



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



Oral History Interview

with

LeRoy Council

Interviewer: *Francesco De Salvatore*

Narrator: *LeRoy Council*

Location of Interview:

New Covenant Church of Philadelphia, 7500 Germantown Ave, Philadelphia, PA, 19119

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Transcriber: *William Patterson*

Summary:

LeRoy Council reflects on his childhood experiences in Orange County and Alexandria with his grandmother and mother. He also describes his memories of the Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery.

Notes:

This recording is part of the Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery Initiative, which was conducted throughout 2023 and 2024. The Initiative collected and preserved oral histories from descendants of those buried at the Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery in Alexandria, VA.

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General	Childhood; Family; Career; Cemeteries
People	Councils; Charities; Johnsons
Places	Philadelphia; Rapidan; Orange Couty; Alexandria; Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery

LeRoy Council [00:00:07] My name is LeRoy William Council. I'm 81 years old. I'll be 82 in May. Facelifts are okay and this is March 31st, 2023. And we are located at the New Covenant Baptist Church, 7500 block of Germantown Avenue.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:30] Great. Great. My name is Francesco De Salvatore. Today's March 31st, 2023, and we're in Germantown in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Um, so great. Yeah. So why don't we start, Mr. Council, talking about your family, who you already shared with me and about, you know, sort of their origins in Orange County, Virginia?

LeRoy Council [00:00:57] Okay, judging from the pictures in front of you, my mother's mother and father not her grandmother, but her parents are from the Orange County area. I think the father was Madison, which is right next to Orange. But my mother's family was in Orange. In fact, my mother was up at Rapidan, which is right on the river that separates Orange County from Culpeper County. If you're familiar with that, okay. So, ah basically from the photo over here on the side, you're going to see my mother's picture, her mother, her father, and her grandmother. Her grandmother is not from Virginia. Her grandmother is from Campbell, Kentucky and her family was brought to Virginia, her, and her brothers. The brothers didn't like it. They went back to Kentucky, and she was the only one who stayed. Um uh now, as far as, uh, I'm going to go a little further back, okay and the reason for that is we're part of the Johnson family.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:02:28] Um huh.

LeRoy Council [00:02:28] Of Orange County the Johnson family, if you know anything about 1619 project, is one of the families listed among the folk that enslaved people that landed in ah Pointe Comfort, which is Hampton, Virginia. That's one of the names on the list. Besides that, in 1621 came Antonio Anthony Johnson in the end, a.k.a. Anthony Johnson, who I guess picked up the Johnson name as he was only asked for the first name when he arrived and of course, our Johnson family comes from the bottom of Virginia, getting up into Orange by way of Zachary Taylor's grandfather, who came up. And when he got into the Orange area, he owned 8000 acres of land prior to the counties. I didn't know if you were familiar with that and so uh that's the Taylor family, which is very prominent in the Orange County area, even in the names of sections of Taylor. And that's basically because of Zachary Taylor's grandfather. Now, that just gives you some background history on our Johnson family.

Our Johnson family in Orange I go back into the 1800s with my, uh, Reuben and Mary Johnson are the beginning point in the family, which history I actually accomplished when I was in Alexandria, Virginia, prior to becoming an adult, having been educated in Philadelphia with a history teacher who taught us history, using her family into the history session, which was a joke as children. But later I've learned, wow, that's exactly how you connect yourself into the history of the world that we're a part of so, in Alexandria. I started in Alexandria when I was ten years old, spending the summers in Alexandria from ten years old to adulthood. That ten-year-old child was then able to meet and see a lot of my ancestors who at that time.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:17] Uh.

LeRoy Council [00:05:18] They were in their sixties, seventies, and I was just a child, and I really wasn't paying much attention to their life, which I wish I was a little older and had that ability to do

so. I came up in Alexandria for the summer sessions because I was one of almost 13 children, which my parents had, but two of them were deceased. So, the rest of us were here in Philadelphia and at ten years old, my baby brother, was born in 46, died in 49. And so, my aunt afterwards wanted to know if I would come to Virginia, But I was very tied to my mother and my grandmother, who only lived around the corner from us, she said that boy is not leaving his mother. But here was an opportunity to go to Alexandria and be like my mother, who was an only child away from her siblings. And I jumped on the opportunity and so, I went to Alexandria and being kind of a quiet shy person. I was still treated at Alexandria like I was at home with my grand aunt and uncle who kept me sort of closer to them. My uncle worked at the Old Dominion Boat Club right across from the Seaport Inn and I used to go down and help him work in the Old Dominion Boat Club as well. So, I enjoyed my time in Alexandria as a child because I was able to move around freely. It was more like being in a country setting, but city wise I did not like the country, but Alexandria was fine.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:07:20] Really, quick. But before we go further into Alexandria, I'm curious, like what are some of your earliest memories growing up in Orange County? What can you give me?

LeRoy Council [00:07:32] Well, there we go with uh I was not in Orange County.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:07:37] Right, okay, okay, okay.

LeRoy Council [00:07:38] So I was in Alexandria.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:07:41] Right you're Alexandria, yeah.

LeRoy Council [00:07:44] So, rarely my grandmother would come through Alexandria in the summer and go up to Culpeper and Orange to the family. And since she was older than my grand aunt, she then would take me with her, something I really wasn't happy to do. But what could I say. I was just a child with my grandmother and said he's going because I was her grandchild, not her sister. She didn't have any children. So consequently, I would end up being up in Culpeper and Orange for maybe a week or two, and that was not pleasant.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:08:22] Okay.

LeRoy Council [00:08:23] So I don't find that the beginning of the family in Orange was very much a part of me as it was a part of my mother. Now, my mother was born in Alexandria in 1917 because her mother had come from Orange to Alexandria, where one of our cousins who's buried in Bethel Cemetery was living from when she was like 14. What happened was her father was married and had eight children. His wife died and he then married a woman who had 11 children. So, he sent his daughters away from that setting so that they would be separated from them. And that's how she got to Alexandria at about 14 years old, and she's lived her entire life in Alexandria.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:09:16] Could you describe your mom a little bit more? You know what? What did she look like?

LeRoy Council [00:09:22] Oh, well, this is this is a large picture of my mother taken in Orange County, Virginia, because in Orange County, Virginia, my granduncle, his family had land. And if

you're familiar with Orange, when you go out 15 and you get to 600 where Mount Calvary Baptist Church is okay, up the road from Mount Calvary Baptist Church is the family land. And the family, the cemetery of Mount Calvary was land that belonged to my grand uncle's grandmother that she donated they're actually my granduncle and aunt are buried in that cemetery up in Orange.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:10:06] That's great yeah, can you tell us a little bit about your mom. Like, like well.

LeRoy Council [00:10:12] Well I'll, I'll back up.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:10:13] What was she like

LeRoy Council [00:10:13] I'll backup as to my mother. My mother was, like I said, born in Alexandria. She went up into Rapidan and her first five years she spent. She was in Rapidan. She loved the country. She loved the country so much that she was only there for five years. My mother was very orientated to country life. So, although we lived in Philadelphia, my mother canned fruit, my mother, canned this and my mother did all kind of stuff. She was definitely not a modern woman. She had a ringer washing machine. She wouldn't even trade a ringer or the tin tubs and all that for modern life. She loved to be in the history of her youth and even Alexandria was not like a metropolis like it is today. There were, you know, houses with outhouses and things like that and of course, in Philadelphia, we had the same thing. We grew up in a neighborhood where they did have outhouses up until the sixties when they converted and put them inside. So, it's like we grew up more of a family. Of the country versus a family in the city. My mother was an only child raised by her grandmother.

But for some reason, her grandmother taught her, you have one child, you have a dozen children. You have to do this for all of them. My mother was a person who you would never think came out of a segregated education in Alexandria. My mother was very open. My mother raised us not about color, but about people. So, you couldn't say the person was White, Black or, or whatever. You just had to say the person's name. Now, that's hard for a person who comes out of a segregated education to come to the city with such a liberal manner. So, we grew up totally in an understanding that here was a mother who trained us to be the kind of person she wanted us to be. My mother had very great penmanship, and her thing was, you're going to have a great penmanship, whether you're doing in cursive or printing. It's going to be legible. So, all of my brothers, if they're not able to do it in cursive, I do it in cursive. But for them, as long as it was printed and it was nicely done, she was happy.

So, my mother provided us with feeding us like she ate as an only child. So, she has a whole bunch of children, so she's feeding us in the same manner she ate. She was not a rice eater, so she did not prepare rice. She wasn't a bean eater. So, she didn't prepare beans. She had a whole lot of people and she worked hard, providing us in a way that she was raised, which today we didn't find a person willing to even attempt, that she washed and ironed, and she also taught us everything that we needed to do. In every single way. So that she said, if you get married, you ought to know what your wife is doing, how she's cooking or whatever. She trained us very well for a larger family. She had been an only child.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:13:55] What were some of you maybe describe one or two of your favorite memories with your mom? Well, when you think about your mom, what are some of the one or two memories that that you really hold on to?

LeRoy Council [00:14:05] Well, I guess as far as memories go, my mother, its memory in me is constant every day because my mother taught me everything that she knew, whether I needed it or not. So, I'm a person who helps a lot of people with a lot of different things because I have the knowledge of how to do it properly. And that was only because of my mother being, even as child, writing letters for Wash Jackson, who had the Black Hotel in Alexandria and, and learning how to write letters from a more adult standard. As he would start the letters off, I take this golden opportunity to write to you, which today is how I begin my letters. Wash Jackson remains in me as well as my mother. So, my mother was just the type of person that when it came to her, her children and everybody else's children, there were never too many. And she was like a loving person, dearly loving person, until I just lost one of our childhood friends. And all she talked about is when we grew up, the playground was only a few blocks away, but it's segregated, and things were not as prevalent as when my parents came to Germantown. But there was still a little bit of issues. And as we grew up, so when my brother, oldest brother was nine years old, my father purchased a metal swing, and our yard was the playground. Everybody in the community came to the Councils to play. And so, my mother was like, oh, everybody is welcome, you know. And it wasn't about color either, because there were times when we went to school and we had to come home at lunchtime that there would be somebody in the neighborhood whose parents were working Black or White, and they came and had lunch with us because that's where my mother, was, she was just a completely open person, happily to be of assistance to others.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:16:27] Wow. Where did your mom live in Alexandria? Like, what do you remember about the street?

LeRoy Council [00:16:36] Yes, my mother lived on. My mother's family, strange as it may seem, my mother being the only grandchild. And when they were in Rapidan, when it was time for her to go to school, they relocated to Alexandria. Bringing my mother to be educated in the city, mother's mother and my mother's aunt were educated in Orange County, Virginia. It was seven years difference between my grandmother and her sister. Her sister talked about going to school on a horse, not walking to school. She had a horse. She was able to go to school on a horse, my mother loved Rapidan, to the point growing up in Rapidan, at one point, they lived near the train and the train that was coming into Orange. They had the post office was there in Rapidan and the train didn't stop. He swung the mail out and got hooked and that's how the postmaster got the mail. But sometimes it didn't hook, and the mail was scattered in their yard and my mother said her grandfather would take her with the mail to the post office. And the postmaster would say, oh, here comes Phill with little Margaret and she just loved Rapidan. I mean, to have only been there for her first five years, Rapidan was her heart. So, when her family relocated to Alexandria, not only was it her grandparents, but it was also her great grandparents. The whole family left Orange and came to Alexandria. So, it's been the case that my mother's heart was in Alexandria so deeply, but it also was in Rapidan. But speaking of Orange County, I will take you back to the family in Orange County. Okay. As I said before, it was Reuben and Mary Campbell. They had four children and they had one son, King. The rest of them were girls.

My line to the family comes from the daughter, Lettie Johnson, who married Phil Campbell. I actually have death certificates, other information that you can physically see what I'm telling you. Lettie and Phil had four sons five daughters. Morton Campbell, who's buried in Douglass Cemetery, was the oldest of their children and the youngest was Phil of the boys. And he's buried in Bethel. So along with, uh, Mary Washington, Mary Johnson, Washington, Crumb. And she's buried not far from him

in Bethel in, uh, I'm going to get back into Orange County, but we'll be deeper involved in what happened in Alexandria of, uh, Lettie's and Phillip's children becomes a real complex situation with my mother. Cause my mother's grandmother. The picture that you have is Alice Perry. Alice Perry married Reuben Slaughter. Reuben Slaughter had one daughter, Ethel Slaughter, which is my grandmother. At five years old, he was in West Virginia and died in the coal mine, not inside the mine, but in the area. She then turned around and married Phillip Campbell, which was the younger of the Campbell brothers. So, Phillip then became my mother's grandfather with her grandmother. His older brother, Morton, marries Reuben's mother Susan Slaughter. So, my mother's grandfather and great grandfather were brothers through marriage. So that complicates the picture, but I knew both. Phillip and Morton, the wives, are buried in Douglass. So, our family dynamics are Campbells the Slaughters and up in Orange County are a large number of relatives to us.

Besides getting into the Lindseys, we're connected to the Raglands and the Waughs, the Miners, and a host of the families up there. So, a lot of those relatives also ended up in Alexandria and Washington, D.C. but we have been part of the Johnson family. The Johnson family is not aware of all the connections to each other up there. So, you'll find that we have all kinds of family that we meet and find out they're intermarried into our relatives. We're aware that they're not aware of our grandmother, Ethel Slaughter Blunt, was well aware of Orange County as I went to Orange County. When she would take me out of Alexandria, we would ride down old 29 and she would point out, oh, cousin so-and-so lives at that house her son lives in this house. We have never seen these people, mind you. But she knew where all her relatives were, whether they were in Virginia or wherever they were as they traveled to New York or whatever. She, my grandmother, knew where everybody was, my mother was not the kind of person like my grandmother, because my mother was more into her children and her family. So, my mother, Alexandria, was a part of her life, but it wasn't in the same way as my grandmother, who was all about family. And that was a part of me gaining family knowledge even when I didn't see people.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:23:40] Well, could you maybe describe those car rides with your grandmother?

LeRoy Council [00:23:48] Well, in those days you were in an older car. We were two, the roads were single roads going from Alexandria to Culpeper on Route 29, which today that's a major highway. Right and it was a longer trip as you traveled from place-to-place years ago, which now you're out. Alexandria, you're in Fairfax. I can remember as a child living on Pendleton Street with my aunt and uncle roomed with the Brown family, Joe Brown, Cleo Brown, and they had one son, which was Joey, you may remember Joey. Okay. Uh, that's where I started my first day when I was ten years old. I was on Pendleton Street, and there was the barbershop on the corner, the lawyer next door, and we were in the house beside there. And next to us, adjoining was the Andersons and so, I was well aware of some of the people that were closely associated with my great aunt and uncle. And so, I don't really know a lot about everybody in Alexandria like my mother did, except when she came down and I got to meet people that was connected with her from school. Like the Millers were one of the families I was well connected with because they were well connected. My mother, Mr. Puggy, went to school with my mother. So, the Millers would be a family that I spent time with as a child. First is really running around Alexandria, me, and a whole lot of people because like I said, I wasn't this outgoing person like I am now.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:25:48] Yeah. Did you? You're starting to talk a little about your mom's history in Alexandria. Can you maybe so, I know she moved. She moved there for school, and so. Yeah, walk us through sort of her history in Alexandria. You know what area she lives in? Where did she go to school? Yeah.

LeRoy Council [00:26:08] Well, my mother lived on the South Side, so they were on Peyton Street, and that's where, uh, Wash Jackson Hotel was and then when the tornado came through in 27, it destroyed his hotel. And, that's how my mother and them had to move from Peyton Streets South Peyton Street to, uh, I think they went to, uh, South Asaph Street. Let me say. When that hotel got destroyed, then that's.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:26:56] When was this?

LeRoy Council [00:26:57] That was 1927.

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

LeRoy Council [00:27:02] When the Hurricane came through because my mother talked about that. because her grandfather took her through the community where the hurricane traveled. And she would see the buildings and the whole side of the house was gone, and the furniture wasn't even disturbed. And so, she would remember traveling through Alexandria with her grandfather and that memory was very strong in her memory. But they went from I think the Pepsi-Cola company brought up where the hotel was and their house and all. And behind her house was a dump and my mom and them used to put their galoshes on and get their stick and ward off the rats and get keepsake items out of the dump. Because, like I said, Alexandria was not the Alexandria that it is today. It was far different even when I was there and as a kid. So, my mother loved Alexandria. She would go from South Peyton Street and walk over to what became Houston but that was Parker Gray.

So that's the school she went to Parker Gray. She enjoyed her education in Parker Gray. She even talked about how the teachers she had a younger teacher and how the teacher would tell them things about what they would be encountering as an adult. And so, my mother's education was fantastic. She actually had more black history than we had. So, she would teach it to us, which we didn't gain in Philadelphia in the school system. The only thing we learned about was George Washington Carver and the peanut. That was it and the sweet potato. You know, we were not taught black history. Instead, we were taught Germantown history. So, my mother trained us in a whole different way than most kids in our neighborhood because she was able to give us that other side of education that we didn't have.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:29:05] Did your mom ever talk about specific teachers at Parker Gray?

LeRoy Council [00:29:14] She talked about all those people but being a young person myself. My memory is not as sharp. On some of the things my mother told me about her youth. Then I have later on in my research.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:29:30] Mm hmm. Are there any stories other stories she told you while she was growing up in Alexandria that you can remember she would tell you when you were growing up?

LeRoy Council [00:29:40] Well, yes. One story she told was about our cousin that I told you that she came to Alexandria, when she was 14. When my mother was born, she lived in the 100 block of North West Street. But the majority of the time, she lived at 309 North West Street and that's where she was when I was a kid. I went down there and then it was West Street. And when you came out her back, there was an opening of no houses that led right around Mount Jezreel. Well, on Payne Street. There was an open lot. I would go through there all the time. She had a dog and their dog's name was Try and Try would follow you everywhere you went. Constantly wetting. And he might follow you almost all into Washington Street. And you'd say, Try, you got to go home you got to go you can't follow me because I'm going down to the boat club. Right? But Try would know his way back and forth and like I say, that was open. My mother, when she was going to school, coming from Peyton Street, would come through Alexandria and be a Payne and uh what's that Commerce, not Commerce, what's the street after Queen?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:31:03] Princess.

LeRoy Council [00:31:04] No going the other way.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:31:08] Oronoco.

LeRoy Council [00:31:09] Cameron, Cameron. Cameron. Okay. She would cross Cameron and about Cameron and Payne Street. She would run into Cousin Mary. Cousin Mary worked for the Dreyfuss family. They lived on the corner of Prince and Payne. In this great big house. I've been in it as a child, and my mother would meet Cousin Mary right there at Commerce and Payne. She would go to school and on her way back home, Cousin Mary was still at Commerce and Payne and my mother would be like, Cousin Mary, you didn't get over to work yet. And she'd be like, no, I'm on my way. If she got there or she didn't get there, it was fine because that was the rare relationship, she had with them the Dreyfuss when she got to work for them. Only had one son and so she was with them as they went through a couple more children. And then she worked for them, and she didn't really do that much, really, because they had another woman who cooked. And my mother said she went to visit the house one day, and she was kind of afraid of the cook. So, she goes down into the kitchen and my cousin said, "Would you like to have something, Margaret?" And she said, oh, what do you have? And they pull out of matzah. And my mother said, Oh, that big one. I'll have the matzah. So, she gets the matzah and finds that it has no taste. But she was too great of a woman to ask for anything else. So, she has the matzah. And then my mother talked about that forever, you know but the Dreyfuss had a junk business down on the waterfront. And so, they made their money off the junk.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:33:06] So where, where your mom lived after being in the South Side and...

LeRoy Council [00:33:11] They still where on the south Side when they left from Peyton Street.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:33:15] There still on the South side but did she own her house, or did she know? Was she renting?

LeRoy Council [00:33:23] No, no she was renting. You know, they, uh, my grand aunt and uncle never owned property in Alexandria. Okay. And I guess where Cousin Mary is at 309 West Street. I don't I think that was all rental as well. The reason that they didn't own any property in Alexandria

was my grand uncle owned that land up in Orange, and in his mind, I owned plenty of land in Orange. I'm not buying a house in Alexandria. So, they moved around Alexandria and from Pendleton Street they went to 309 West Street, which our family had been in that house for years. And from West Street, they then went up on Columbus Street after Reverend Miles and then built them houses where Miss Indie them lived and they had a garage. They put up two houses, and the Campbells and the Wanzers live side by side. And then from there, after before my uncle died, they went into what was at Adkins. The Adkins okay yeah. You and the Adkins right there. And when they went in there, my aunt and uncle lived up over top of the maintenance building because that was a two-bedroom house. And by him being sickly and my aunt working for the Pancoast and all these Humphreys and all these well-to-do folk and Alexandria, they went into a house with two bedrooms, which most people wouldn't have had unless they had a family. So, they lived over there until he died and then in the end, she lived in the apartment on Wythe Street facing Payne. That was their movement in Alexandria. Pendleton, West, Columbus, and then down there and the housing.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:35:28] You've talked about your aunt uncle a little bit who lived there, too. But could you maybe describe both of them? You know, maybe give their names again? And I mean, just describe them for us, like who they were.

LeRoy Council [00:35:41] Right. All right. Well, my aunt was Dora Campbell. Her husband was Nehemiah Campbell she never changed her last name. They were probably related up there in Orange anyway, because both their families were in Calvary Baptist Church. Anyway, he worked for the Old Dominion Boat Club. That was his only job down there was the Old Dominion Boat Club. So, he was well known down there on the waterfront. I would go down there to the waterfront with him, and one of his friends was O.C. Francis and O.C. Mr. O.C. and his brother lived in the basement of a bank on Fairfax Street, right off King. Um because he would take me there and we'd go down. I don't even know how they even had a basement under the bank. But they lived. I guess the bank was more secure now when somebody was down in the basement living. So, we moved around Alexandria quite a bit because my uncle, you know, knew there were a lot of people from Orange County. They lived in Alexandria, not only our relatives, but a lot of the other families, you know, the Comforts and the Miners and the Jacksons, which was part of their family. When you went out to Henry Street and it kind of curved where the church is now.

Then it was a drop down from Henry Street our cousin lived in a house in a drop down. Right after you get across King Street and you're going towards which now takes you out to get on the highway. There was the church sitting there, but our family lived on Duke Street in those houses that are now no longer there. And of course, they lived in Henry Street in the dip. My uncle belonged to Shiloh. My great aunt belonged to Mount Jezreel, so I spent more time in Mount Jezreel than I did in Shiloh. But they went to two different churches and behind Shiloh was Armstrong's, they had gone to school with my mother as well. So, I would go visit them and their daughter married into my mother's best friend's family and had LeRoy. And so there my mother was, tied to the folk in Alexandria that she grew up with, more like a family. So, we've always been a family to all these different folk. I think when I was talking about the Davises up on Columbus Street they lived near the church. Then my mother went to school with him as well. So, my mother always was in Alexandria visiting all the different people that she knew because that was her happy moments to go back to Alexandria no matter if she went to Baltimore, she went to Alexandria, when she came home, she had to go to at any time she was close to Alexandria, my mom was in Alexandria. Yeah. So, she was in Alexandria to me was like a second home.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:39:10] Yeah. Are there any specific memories you have with your aunt and uncle that you want to share that like ones that you know?

LeRoy Council [00:39:19] Yeah, well, for him it was, for him it was like down to the to the Old Dominion Boat Club.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:39:27] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [00:39:28] Now, I'll tell you a story that happened there one time. They had a storm. So, the river was rushing. So, one of the guys, you know, the younger guys, looks out over the water, and he says, oh, I think that's something we could get. So, he puts me in the boat with him and takes me out in the middle of the Potomac River. What he didn't know was I can't swim. So, my uncle is in a panic because now I'm in the middle of the Potomac. He knows I can't swim, so he's up and down the waterfront. And finally, we come in below the boat club, and my uncle is just terrified, because if something happens to me and he's in charge of me for my mother. Oh, he knows he is in trouble, but I had no business getting in the boat to begin with. But I'm a kid. What did I know? I jumped in and got out in the middle and the water was rough because the trees were all going too. Stuff was being pushed down the Potomac in the storm. So that was one of the things that happened at the boat club. The terrific memory for me as far as my aunt, my aunt was involved in Mount Jezreel, all Mount Jezreel had the pastor was Reverend Miles. Reverend Miles was unique as a person, and he wore clothes that most ministers wouldn't wear he was very flashy. Well, when he died, his wife lived on Princess Street in that what was its doctor's house or something?

I believe. And my aunt was like, oh, my nephew, he has good penmanship. So, she takes me up there and I do all the writing for his wife. His wife was a gospel singer from Washington, Pennsylvania. So, I got to meet her. But at the same token, Reverend Miles, I had been involved in the church with the people. And, when he died, there was this tremendous funeral, and he was being buried over there in Arlington National Cemetery. So, the funeral ran long. So, when the funeral was over, the people put him in the hearse and took off. And the folk and the church are now rushing over to Arlington Cemetery in all different directions to get there in time, because you have to be there at the gate for, for the burial. So, I was riding with Miss Katie Sommers, who lived on the corner of Alfred and Pendleton. They were in the first house and Mr. Keyes lived down the block. And she was I was very familiar with her because after I was older, I worked in Washington, DC for two years and she worked in Bethesda. And she would take me, Mr. Keyes, and another woman, and we would be taken over to D.C. She dropped me off at DuPont Circle as they kept on up to Bethesda, and she was a wild driver.

So, one day we're flying down Washington towards the airport, and she says, Oh, I'm all out here by myself and the woman in the back seats says yeah, just you and a man on the motorcycle, which was the police. He caught us at the airport, and he said to her, you were speeding. And she said, Oh, I'm so sorry, officer. I dropped my pocketbook on my foot, and I was trying to get it. And he had to raise his head and laugh because he didn't want to laugh at her, but he didn't do anything but let her go. But then as we traveled that road, that was when they were putting the stones and everything out there in the water and increased the size of the airport runway. That was in the sixties, but my aunt worked for the judge, the Pancoasts, the Humphreys. They were in the real estate business, and she worked for a whole lot of very prominent people. And so, she lived a very comfortable life and nobody bothered her because if they did, they would be in a world of trouble because of the folks she was working for and I would like the Humphreys his wife would come and get me. She had this little car

with these two seats in the front and you wonder, where was the engine? But you found out where your legs were going beside the engine in her little car, and she would come haul me all over the place. So, I really enjoyed my time in Alexandria. My aunt was dressy, dressy for church and all of that and they were. They were really nice to me. I think I was treated like they did my mother spoiled me in a way. So, I enjoyed being away from my family in the summers. Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:44:38] Really, quick. You know, you mentioned their involvement with the churches in Alexandria. Can you talk more about the two churches that they...

LeRoy Council [00:44:48] Well, I was involved with more than two churches, and that was because of the Millers. The Millers, who were part of my mom's classmates and they had all girls and one son, but the girls went to different churches. So, they'd be Third Baptist and be the church there on the Alfred St Ebenezer. So, I was moving around Alexandria into different churches. More about my main one was Mount Jezreel.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:45:25] Do you remember any of the pastors at those churches, the names?

LeRoy Council [00:45:30] Um, no, because then I was young.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:45:33] Yeah. Yeah, right.

LeRoy Council [00:45:35] I mean, because I was in Mount Jezreel so long. I was not only with Reverend Miles, but I was also there with Reverend Houston as well and when Reverend Miles had the church, it was pink and blue. And when Reverend Houston came and the church was changed colors, which was more suitable to the church because he wasn't flamboyant like Reverend Miles. And I do recall that when he became the pastor, the church up in the very front of the church, high in the air was this flat panel? And I know the flat panel I lettered. One Lord, one God, one baptism. That was kind of scary for me to get up on a high ladder.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:46:21] Wow. When did you do the lettering for the church?

LeRoy Council [00:46:27] That was probably. Maybe late 59, 60, right after Reverend died. Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:46:38] Well, you know, so as we're talking, you're talking about your summers in Alexandria, but we're also forgetting that not forgetting, but we're also missing this part where you were living in Philadelphia, right? You're living in Germantown.

LeRoy Council [00:46:48] Oh, yeah, right. Yeah. Born and raised.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:46:50] Right. So, yeah, could you maybe sort of describe your childhood here in Philadelphia during the year before you, you know, before you go every summer? Alexandria Yeah.

LeRoy Council [00:47:02] Well, that was from birth to ten. Yeah. Okay. My, well, growing up in Philadelphia, in a large family, I guess today I can look back and say I was blessed to be in a large family because I learned to deal with personalities. And had I been an only child, which I didn't

understand, my mom was able to do that. But personalities in a big family can be complex and so, I was more of a quiet person. But some of my brothers were outgoing and aggressive. And so basically, I paid them no attention because I was happy in my setting, and I was a happy child. So, I don't really remember like my mother could go back to when she was like about four. I can go back to when I don't even remember taking that picture. I was five years old on a Horse Pony, but I can remember I was six years old. My mother taken me up to the school, which was just up the block from us and said this is the school you are going to go to. And that school was Pastorius Francis Pastorius Elementary School, which was built in 1883. It was Old Stone School. And then having had such a nice childhood, that's my first memory. My next memory would be probably as a child and maybe the first grade that they had to play in the school and the parents arrived and there were more parents than they thought was coming. So that was the only time that my father held me because he had too. The dynamics of the family was my mother came out of this loving family.

My father's family my father was the oldest. He had a sister and a brother, and his father died when he was 16. And he lived on the next street from where I live right now and my sister lives in our grandmother's house on the next street. And that was 1932 at the same time, prior to my grandfather dying. My mother lost her grandmother in January 1932. So, the two dynamics of a family kind of crisscross each other as what they were doing. So, in 32, we never knew our grandfather. Because he died and we never knew our other grandfather because he was in Virginia and we were in Philadelphia and he didn't honor us, so we didn't know him. So, the dynamics of the family are those two types of families that my mother came from being raised by her grandmother in a very loving manner and in the manner that her grandmother taught her. What I say, I mean and so my mother said as a child, she one time had got in trouble with her grandmother. If her grandmother called her by her name, Margaret, she knew she was in trouble. So, the grandmother called her Margaret, but it was bedtime.

So, she went to bed. Her grandmother had company. So, my mother was like, Oh, there's company. So, everything is fine. Until she heard her grandmother say to the company, you'll have to excuse me for a moment, because she had to take care of the situation with my mother. And my mother then raised us in that same manner. Whatever I say is what I mean and so she talked to us. She wasn't one of these types of parents that, you know, might challenge you or beat you and did things like that because she was raised that your word is your bond. And so, she raised us like that and she explained things. And the minute you crisscrossed what she told you, you were in trouble. So, I was not a troubled child. Because at 12 years old I was in the alleyway with my mother, and something came out of my mouth. I don't know what it was, mind you, but something came out of my mouth and my mother backhanded me at 12 years old, and that's the only time my mother struck me. She didn't have to strike me again. I understood what she meant, and I understood that as long as you're doing what you're supposed to, those things don't happen. So she was that type of mother and so her time in Alexandria was great, my time in Alexandria was great. And I think it made me a better person to have gotten away from my family setting in the summers.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:52:15] Could you describe, you know. Yeah. I can't paint us an image of cause, you would drive. Would you drive from Philadelphia to Alexandria, or would you take a train like, what?

LeRoy Council [00:52:28] Most of the time it was in the car, but a couple of times it was on the train.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:52:32] Yeah. Could you, like, paint us an image of that car ride? Like, walk us through, you know, like doing that, doing that drive every summer?

LeRoy Council [00:52:38] Well, I guess basically being a kind of quiet person as I was that taking these trips in the car was not the greatest thing in the world for me, except it should have been because our father took us on these trips. When he loads up the station wagon with all the children, he would take us on these country trips. But you know, because it wasn't the main highways then, and as he took us on these trips, he would say, pay attention to where you're going, and then he would question us. So, we were aware of traveling from place to place. But I think when I went to Alexandria by me going to Alexandria, either with my parents or my grandmother or somebody in the family was just a daily trip in the summer, you know what I'm saying? Not that I paid any attention to where we were traveling or any of that cause that was not in my mind to get Alexandria.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:53:44] And like what? Yeah. So, like what? What were like. What is it like you've talked you've talked about how you really want to give Alexandria the summer and yeah, like what? What were the differences between, you know, Germantown and Alexandria for you.

LeRoy Council [00:53:59] Like what I guess the biggest difference was being an only child.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:54:04] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [00:54:04] Out of the family you know it wasn't I could have stayed in Germantown, you know. I mean, it was like we grew up in Germantown. Our family had been in Germantown, my father had come when he was ten years old, and he lived to be 96. So, he had been in Germantown a long time. Our mother at eight years old had come to Germantown and then for example, her trip to Germantown when she was eight years old was, like I said, it was segregated. My father went to a segregated school, elementary school, when he first came to Philadelphia. My mother coming up from Alexandria just for a visit, was up there in the neighborhood. And older women said to her. Well wouldn't you like to swing on a swing, and she was like, oh, yes, I would like to swing on the swing. Well, they took her to the playground where Blacks weren't swinging on the swing to let her swing on the swing in hopes that somebody came and said something they were ready to fight. So, she didn't understand why they were taking her to the playground. She was going to swing on the swing. She was eight years old, you know, but she was coming to visit her mother but coming back to Alexandria because she stayed in Alexandria till, she was 14. So, it was just a visit up into the same area where we live at, she actually met our father right around the corner from where I live at right now. He lived on the block. Her mother lived on the block, you know, so it was all the family right there together. So, we really haven't moved beyond Germantown, basically. Yeah. And I was the only one that would be in Virginia. So as kids would come to visit in the summer to our house, they would say, oh, you got all these brothers and sisters, and they say, no, it's one more. You mean one more? Oh, our brother LeRoy he's in Virginia. So, yes, it was a nice opportunity not to be you know, within not that it was family. Family was fine Philadelphia was fine.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:56:10] Mm hmm

LeRoy Council [00:56:11] It wasn't like I need to escape. That wasn't the case. It was just an opportunity to go somewhere else.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:56:17] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [00:56:18] That I enjoyed.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:56:19] And you know, you've already described some things, but yeah. Could we hear a little bit more like. Yeah. Like to tell us about the summers in Alexandria. What, what where how did you spend your time? And for example, you know, in Alexandria in the summers, they were.

LeRoy Council [00:56:34] Basically.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:56:35] What it looked like day to day, you know, what?

LeRoy Council [00:56:39] Well, day to day, I wasn't really you know, your kids are you're not doing that much. What I did was the Millers, the girls, they were swimmers. So, they had there you know, the Blacks had their swimming pool, The Whites had their swimming pool. The Millers did synchronized swimming. So, I would go to watch them do all that acrobatic stuff in the swimming pool. And that was probably one of the fun things for me to do in Alexandria. I'd say the biggest portion, I was down there at the Boat Club with my uncle, you know, and you know, he was paying me for spending time down there at the boat club. Yeah so, it wasn't like I'd say I was an average kid who would go away to another city and be exposed to the whole city. I was sort of sheltered you know, so there's not a lot I could tell you about my childhood and Alexandria because it was basically my mother's people as she knew my cousins, like the Fords, you know, being around them, you know, later on because, you know, I'm older than them, you know, so later on being around them. But then the other cousins that were down there, you know, and families that lived nearby. So, it wasn't like I guess it was a little on the peaceful side. Yeah. And Philadelphia was just as peaceful. It's just that it was a different environment.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:58:27] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [00:58:27] The city itself was old houses. All the people I knew on West Street was a house that was leaning in the block. The 200 block was a wooden house, and the old lady lived in was leaning and things like that. So, it was like I remember the Millers lived on the corner of, uh, Queen and Payne in the end, but I remember the old White family that lived there before they lived, there was an old couple. They had pretty roses in the side yard and all that, but just moving through the community, not so much visiting people. But more or less just moving through their community as a kid who was not from Alexandria. So, it's like I would say it was a good life, but the memories are not as strong as maybe some other kid who was more active than I would have been. Say it was my brother David who was that more outgoing kind of person. He had many stories to tell I remember one time I was going down; I think it was on Oronoco Street is the one after Pendleton and my uncle is on the corner, Alfred and Oronoco and as I'm coming down the block, I'm like, oh, I wonder who that young woman he's talking to. Well, come to find out, it wasn't a young person like I thought it was an older person who was married to Lindsay. And they all came from up there in Orange to the Comforts and the Lindsay's and he was talking to one of the Comforts. And he's like, oh, LeRoy, let me introduce you. Well, her children were younger than me and so, I actually knew them because they lived in the projects back off of what's that when you're going towards away from Pendleton and behind?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:00:31] Was it Atkins.

LeRoy Council [01:00:33] No. There are older ones that are up there. He would know because they're right up there above Patrick.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:00:41] Samuel Madin.

LeRoy Council [01:00:43] I don't know the name, but, but they...

Francesco De Salvatore [01:00:44] Was it Parker Gray. Next was Parker. Not far from it. Parker Gray school.

LeRoy Council [01:00:51] While they were between what became Houston and Parker Gray.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:00:55] Yeah. Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:00:56] But, they were between Patrick and Columbus. Yeah, back over there. I think that's where the Lindsays and the Comforts lived.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:01:05] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:01:06] And he might know where the sister lived. She married a Diggs, but I don't know. My next oldest brother married in that family. So, I learned more about that family later on when I was there as a kid.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:01:21] Uh huh. Yeah. So, I mean, you know, I think, uh, you know, I'm curious now, you know, we're kind of moving in the, I would like to move into the Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery.

LeRoy Council [01:01:35] But before that, I was going to take you to my father's side.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:01:38] Yeah, okay let's do that. Yeah. I wasn't sure.

LeRoy Council [01:01:42] Yeah. If you and the only reason I wanted to do that is to share the correlation of the two families.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:01:47] Right? For sure yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:01:49] Okay, my father was born in Surry County, Virginia, and Surry County, Virginia is right across the James River from Jamestown. The ferry crosses from Jamestown to Surry. Every single day. So that's where he was born but he's a part of our Council family. Our Council family on our White side comes from England to Virginia in 1658. We are the slave side are probably early 1700s, and they only had four slaves and of those four slaves, I am generations from the youngest. And they went to Isle of Wight County. Isle of Wight County is also right beside Surry on the south side, but it's a larger county. So, we are only one county away from where our family settled and when we got into Surry County. It was during slavery, after slavery ended, really and we were still enslaved, and our family had no idea who we were. So, we were in Surry County and they thought

that was it. Til I got into the research. So, then I found out that it was a larger family and I have books over there that even document our Councils of slavery to us in the book is our line for some strange reason. But our family of the Councils in Surry my grandmother is to Charitys from her mother. So, Will Charity was my grandmother's cousin. They had no idea of the relationship, but I remember him from a kid in Alexandria being the cab driver. And I kept saying, Charity, Charity got to be related. So later on, my cousin in Virginia tracked our Charity family from down there in Prince George's County, and they left Prince George. Two brothers left Prince George and went to Haymarket and they settled in Haymarket, and then he ends up from Haymarket in Alexander.

The strangest thing, and that is my great, great grandmother, which is my grandmother's mother. The Slaughters, their side of the family came from up there in Fauquier County, which is not far from over there to Haymarket in a section called Upperville, which is right off 66. Okay and I never knew that in the beginning because the three sisters were in Orange, and I wonder where they came from but they actually came from Fauquier. The amazing thing about these counties are these people are moving around even after slavery quite a bit, but they're not going that far. But you have a hard time understanding where they came from so, my great, great grandmother and my great grandmother are both buried in Douglass. So, the great, great grandmother's side was Fauquier. And my great grandmother was in Kentucky, rather and my great, great was Fauquier. So, it's like the history is all combined but as we got into that history of my father's side, then my grandmother, his mother was a Crocker and my great grandfather a Council. Marries my grandfather, rather, Council marries my grandmother, who's Crocker and Council. Okay, all from that bottom end of Virginia just like the Johnson family.

We're all from the bottom end they come to the middle, but the Councils stay down there. My grandmother's great grandmother, Margaret White. White is just, I guess, by marriage but she was a slave. So, Margaret was her only name, and she was born in 1833, died in 1928. So, she was 95 and she was the one who raised my grandmother and her brothers because her daughter had to be removed from there. And so, she took on the grandmother's side. So, in the beginning, my grandmother just had her grandmother. Find out later it's her great grandmother. So that history in that part of Virginia is very prominent on her side. So that's what I had over there to show you.

LeRoy Council [01:07:00] Is uh.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:03] Very.

LeRoy Council [01:07:05] The larger picture is my grandmother know over here on the table. Yeah. see, that's my grandmother.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:13] Yeah. Maybe we could show it on the table, that one. Yes. Yeah. Yeah. That's great.

LeRoy Council [01:07:28] Okay. That's my grandmother. She lived to be 97 years old.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:34] Oh, wow.

LeRoy Council [01:07:36] And this is her story from connecting a Charity family which was her mother. Okay, now, if you go in and you get the picture of the man that was beside it.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:57] That's cool.

LeRoy Council [01:07:58] Oh, I took that picture of my grandmother when she was 71.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:08:01] You took it, okay?

LeRoy Council [01:08:02] This is my grandmother's Uncle William Charity.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:08:06] Wow.

LeRoy Council [01:08:07] And this was how I took this picture as well in Virginia and this is on his 90th birthday. He lived to be 94.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:08:17] What's, what's he doing in that image?

LeRoy Council [01:08:19] He sees he's smoking a cigar and drinking his beer. So, her family members lived long lives and they were very active.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:08:31] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:08:32] So that's him. That was her mother's brother. So, the Charity family is another family that comes to Virginia down the bottom in the 1600s as well. What happens is our line of family slaves' first name was Charity, which became our surname. So, you know, son of Charity Thomas or whatever, became Tom Charity. And so, her first name became our surname. It's not tied to White Charities. So, our history down there is fantastic. Our history up there is fantastic. I also worked on this was going to bring in her best girlfriend, which is uh Gertrude Thomas. Now, Gertrude Thomas was born in Madison. Her family was migrating from Florida to Alexandria and her mother, being pregnant, delivered her to Virginia. So, she's not born that far from where my mother was raised as a child in Rapidan. So, my mother was one year older than her, but the two of them became the best of friends through their whole life and Gertrude became our auntie.

But now comes another story in her line because her grandfather, Mose Thomas, is buried in Douglass, along with his wife, Irene. And I think one of the babies died and one of the daughters is buried there. So, their family is very historic in Florida because her grandfather was part of the Black Seminoles. So, it's all of these different dynamics on family that come together in Alexandria, and we all become one big happy family. So, her mother lived in that house. Her first house was up in Seminary. But where the road comes from is between Braddock Road and King. Her house stood there, and they brought her a house and she then built that house right across from the high school where the light is, and it sits up on the hill. Yeah, that was Gertrude's mother's house she built it.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:11:27] Do they? Do they work at the Seminary?

LeRoy Council [01:11:33] I don't really know how her mother got up at Seminary, but she was lived up in seminary when there were very few blacks up there.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:11:39] Uh huh. It's mostly okay because most of the people lived there. Worked at it. Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:11:44] So I don't I'm not sure what Ms. Mattie did. I know she was a member of the Tents. Uh huh. And very active. Uh, you know, in, uh, in her church as well.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:11:55] Yeah. Hmm.

LeRoy Council [01:11:57] But, but I, I was in that house so many a time up there on King Street because that's where Auntie Gert was. She was with her mother who built the house, then Auntie Gert, was in the Highrise down in The Burg, the senior citizen. And then the mother came to live with her while they re- furbished her house and after, then Gertrude moved up there with her mother and then in the end, she was there with grandchildren and all that. There's a possibility if you know Ms. Menefee. Okay, she took care of Auntie Gert. Now she knows Auntie Gert's family, so she would probably be able to link you to somebody that maybe could help you with who is buried in Douglass.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:12:49] Mm hmm.

LeRoy Council [01:12:51] Her and her sister took care of Auntie when Auntie was sick till she died. But they lived up on Seminary and I can't think of a woman who lived in the house next to her, the old lady. In the Green and White House. The family lived there for years before they got up in Seminary.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:13] Did you ever interact with anyone at any from the Casey family or the Lewis family in the area?

LeRoy Council [01:13:25] No. Were.

LeRoy Council [01:13:27] Oh yeah, the Wanzers yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:29] Did you interact with any, anyone with, with

LeRoy Council [01:13:31] Yeah, Ms. Cali who lived right next door to my aunt and uncle on Columbus.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:37] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:13:38] Yes, so I knew the Wanzers when they had the singing group and all of that. Yeah. So yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:45] Interesting. Would you feel comfortable describing who your dad was? I know it wasn't the best relationship, per se, but we are probably. Yeah, well, you want to describe it a little bit.

LeRoy Council [01:13:57] Well. I knew more about my mother's family because I only went to Surry after I came out to service, and I was 26 years old. So, my first time down in the bottom of Virginia, to my father's people, I was grown. My father never went home. We never thought Surry was all of

that till we got down there and it is the country. Yeah, I mean, country they don't have I think maybe now they may have a Dollar store, but all they had was just regular little general stores at the intersection, you know, like that. It was still so country that when you're up and down the roads in Surry the deer can be right on the side of the road. And you ride by and say, oh my God, I wish I had known a deer were standing there. They could have jumped in front of me you know what I mean, it is just completely country. They don't want it to be anything more than country. So, the ferry keeps going from Jamestown to Surry, and now the ferry runs 24 hours a day and the ferry is free. They don't want to put up a bridge because they don't want all the people moving over in Surrey and building houses. So, it's rural, really rural.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:15:22] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:15:23] So we went to Surry, found out that my father's people they weren't the loving family like my mother's side. They were more materialistic, more into who amounted to this, that or the other. My great grandfather was born a slave in 1862 from the product of his Black father and his mixed mother. So, she had five children, three girls and two boys. The two boys look like the mother. So, my great grandfather looked like a White man, and he actually amassed like a 200 acre farm. He had a great big two-story house with the best of everything in it. He even had a car when he died in 1919. So, they were well established versus my mother's side, like I said, who they just roomed in, rented, you know, only because he didn't want to buy. Couldn't afford it but they were more prominent down there in Virginia. The Council family is probably one of the largest families in America because we're now scattered all across America. But our roots are in Isle of Wight County and then they were the slave masters. Three brothers, mainly two brothers left Virginia for North Carolina when they were established in North Carolina, which started like 1828.

So, like about the 1840s, they moved out of Virginia because they the Council family were cattle people in England, and they were cattle people in Virginia. So as Virginia was growing, you couldn't have these huge plantations and this mass of land. So, then they moved into North Carolina where they captured land with thousands of acres of cattle. And so that's how they made their move into North Carolina. So that picture was taken in North Carolina cause a family, even direct line cousins. So down there that I can just tell them you're my direct line cousin because I know who you are, you know, and they're all we're all connected because it's one Council family, like it's one Charity family. All our family names in the bottom of Virginia are original family names. It's spelled just like they always were and so, we know who we are from that same way with our Orange County there's no variation in names.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:18:05] Mm hmm. Could you describe your father? I mean, you mention his name, but maybe mention his name again.

LeRoy Council [01:18:15] Well, my father being the oldest of the children.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:18:19] Mm hmm.

LeRoy Council [01:18:19] When his father died, he was 16. Yeah. So, then my father became his youngest brother's father because he never knew his real father. He was six. So, my father raised his brother and sister in between. So, she married, and my mother courted my father, taking care of his little brother with ten years difference between them. So, my uncle was only ten years older than my

oldest brother. So, the dynamics of the family is like he was like a big brother instead of an uncle. So, for years he's been our big brother. He never was our uncle when he wanted to be our uncle. You can't change now, you know. You know, if you thought he was, he feared our father because our father raised him. I didn't fear my father. You know, he's, my father. There's no reason to fear him. But my uncle being raised by him really did fear him. Because if any time you want to straighten our uncle out, you just say, I'm going to tell my father right away. He was a whole different person. So, my father was a disciplinarian. Our father was an electrician. He worked at the shipyard and then he went into the service, and then he got a job at the Navy Yard. And that's where he was all his life. So, our father provided for us. He put a roof over our head. He brought us food. He brought us clothes, but he didn't father us. But I understood that his father died when he was 16, so he had come a long way to 16. But then that transition from 16 to adulthood, raising children, he had no experience.

Now, my mother, who was an only child and was raised with this family of loving somehow could do the side of my father of raising children that he couldn't do. How did she know that from her grandmother? I don't know. But she had the ability to do everything we needed that he should have been doing, like father son conversation. It was mother son conversation because she had to handle all that. When my brothers in all of that, you know? So, he was a worker. You know, he was a provider. The lack of being a father to raising children. You know, we just had to deal with that so basically, the bond was our mother and not our father. He outlived our mother by 20 years. But still, you can't replace the mother side because you didn't know how to handle it. So, the relationship is not the same because of the dynamics of the family. So, I mean, it's not knocking him. It's not knocking my grandmother. Cause, you got three kids to raise because you lost your husband in your thirties, you know. So, it's not because you learn and understand that as you get older, but at the same token, you wonder why family dynamics are the way they are in the sense that how did one person who didn't have any siblings know how to raise 12 children versus the person who had two siblings that didn't know what to do with them. That you know, that's the mystery of my mother's training versus my father's training.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:22:02] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:22:03] So you know he did do for us when we were young. When we were young, he took us on trips. He even taught us how to understand where we were going. But the older we got to that point he was a teenager going into adulthood. That's where the disconnect came from but, you know, it's understandable. So, I mean, it's like all families, there's no perfection anywhere.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:22:34] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:22:35] So, I don't say. That my father was the worst person in the world. I just say he didn't have the skills and then that holds true, and a lot of people allege. If you're not taught the skills that you need in life. It's hard for you to establish them on your own. So, my mother was on the foundation that she lived all her life on the foundation from her grandmother till she died. She lived on that foundation she talked about and everything else. My father didn't have that to go on. Plus, he had a domineering mother. So, she was very controlling. So, he didn't you know, it's I guess it's hard for a male to be under a dominating woman for most of his life. Our grandmother lived with us for 20 years, so we understood. But it was different because we had a mother. She could be our grandmother, but she couldn't be our mother. So, the family dynamics is a little on the stranger side, but family history makes up for it.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:24:01] Yeah. I mean, no, no family's perfect, right? You know, and thank you for sharing, thanks for sharing.

LeRoy Council [01:24:07] I mean, it would have probably if grandfather lived because we knew his brothers in Virginia, and they were really like a substitute to our grandfathers. And they were really quite interesting people to be around and quite interesting people as a whole. But they were in Virginia, we were in Philadelphia. So, our time in Virginia, like I said, I was grown before I even went there. So, it wasn't like a normal ten years old. Yeah, so I am more familiar with Alexandria and I'm not in the know when you ask questions like, do you know these different people and all that, That's the part I don't have because I'm really kept from among the family members or who they knew or my mother's friends that she went to school with, you know, as opposed to just being a person who floated around Alexandria and knew everybody.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:25:15] Yeah, I'm. I'm curious. Like, when did you first learn about Douglass Cemetery?

LeRoy Council [01:25:23] I learned about Douglass Cemetery with my granduncle because he would take me to Douglass Cemetery to clean off my great grandmother, my great, great grandmother's graves. The cemetery was grown up with honeysuckle. It was literally a mess, and we would go in the cemetery, and we would clean off the graves because my great grandmother had a rosebush. My great, great grandmother had a little evergreen bush, and we would clean off those two graves.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:25:56] Mm hmm.

LeRoy Council [01:25:58] And then we would leave the cemetery and step down into the creek, because the creek ran in the back of the cemetery. Took us under Duke Street by San Tula market and that's how we would come out of that side to get back over to West Street where we were living on 309 North West. Okay, when you came out of underground, at San Tula that brought you over to. It's not Commerce Street, but it's something that links them to Commerce Street.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:26:34] Was it? Yeah. Diagonal Road.

LeRoy Council [01:26:37] Right? Yeah, we would come up that way and then we would end up back over to West Street in the 200 block and go into the 300 block.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:26:48] So, okay. So, when you first discovered Douglass just so I understand you went with your...

LeRoy Council [01:26:55] Granduncle Nehemiah Campbell.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:26:58] Nehemiah Campbell Okay.

LeRoy Council [01:26:59] That worked at the Old Dominion Boat Club.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:27:00] Old Dominion oh yeah. Um, and so when, what year roughly was that? Like, when do you remember? Like, when.

LeRoy Council [01:27:10] I probably was like about 12.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:27:13] You're about 12.

LeRoy Council [01:27:13] So break. 53

Francesco De Salvatore [01:27:15] 53. Yeah. Um, and so, and so you would follow the creek to the cemetery. No, no, sorry. I think.

LeRoy Council [01:27:25] We would. We would come our Payne Street. Right. And coming to the cemetery that way.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:27:30] Okay.

LeRoy Council [01:27:30] But when we left the cemetery, it was dark. So we would step down beside the creek. You didn't know where the rats or anything. My grand uncle, he's. He went in there I followed him. We would come down under Duke Street by Santullo I mean, it wasn't. It was not the nicest way to travel. But that's how my uncle would take me.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:00] Interesting. Do you know what that creek was called? Do you remember what they called that creek? Okay.

LeRoy Council [01:28:07] No, it was not the cleanest thing in the world.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:09] Yeah. Um.

LeRoy Council [01:28:12] But since we're talking about Douglass Cemetery, I might as well go into that a little bit more. My grandaunt died in 82 she was the last of our family in Alexandria.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:29] Okay.

LeRoy Council [01:28:30] So which meant that after that time frame, I'm down there with my cousins, the Fords and all of them versus my direct line that I was raised with as a child.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:41] Uh huh.

LeRoy Council [01:28:42] So Rosie Ford would take me to the cemetery because, uh, Cousin Mary, like I told you, they were there from 14.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:51] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:28:52] She was 91 when she died, so she was like a link in our family for generations. So, we would go down there because her tombstone on her grave was from the Dreyfuss family and their name is on their tombstone. Okay, so that's in Bethel. So, we would go down there trying to find that in the beginning you could walk along Payne Street and look into the cemetery, and you could see her stone. But later on, it wasn't like that over in Bethel either.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:29:22] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:29:23] Bethel wasn't as bad as Douglass when I was a kid, but it was not nice either. So, Douglass ended up being my great grandmother and my great, great grandmother, which we both buried in 32 and 34. My great, great grandfather was buried at the back fence in 55. I scribed his name into the homemade tombstone that his name is on. But while I was there, I decided I wonder whose company grandfathers were in with those huge monuments behind him behind the iron fence. So, I walk around the fence into the White side of the cemetery, and I probably was about three monuments away when I see Eliza Chew Mason, born in the Cliveden House, which you pass coming up Germantown Avenue because that's like if you come straight up Germantown. So, you pass that in the 6400. There's one, on the right-hand side coming up is the Cliveden House and across from the Cliveden House is the Upsala House. That's where they fought the battle of Germantown.

The British I think we're in the Cliveden house and the Patriots were in the Upsala house. Upsala was the Johnson family. Again, the Johnson family, whose parents' house is right there at the corner of Washington Lane and Germantown Avenue. This was the son who built that more of it's not Victorian, but it's an older stone structure. Now, across the street at the Cliveden was Chew family, who they came out of Maryland, and they had slaves in Maryland and in the Chew House, Cliveden house there on Germantown Avenue. So, they were large slave holders to the Chew family. That still is a house that you can tour when they open for a tour season. You can go to their grounds, but I don't think you can go into the house. There are marks on the building when they fired in the cannon ball across the street during and they reenacted every year the battle of Germantown. So, she was the granddaughter of Benjamin Chew, whose son was Benjamin Chew Jr.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:32:16] Who was buried across the street?

LeRoy Council [01:32:18] That's buried there now. Buried in Alexandria.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:32:20] Right. That's what I mean.

LeRoy Council [01:32:22] What is that cemetery across?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:32:24] Across from Douglass.

LeRoy Council [01:32:24] In back of Douglass?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:32:27] Yeah. In the back of the yeah, okay. Presbyterian.

LeRoy Council [01:32:30] Right yeah. Yeah, the Mason family is one of the well-to-do families in Virginia and so, she married, you know, they marry in their class system. So, it was amazing for me to go down there and go around the fence and find out my great, great grandfather's closest burial ground was against where she's buried. Well.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:32:56] So yeah, can you talk a little bit more about those first visits with your uncle, you know you're talking about you know, trimming the thorn bushes. Can you describe more, more like, like about those visits.

LeRoy Council [01:33:11] Well, the only thing I could tell you was that when we were in the cemetery it was a mess. Yeah, literally, it was a mess. You didn't see any tombstones. You couldn't see none of

that. Even when we went in there, we'd have to clear that stuff away to even see the tombstones of my great grandmother. My great, great grandmother. None of that was visible then and then over there, where they put those condos, there was a drop off that when you got to the end of the cemetery it dropped down.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:33:42] Okay.

LeRoy Council [01:33:42] Not a tremendous drop off, but it was a drop off. Now I remember that very well.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:33:50] And that's a side you would enter, right?

LeRoy Council [01:33:54] No. This would be going towards Duke Street.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:33:57] Okay. So, you would enter it.

LeRoy Council [01:34:01] We'd come in on Payne Street and in that main road. Yeah, okay. Now, when you first came off of that main road, then Auntie Gert, grandfather, the Thomas' are buried somewhere right near the road but it's no markers. But they're buried in front of where my great grandmother was buried.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:34:26] Yeah. So, you end up in Payne Street and so how far? Just roughly, how far was that from the entrance? How far was your...

LeRoy Council [01:34:37] How far?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:34:37] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Right.

LeRoy Council [01:35:03] I'm going to tell you. I'm going to pass this to you.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:35:05] Oh, so you. Okay.

LeRoy Council [01:35:25] Now, I don't know all those family names. He I'm sure he may know quite a number of family names.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:35:33] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:35:34] But as you see that the middle path where the little pavilion is, this is in front of that and tells whether as the third or fourth row in front of that point.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:35:47] And so did you ever see other families or individuals going doing similar things as you and your uncle, like helping clear somebody? So, your early visits, you don't really remember anyone else being there?

LeRoy Council [01:35:59] Nobody was there.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:36:01] Okay.

LeRoy Council [01:36:02] It was only it was only him and I.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:36:06] Yeah, and like, what? What was the frequency? Would you go every week, would you go?

LeRoy Council [01:36:11] Well, not every week, but every time it grew up, we'd be back in there to clear it again and honeysuckle this stuff all grew kind of fast, right? Yeah. So, yeah, we made quite a number of trips. Okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:36:23] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:36:24] Because he my granduncle had been in our family so long around these elders was very much a part of his life that it was wrong for them to be in a cemetery. There was such a mess.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:36:42] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:36:43] So even though, you know, this was done after work or on a weekend, you know, and one of them days he didn't have to be at the boat club that we would. Go to the cemetery and clean it off.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:36:59] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:36:59] What I didn't mention was down, uh, King Street. Where the Old Dominion Boat Club and the Seaport Inn. My mother remembered when that was nothing but the shells from the oysters that you were walking in shell covered.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:37:21] Did you say?

LeRoy Council [01:37:24] And she would tell stories about going down there and sometimes I guess they would be picking up the shells and finding stuff rotten in there. Yeah. You know.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:37:34] Did your uncle ever tell you, like, with any stories ever told to you about Douglass or any information about Douglass that he ever told you about?

LeRoy Council [01:37:44] No, no more than why we were there.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:37:46] Why you were there?

LeRoy Council [01:37:48] I mean, it's like. I guess, Douglass Cemetery. Although Cousin Eddie is buried in Douglass Cemetery. That was, uh, Cousin Mary's husband, Eddie Washington. Okay, where he's buried in Douglass, and I don't know whether your information tells much about who's buried where. Okay, where he's buried in Douglass Cemetery in some family plot, so I don't know who. That's why I was interested in seeing the papers, seeing whose family plot he was buried in. Okay, well, whose family plot he was buried in, and he has a high stone. Cousin Mary was supposed to be buried beside him. That they had left a grave for her you can keep that. They had left a grave for her to be buried beside him but like I said, she lived a long time. So, by the time she died I was down

there talking to my cousin and saying she's to be buried in Douglass Cemetery next to her husband. But she had a second husband, which only lasted a year. He married her when he was way younger. Had a massive heart attack and died. So, she tells Lewis he's to be buried by her husband. Well, of course, the second husband is who Lewis knows. So, he buries her over in Bethlehem. She wasn't supposed to be buried in Bethel. Of course, Mr. Click claimed there were no records of who was buried over there in Douglass. So, he wasn't about to bury on the ground or anything else because he's like saying, you know, there's no records. That's when he told me that these were the names. I was shocked because Mr. Click told me a long time ago. That's the father and the son, that there were no records of Douglass Cemetery because he didn't want to be bothered.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:39:49] Yeah. So can you further. So, you know, during that time when you were first going in the fifties, you know, can you describe a little bit more about what, you know, kind of paints the image of what it looked like, what Douglass, like walk us through from the entrance.

LeRoy Council [01:40:07] The whole thing. Yeah, the whole cemetery was covered in wall overgrowth. The whole cemetery from the front to the back was covered. We had to make our way through this, too, because my grand uncle knew where the graves were. So, he was able to walk me in there to say, okay, this grave is here. They were in two rows, but not one behind each other as far as where they were buried. So, we would go and do Grandma Alice, who was closer to the road, and then Grandma Susan, who was over in the cemetery. Further, as you'll see by the I counted tag numbers on the stones and all because I'm sure when some of those stones are not even in the right place. But there's numbers on those stones when I recorded it. So, you'll see that there you know, the numbers are there around the very top of the stone.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:41:12] Okay.

LeRoy Council [01:41:12] So that day that I talked to you, I didn't know where that list was, but God led me to it before this day.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:41:19] That's good. Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:41:20] So I'm like, Oh, my goodness. I found that, yeah. I didn't want to tell you. I had it. Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:41:27] Was there, was there a fence around Douglass at that time? Do you remember a fence?

LeRoy Council [01:41:31] So the only fence that divided Douglass from the White side is the iron fence that my granduncle was buried up against.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:41:41] So, so you could enter Douglass from any.

LeRoy Council [01:41:44] Any direction.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:41:45] Any area.

LeRoy Council [01:41:45] Right. Where you couldn't come from the Duke Street side because it was the drop off, right? So, you would have to climb up there but going up the main road and walking into it was...

Francesco De Salvatore [01:41:55] So could you talk about the drop off a little bit? So, it was a slight incline that went down.

LeRoy Council [01:42:01] Yeah, now, I couldn't tell you just how deep it was, because we never went over there. We were only working on the two graves. Right. But you could see it, you know.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:42:11] Do you know if there were their graves there?

LeRoy Council [01:42:16] You can see nothing you can't see. This was all covered up with the honeysuckle and everything else. No. When I went to Douglass after they put those condos up there and they cleared off the cemetery, that was when I was recording. Then you could see what the cemetery kind of looked like but now it was not a nice place for me to visit even once they cleared it. Because now I'm horrified that what I'm seeing is not nice. These are some of them stones. The names are hard to reach because there's the stuff is sunk in the ground. Right. So, you know so, broken stones and all kinds of stuff. Tombstones. This is, you know, having been a child in there, cleaning out the graves with the rosebush and the evergreen didn't exist anymore but just to think. That these are these are our ancestors. Not that I knew my great grandmother and great, great grandmother, but I knew my great grandfather. My great, great grandfather and so the kinship were there, even though you didn't know the people. But my mother knew of them so that was the difference. She could talk about her people to me, you know, differently than we actually seeing it.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:43:43] Uh huh.

LeRoy Council [01:43:44] But I mean, the cemetery was a mess and like I said, we would leave the cemetery and step down there by the creek to clear some weeds and clean the cemetery. We only cleaned two graves. My great, great grandfather wasn't buried in there then he was still alive. That's how I knew them because they were alive, and they started dying when I was in high school. But, you know, it's not the same when you go into a cemetery knowing that it's your people there and knowing that there's other people in that cemetery that I was told that was in there, even though there were no stones like the Thomas', you know, they're buried in Douglass. Yeah, and I'm sure they're going to be on your list as well. Yeah, so, it wasn't like going to the cemetery like I go up here to Fairview Cemetery. You know, I wish I could show you in Fairview Cemetery where my parents are buried. There are also folk from Orange County. We live in an area where Fairview Cemetery was the only place that the Blacks could be buried. Okay, and I'm going to show you that it was early in 2000 that I was down in Douglass and wrote that article. Okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:45:21] Can you give some back story about that article? Like what year did you write the article and why were you writing the article?

LeRoy Council [01:45:29] Well I was down in Douglass to oversee the graves where my great grandmother and great, great grandmother and my great, great grandfather was buried at that point. And when I got there, I just couldn't believe that they had built the condo beside it, cleared off the cemetery, never corrected the cemetery, just cleared it off, put in that path in the center with that little

pavilion, like it was a place to sit down and commune with your ancestors. And this is horrible. That was horrible, cause I'm remembering as a child going even though it was a mess. But going in there knowing they were there but to come back all these years later and then this comes back to something that they set up, that if somebody came to visit Douglass Cemetery, they would sit in the pavilion and have an opportunity to commune with their ancestors. I didn't find that at all an interesting situation because to me I was really angered at how dare they clear it off, didn't do a darn thing about fixing it just so these people weren't looking at that horrible cemetery I had cleaned off as a kid. That's the only reason they cleaned it off. They didn't clean it off to make it a nice cemetery.

They cleaned it off to make the people look out the back and look down on a cemetery that wasn't as horrible as it had been. That's all. That's the reason I wrote the article. So that was in early 2000 but I'm going to tell you that here. This is Fairview Cemetery here in Willow Grove, which is just outside of Philadelphia. Okay. Now, in 2000 just prior to that, I constantly visit my mother's grave and the reason I constantly visit my mother's grave because my mother told me when her grandmother died in Alexandria every day after her grandmother died, she was over there in Douglass Cemetery and I was like, wow. Who would go to the cemetery every day? But then my mother died, and then it was like, yeah, mom, I understand. I'm up here all the time, you know? And it was like there were times I was crying and then I was like, how is my mother going to be at peace if I'm standing on her grave crying over the loss of my mother? I'm like, that's not fair to her. So now I am going to visit, but there's no crying. But this day is when I was visiting my mother's grave and my mother's spirit comes to me and says, LeRoy, you're standing here over me. What about your siblings? So, I go to the house and the guy who was digging the graves takes me in and he shows me where all my siblings were buried. But he's into the old book where it was handwritten originally, and he then takes me out to the grave and when he gets to my sister's grave, there's a military stone on my sister's grave. And I'm like, well, who was that? And he said, "I am not your family. Well, lo and behold, I found out that a mother and her son are buried on top of my sister, who was in a two-person grave for one of us to go in there with her.

So that's, that's my niece is now at the White House in the legal department because she was, uh, captain in the Army, on the legal staff. She went to Washington Lee Law School, and she then now I understand, is in the White House. But before when she was in the military, I said to her, I need you to write a letter, because my father was not interested in fixing this situation. But my mama spirit had came to me, so I can't deny it. So, I tell my niece, I said, they have a new president of the cemetery. I've met him and he's telling me how he's willing to fix up the cemetery and I say, I'm one of your problems. And so, I say, I need a letter written that sounds like a lawyer wrote it. So, she said, "Well, is papa in agreement, I don't care about papa. I'm about my sister. So, she writes me the letter she was going to Germany. I don't care. You're going to Germany. I don't care I need my letter. So, she wrote me the letter. I go to my father with this letter and my father says. If it costs money, he's out of it. Now my mama spirit came to me. Okay, so I can't accept what he says to me because the grave is in his name. So, it took me five years to settle that but before we settled it, that's when I had my niece write the letter. We go back to my father again now I take my sister and we discuss the same situation I discuss with him, and he says, oh, that's not right. Good, sign your name on here I agree. Which his name to sign on there I agree, and the letter went to the president who took it before the board, and they corrected that situation. So, it's not just about Douglass, okay? It's about cemeteries and your ancestors and you just don't put them in the ground and forget them.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:51:38] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [01:51:39] So I have the same situation up here with Fairview and I'm going to show you Fairview has over a thousand almost 2000 people buried there on a 30-acre thing. And they list people I think they did 30% of the people in the cemetery, and most of them are listed being born in Virginia but don't say where. I got a few out of there that told me that they were born in Orange County, and that's what that is, the ones buried up there and a lot of them are connected to our family.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:52:24] Wow.

LeRoy Council [01:52:28] But Orange County and Virginia is in Philadelphia. Just as prominent is it's down there and Alexandria with the family members who migrated north.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:52:46] So, did this kind of proceed then you do this procedure article about Douglass?

LeRoy Council [01:52:54] No, this was the same year. The same year but later.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:52:58] Yeah. Okay.

LeRoy Council [01:53:00] Like I said, my mother spirit came to me. My sister had no marking on her grave, so I would not know that there was anything wrong in that situation. If my mother's spirit didn't come and tell me. You need to straighten it out and she could've gone to anybody else to tell them that, that they had done it. But my mother knew if I LeRoy stands there and my spirit tells him what to do, it will get done.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:53:28] And so you, so when you wrote the article about Douglass, you, you returned and physically went to Douglass, right? So, can you describe what it looked like then? Like when you first arrived.

LeRoy Council [01:53:42] There, that's when I told you they cleared it off and put that pathway in the center at that pavilion. But the cemetery itself was clear. But the graves and the stones and the mess that the cemetery was in was still there. You know, I'm walking as I'm doing those two rows and I see numbers and there may be other people on that row that I couldn't record because the stone is down in the ground so far. That is just a number on the top. So, no I didn't find it to be any more of a pleasant spot to go to than when I was 12 years old in the cemetery cleaning graves.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:54:30] Yeah. What was it like returning after all that time?

LeRoy Council [01:54:37] Well, after all that time returning would be the fact that after that time, now there's more folk in the Bethel Cemetery and that connects to us as well. So, I'm down there to see everybody because I'm the type of person whose If I go to Fairview, I take my nieces and nephews when they were little. Get a stone, get a pebble cause as we go to our family, we're going to leave a stone at each grave because that's what the Jewish people do. They go to the cemetery, and they leave a pebble on the top. When somebody else comes over, there's been somebody else visiting. So, I knew that from my Jewish friends. So, I would go on the summer day and do the same thing. Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:55:22] So when you were younger and going with your granduncle, did you ever hear like from other people, like other family members they talk about Douglass was there anything you remember as a kid people saying about Douglass?

LeRoy Council [01:55:37] But the only thing I ever heard anybody say about Douglass was the day I was in there and recorded this story and I went to the Hopkins house. And Helen's daughter, Lucretia, worked and as I'm in Hopkins House with her, she's like, well, LeRoy, what are you doing? So, I just came out of the cemetery. There was a cold, damp day in January, but I was over there. She was like, what were you doing in the cemetery? Well, I was over there recording names off the graves and checking on the graves of my ancestors. And she was like LeRoy you're in a cemetery doing stuff like that? And I'm like, I didn't know at that time her grandmother was buried in Douglass, Helen Miller's mother. And I'm like, Wait a minute, you're down here I'm in Philadelphia. I'm coming down here and I'm complaining about what I see. But you all are too complacent nobody's caring. But you forget your ancestors are there, too. Somebody's ancestors are there all these people buried in there have, in most cases, some descendants still living in Alexandria. So, I'm from Philadelphia. Why in the world would I come from Philadelphia and come down there and find the horrors in Douglass Cemetery? And it disturbs me, but you all live here all the time.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:57:07] Yeah, so I mean, you've said it, but I'm going to ask again. So, can you list all of your family members who are buried at Douglass?

LeRoy Council [01:57:22] Yes, because there's not a lot of our relatives in Douglass. So, my great grandmother was Alice Campbell. Her grave there on one rose I submitted to you who died in 32 and then Susan Slaughter is who died in 34 is also in Douglass Cemetery. Edward Washington, who has the upright stone he's passed the path, and his stone is there, which I didn't even know he had a stone. And then the other person buried there is my great, great grandfather, Morton Campbell. Okay. Now, whether there's other relatives in there that I don't know about is because there was any reason for me to interplay with them or for someone to say, like my granduncle, who would say, oh, well, first of all, our people didn't die out so quickly. That's number one they lived a long life before they died. My great grandfather, my great, great grandfather, Morton Campbell, had frostbitten toes. So, they took him to the hospital, and he thought they were going to cut off his toes or his foot. But when he woke up, they cut off his leg just below the knee and so he would when my mother saw him, he said, oh, I went in there for them to cut off my foot and oh my God, they took my leg. Well, he came to Philadelphia for his prosthesis So, he was staying around the corner with our grandmother who was his granddaughter. But I found out later that Susan was six years older than him she was born in 1860 and he was born in 1866. And he's around the corner with our grandmother and he called and speaks to my mother, and he says to her, Margaret, can I come around the corner with you because I'm sick and tired of women bossing me around? So, then he comes to us and we're four or five, three, six, seven. And you know.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:00:01] This is in Philadelphia...

LeRoy Council [02:00:02] Yes, and I think at that point, if I was four, my oldest brother would be only nine. So, he came around and he drank coffee out of one of those pots, little, small pots with a long handle. And my mother would make him his coffee, and everybody would want to take grandpa his coffee. He was not up and down the steps he was just in the room and the people that my mother said, the man came like, we're kids, right? So, she said the man came to discuss the prosthesis with

him and the man came up and talked to him and when the man came down the steps, he went out the door. And my great, great grandfather tells my mother, do you know that man didn't have no legs? And my mother said he didn't. He said, no, that man stood in front of me and squatted down, showing me what you can do with prosthesis he had two prosthesis. My great, great grandfather got his prosthesis, came back to Alexandria. He would strap it on his leg, sitting on the side of the bed, and he never walked with it. If he had to walk, he took it off and he got his crutch, put the crutch under his arm, and he walked with the crutch. He never walked with the leg, but he put the leg on, and he act like he had two legs. As I was a kid visiting and that was on 309 North West Street.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:01:34] Do you have any other stories with him and Morton Campbell?

LeRoy Council [02:01:42] Not really, because that was in Philadelphia and when I was a kid in Alexandria, I was down 309 Northwestern a lot. Yeah, but grandpop would basically be sitting. He wasn't a talker you know, and I'm a kid, so I'm not asking him questions either. So probably if I was older and talked to him, I would have found out more about him and the family and everything else.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:02:15] Were there any family stories that were passed down about him?

LeRoy Council [02:02:21] No more than him losing his leg.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:02:24] Yeah. So, let's move on to...

LeRoy Council [02:02:28] One more. One more thing about him.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:02:29] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [02:02:30] And that is, I have his death certificate his death certificate says when he died in 55, he was 70 years old. He was born in 1866 and he was 89 years old. I knew he was over seventy years old. That would have made him younger than his baby brother, Phillip, which was probably in his early seventies at that time. Who put him down as 70 I don't know but I went and searched up his death certificate to prove to myself. I knew he wasn't seventy years old and how is a man born in 1866 died in 1955, 70 years old. So, when people are doing research and finding death certificates and looking up information, you can't go by everything you see. Yeah, you have at least to understand that in dealing with research you're talking to elders so that you have a better understanding of what you're finding. So that you can get it correct. How is his wife buried over there in Douglass born in 1860 from Fauquier County, Virginia and here's a person who's listed as being 70 years old. But I also knew that my mother always said he said he was born a year after slavery ended and that was December 1865. I mean, 1865, that slavery ended. So, he's born in the next year. So, I knew I didn't know that his wife was older than him till I got into her records. But that was probably one reason he thought that she was typical. We had Black women in our family and our Black women in our family were strong Black women and nobody required a man to help them. They had children so; it is my grandmother. My grandmother was born in 1900. By 1905, her father is dead in West Virginia and her mama is in Alexandria with her daughter and no husband of course, she was from Kentucky.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:05:04] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [02:05:05] And it didn't matter that I have a husband, but when he did something wrong in her eyes, which would be wrong in everybody's eyes, really. She got rid of him, and she raised her child by herself. She ended up with two children, but she had Phillip for the second husband who helped her raise my grandmother. But it was a case that these were not weak women by no means and no cases in my family was their weak women who demanded that a man could tell them what to do. Even my mother was like that, okay it's only a year difference between her and my father and she said, you don't know no more than I know. So, there we come from a strong background of people. Who are destined to let us know who we are.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:06:06] So, yeah, I mean, let's talk about some of those women. So, like, I mean, you've talked a little bit about your great but your great, great, great grandmother, Alice Campbell, right. Um, but yeah, can you tell the details more about her.

LeRoy Council [02:06:22] Well, I think I don't know that much more about her other than what my mother said about her grandmother. Because these people are gone long before we're even born, right? We don't you know; we don't have grandparents on both sides that we can physically say we knew. Our grandfather and my father's father worked up in, uh, he worked in the shipyard in Newport News, where he learned how to do his craft. He then came to Philadelphia, and he worked with Bill Cosby's grandfather and so Bill Cosby's family and our family and my parents and all of them, everybody knew each other before they married. In Philadelphia it's like we live in an area that was like a nuclear family. These folk came from all over the place in the South, but because they didn't have relatives up here, they bonded together, and they all became a family. So that Nuclear family raised everybody. So, Bill Cosby's parents and a lot of the families in our neighborhood where some of them are large families like we were, and some are not as large families. But Bill Cosby's was the first child, the mother had four sons. But my mother was in the hospital with his mother when they were having children. I knew his brother before he passed. I saw his father once but there was another issue. The father was in the service, and he was an alcoholic and so there was not a kinship between Bill and his father like the grandfather.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:08:04] Mm hmm

LeRoy Council [02:08:04] But we all grew up in this neighborhood. The neighborhood was predominantly White with just a handful of Black families that had been there from their move up from the south in the twenties. So, we didn't grow up in a Black neighborhood. We grew up in a White neighborhood. That's why my mother taught us that it's not about the color of a person but their name. Because we were involved with a large White community.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:08:38] Um mmm so. You have many memories or stories are passed down through the family about Alice Campbell.

LeRoy Council [02:08:50] No more than, no more than when I told you her brothers came from Kentucky with her and then they went back. So, I don't I never even did any research on that Perry side.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:09:00] How about Susan Slaughter?

LeRoy Council [02:09:03] The only thing I knew about her was her father was Ben Slaughter, and he was up in Fauquier County, and he had three daughters and two of those daughters ended up being a part of my family. And I think the third daughter was never married. The one daughter was Cousin Mary that ended up being buried in Bethel near a cousin. The other was my grandmother's grandmother. So, they married into the same families, of course, because Mary was a Johnson, because her father was the only boy. So, she carried the Johnson name. So, I mean, it's like. Well, let's put it this way. You're asking about oral history. Okay. My grandmother was raised by her great grandmother who was born a slave. My paternal grandmother knew all there was to know about her great grandmother, her life story, because she was the only girl and oldest with five brothers under her. My grandmother had this knowledge of a slave but carried anger with it. So instead of explaining the oral history of her great grandmother who lived to be 95, my grandmother's attitude was, oh, I could tell it to you, but to bring tears to your eyes. Don't tell me about bringing tears to my eyes. Tell me the story let me make that judgment. Okay. Instead of telling it, she took it to the grave.

So, when it comes to oral history, you're not always able to express oral history because family members aren't talking. Why aren't they talking? Well, in the case of my mother's people being a loving family, they threw skeletons at your feet. And you said to yourself well, that wasn't quite right, was it? But they didn't care. But on my father's side, that was important to keep those secrets. So oral history isn't past in families as well as it should be and because oral history is going to bring up some things that you don't want to hear. Yeah, okay. A typical example was my grandmother's uncle I showed you. His father was married twice, the first marriage he had three children and my great grandmother was the girl in between the two brothers. Okay. This is when he was a baby in the picture, I showed you. She, you know how you have post-traumatic stress. That's probably what happened to his mother. She ended up in a mental institution the father took on a second woman and had nine more children. But when you got into the record, the record said that her mother was married twice, and he was from the first marriage, and she was from the second marriage. And those were his nieces and nephews. Those were his children. Those two women outlived him. So, they both die with him being their husband, and yet they outlived them. Because of course, my great, great grandmother, lived 57 years in the mental institution and died the year I was born.

So, it's oral history that I researched, not oral history that was passed down as I can pass it down. Okay. I pass oral history down all the time, because when you learn about your family, it's important to know who they are and it's important to know that if it's Will Charity in Alexandria, he's related to us from down the bottom because our ancestors are from Prince George County. On our Charity side, there's no records. So, we've hit a wall we know the beginning of Charity being a slave in 1660s who was freed in 1698, and that's long before the mass of slaves came to America. She was already freed by her master. So, our history is fantastic. Through the research, it's not so much passed down. My grandmother and my father knew very little about their family. I know more about their family than they ever knew because they didn't have an interest. And what interest was there they did have they wanted to pour it on you with anger, they carried how you are carrying anger about your great grandmother who lived to be 95 years old, born a slave. That's one of the strongest women in our family. Not a weak person, so you should gladly want to pass that information on. But unfortunately, we don't have it. So, when it comes to our folk buried in Douglass Cemetery, they're only the ones that I like. My great, great grandfather who lived to 1955 that I knew well enough to even though we didn't have a conversation about it. But I knew the person and he wasn't you know, they said he was unemployed when he died at 70 and their records, man, 89 years old. And no, he wasn't unemployed. He's lost a leg. He can't work, you know what I mean.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:15:07] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [02:15:08] So it's, you know, that's the kind of stuff that's left out now, maybe through other folk in Alexandria. Like, uh, what was Mr. Gray's name?

Francesco De Salvatore [02:15:22] Mr. Gray.

LeRoy Council [02:15:24] They lived up there in the seminary behind the school. Parker Gray was named after his family.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:15:34] I tell you.

LeRoy Council [02:15:37] Because he learned to be old, too. Yeah, but the Gray family is his family? Parker Gray is named after the second part of Gray is his family. But he lived over there behind the school T.C. Williams. Back over there but I know a little bit about some of the people. Right. But I don't know their story because I was a kid. Basically, if I had been older.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:16:10] How about Edward Washington? Was there anything you want to share about him?

LeRoy Council [02:16:16] Well, he was all I have on him is he was a butler and that was in his death records. But he was sickly, and I know that from my mother. So, although he was alive when I was ten years old, I never saw him. So, I guess he was sickly in the house when I was a kid, so I never was upstairs, you know, to have seen him. So, no I know very little about him, but he's buried over there.

LeRoy Council [02:16:50] In Douglass, okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:16:52] I'm curious to hear more about, you know, like, and maybe, don't remember or maybe don't have an answer for this, but I'm just curious, like what were the practices that you observed from your family when they would visit cemeteries? And it doesn't necessarily have to be Douglass, but other cemeteries like they may have visited, like what were the practices that, you know, that they would do? Like would they bring things with them or was there anything that you remember?

LeRoy Council [02:17:25] No, no. Basically we're in Fairview Cemetery.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:17:29] Mhm.

LeRoy Council [02:17:30] And when my paternal aunt died, which was in 54, it was like being in Alexandria, it was like going up through the country on these country roads. And you thought you went somewhere. Today you're in Fairview Cemetery for a very short time. It isn't as far away as when we were kids and we thought we were traveling but of course, it's different roads, so you're able to go faster. But then it was like we were making a trip to go to the cemetery and then again, we did not go to the cemetery that often. Because our family members were not dying out like most people. So, even in Alexandria, we didn't go to the cemetery that often other than to clean off the graves. They were dead long before I was born. So, it's like it wasn't that we went to the cemetery because there was somebody in the cemetery that we knew. The people that were buried over there in Bethel all died

much later. I remember them, you know, but another thing is in Alexandria wasn't a big amount of our family as they got older. So, it was first cousins, second cousins and that sort of thing, but not ours as a small family, as you can see, my grandaunt and my grandmother were the only two girls. My mother was the only grandchild. So, it's not like we had no big family, immediate family. What we had was a large or extended family from Orange County when they had more children. So, these folk that are in Alexandria are cousins to my grandmother and my aunt, first cousins. But this is all older folk maybe like I said, Cousin Daisy lived right there on Duke Street when it was in the dip. You went to visit these people, but it wasn't like there was a constant connection of us having reunions and all that kind of stuff that wasn't going on. No, that didn't happen in Alexandria.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:19:45] And it's like, what traditions have you I mean, you mentioned like bringing pebbles, for example. What are practices or traditions that you've created.

LeRoy Council [02:19:58] Well, it's not like I created them. It's like we borrow them. Well, no, no. It's like, it's like for me taking my nieces and nephews when they're young to the cemetery was we're not a family as a whole Black folk. Do not go to the cemetery, they bury you in the cemetery and there's a few families that might come out on Memorial Day, and they have things like that. We never did anything like that. So, it's like we were only in the cemetery when we buried somebody, or a person like me. I go to the cemetery not to bury somebody to go visit. So, and I visit I go and visit everybody in the cemetery that's related. And I remember my Robert Campbell, which was my great grandfather and great, great grandfather's brother, lived outside of Philadelphia. And he was married, I guess, in Orange and had two children but when he got up in Philadelphia, he married a Council. And she had her children from North Carolina, and he had his children. All these folks are buried up in Fairview. So, I would visit her children out in West Philadelphia. They did not know where their mother was buried but my grandmother is buried on this road, and you come over to the next row and that's where she's buried. So, all these people in the cemetery, they got Germantown one and Germantown two. Most of the folk old folk from Germantown, which is not where the cemetery is, that's up in Willow Grove are buried in Germantown, one or two. That's right at the main road and the hedge, that's how. So, as I'm walking through the cemetery, I'm taking the young ones through now I doubt very seriously they go to cemetery now. They're grown but they can remember Uncle in the cemetery.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:21:58] Okay. Yeah.

LeRoy Council [02:21:59] Because that's the difference in me having my background and the rest of the family that, you know, folk basically take you to the cemetery and they leave you. They don't come to visit. You know, unless for some odd reason they are passing the cemetery to go somewhere else nearby. But basically, they're not you know, into that. Okay. Now, when you picked up the picture of my grandmother's granduncle or uncle, rather. Okay. He was born in 1881. This is a scale made in 1881. Okay. So, I bought this because that is the year that he was born. This is a scale that works, it has a spring on it, and it will pull down to lift something. The scrub board and ice tongs were used at the same period of time for my ancestors. This is a small version because I have a larger one on my wall. But this one is when they were using just a small block of ice to move around after they shipped it out of a big block. So, I just bought those things because I have numerous stuff in the house of things that I did or collect. And these pictures were done when I worked in Washington, D.C. in the early sixties. These are two watercolors that I did while I was in Alexandria, Virginia.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:23:48] Mm hmm. Right.

LeRoy Council [02:23:52] And I was going to tell you about my change of life.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:23:57] Yeah, yeah. Really quick is there any other information about Douglass, I haven't asked you about? That you want to share is there anything that makes sure we've covered everything for Douglass?

LeRoy Council [02:24:08] Well, basically, because if I was a child from Alexandria. Yeah, I probably would know more about Douglass.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:24:15] No, you know, quite a bit. No, I mean, making sure that we've covered everything.

LeRoy Council [02:24:19] Being that it was in my summers.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:24:22] Yeah, No.

LeRoy Council [02:24:22] And what I did it in summertime down there and even if I come in after I was grown to go back down there. It's like what disturbed me most is the folks that were grown, raised, and lived there all their life that I knew from a kid who had no desire to worry about Douglass cemetery. So, I guess that would be like I said, and I've been a child like my mom raised that, Alexandria. Trust me Douglass Cemetery would have a long time been corrected because the passion of their ancestors buried there is important to me.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:25:08] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [02:25:08] Yeah, I didn't find that to be, and you probably don't find it so much today because some of the things I suggested in my article was about the churches and the Boy Scouts and things like that to do things to correct. Yeah. So, I mean when I saw your questions, I knew the direction you were going. My knowledge of only by being there in the summers and doing what I did in Douglass that was important to the family. Was it because, like I say, the rest of them were there in Bethel? Yeah. Which I didn't find to be much better.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:25:51] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [02:25:51] And how they didn't they don't keep up that Bethel. Yeah. What disturbed me was when Mr. Glick was there and I was over in Bethel to see Mary's grave, as we passed down that main road that led from the main road that brought you off West Street was this grave at the corner of a narrow road that they were, I guess, using them going there to dig graves, right. The grave was a mess. It looked worse than when I was in Douglass and I'm passing it. And Mr. Click says, well, you know, that grave belongs to the fire chief's, mother, and he's not paying no money for upkeep of the grave. So, I do absolutely nothing to the grave and I'm looking at this, this is horrible. You know how you are passing into a cemetery, and this is one grave looking like a mess. But you're cutting grass what did it take to knock those weeds off that woman? But you don't, you didn't feel a need to do that because they're not paying. I don't think other people are paying either, but this was somebody that had money and you want to get the money out of them. You know? So, you know, it's a case that typical cemeteries even Fairview. Fairview at one time was absolutely a mess until the new president

came and he decided he wanted to fix the cemetery up the street in the cemetery and he's done a marvelous job. So now you pass it, and it looks like a cemetery should look.

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

LeRoy Council [02:27:28] And so when I was in Douglass, that was the disturbing factor because I didn't know most of my ancestors were buried there. But my kinship to them was from my mother's kinship. Alexandria so, yes, I come into that saying, why is this still like this? Why hasn't somebody done something? You've got that wooden sign saying Douglass Cemetery is as old as it is. Right. Why wouldn't you make it a showplace for the people to come and tour our old cemetery. This is nothing new. This is all a cemetery yet when I walked around that fence to the White cemetery. I couldn't believe those years for very long before some of my people, but everything is in. Nice. Everything is properly done. It's kept up I don't care whether the families aren't even there no more. The cemetery is kept up. So why are we in front of that same cemetery? Look at the mess. So, it's not. I wished I could make more trips to Alexandria. Maybe when Miss Helen was living, or she was all into politics and all of that I could have talked to her. And speaking of Miss Helen and speaking of Alexandria, something did come to me just now and that is Randolph's. Miss Agnes and Miss Mary and her mother's name was Kate. Well, I knew them I knew them because Cousin Mary lived in that 300 block of North West Street and so did, they, down near the store. And Cousin Mary was very good friends with Miss Kate and so were Ms. Agnes and Ms. Mary were good friends with my aunt, you know, all being a member of Mount Jezreel or not. So, I knew them. That was one family I did know because there was interplay between them and my aunt now. So, I knew them very well.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:29:50] Right. Well, I know we're trying to talk about the watercolors there. So, I don't want to transition back to that.

LeRoy Council [02:30:00] Well, that was watercolors were one of the things I loved to do when I was in high school, taken commercial art. So, watercolors were one of my mediums I loved. It's one of the harder mediums to do, but it's one that came easy to me. So, when I was in Alexandria and I worked over in DC, then I would do watercolors in my spare time because I worked for the National Capital Display Company, which was owned by Ralph Tate, who was Black and I got to him through doing that artwork on the sign of that place on Henry Street, right near Oronoco, isn't it? Korea.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:30:48] Yeah. Do you remember what that place was?

LeRoy Council [02:30:51] Not Wythe because Wythe is where you lived at. No, Wythe is crossing Patrick, and that street is Pendleton and what's the next street? No, Henry's going this way with the street. Right. That shop was there, I know which one you're talking about. You're talking about the one up there at Henry. Right. Well, it was on Henry Street, but near Oronoco.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:31:17] What did you do for that? Can you describe it?

LeRoy Council [02:31:20] One sign was it was I guess Pepsi-Cola had done the sign and it was all lettering, and she wanted something on the sign. So, I did artwork on the end of the sign, which was a horn of plenty and stuff coming out of the horn plenty.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:31:38] When did you do that? When do you remember when that was?

LeRoy Council [02:31:41] Well, it was it had to be 59.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:31:45] Okay.

LeRoy Council [02:31:46] What happened when I came out of school and came down there. Because it was before I got the job with Ralph Tate from this White guy who was watching me do the sign and told me about this company over in D.C. and then when I went over to D.C. about the company, I got a job.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:32:10] Uh huh, and so you were how, how old were you when this happened?

LeRoy Council [02:32:15] I was out of high school.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:32:16] Out of high school, okay. Yeah. So, could you walk us through you know, sort of those years, like your first job and yeah, just like your professional career.

LeRoy Council [02:32:30] Well, I'm only laughing because my mother had nine boys and four girls.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:32:35] Huh.

LeRoy Council [02:32:36] So basically, when I grew up, there were four girls and seven boys. Because we lost one, we lost as a baby and the other one was three years old. Just before I went to Virginia, he was only three. So, for me to come through school and I did work. My brothers did, but my mother gave the tokens to my sisters and me. So, I never had a job until I graduated high school. When I went to work, I went to work first in Philadelphia for a short period of time for a guy who was doing Mr. Softie trucks, and I really didn't like that so much. So, then I left, and I went back down the Alexandria. But I didn't go down there to go to work. I just went down there, and this is how fate puts things in your place. And so that's how I got to go to work over there in D.C., right off from DuPont Circle. They used to have the DuPont Hotel. Well, in the back of the hotel, and on Embassy Row was a carriage house and that's where the display company was in the first floor to carriage house. The carriage house was unique because although the horse and the wagons came in the carriage house, they had a ramp that led the horses up to the second level, which was kind of strange. Then it had one of those metal twisted staircases from the basement all the way up to the top floor. There were different companies in there and this was behind it on Embassy Row, one of these buildings that Mamie Eisenhower used to come to and when she would come, you couldn't do anything everything was blocked off. We were in the back alley you know; you couldn't go nowhere because she was in the embassy in front of us. I also worked for Ralph Tate when John F Kennedy became president. We did the Flamingo for the Florida float because Ralph was one of these kinds of people who could make stuff move around and he was real mechanical, right? So, we did that for the float that when John RFK was inaugurated, there was a terrible snow and the whole place was covered with snow except Pennsylvania Avenue. It was clean, as in the summer you had to trudge through the snow to get there but all of that was for the camera it was cleaner than the bored now. And I remember that very well because I went over to his inauguration parade and saw the stand and everything else. So that was part of my time in there is more in tune with things happening in history than anything else, because I was down to Washington for Martin Luther King's first march in D.C., where they marched

from the Capitol to the Washington Monument. And the thing was held behind the Washington Monument. It was a prayer religious prayer session. I was also down there for the main march, and I was actually seated up at the beginning because we were there, and it was such a crowd that we were behind the rope. And when they were getting ready to start, the seats were empty. So, they said, fill in the seats. So that's how I got to sit out there where those seats were really set for the more prominent people, but they couldn't get through. So, I'm there when that when he did a I Have a Dream speech. I was seated. So, I have fond memories of my time in DC. and Alexandria.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:37:01] Yeah. Can you tell us a little bit also about. Yeah, like you going beyond Alexandria in D.C., but just like what? What you know, what did you professionally do?

LeRoy Council [02:37:13] Okay, well, after working in D.C., I went back home. I was in D.C. from, uh, I was in D.C. from 61, 62. Then I went back home and at the end of it I went to school. I was doing summer classes, I mean, evening classes at the Philadelphia College of Art study and different things I needed to do for my own self. And I wasn't planning to get no degrees for a teacher or anything like that. That was not me. So in in January of uh, I was in Washington from 60 and 61. I was back home in 62, January of 63 I entered the Navy, so I went in the Navy under a three-year program no guarantees. I flew to San Diego for boot camp because it was wintertime and I wasn't going to Chicago, so I went to San Diego. My first time, in an airplane flying nonstop from Philadelphia to L.A. and then down to San Diego. I finished boot camp from boot camp, I went to Pensacola, Florida, to photography school. I then studied photography which was an amazing course as well. What I didn't know was by studying in their photography school, which was one of the premium schools in the country at that time. They felt that once you went to photography school, you were able to get into systems, which was what I didn't want no parts of no electricity, no electronics, all that. So, then I ended up in Sanford, Florida, in a new forming company.

That's what that book is over there with uh, they were forming and then they sent us to System School. We ended up on the Kitty Hawk, which was out of San Diego, which I was watching when I was in boot camp as it went in and out had no idea that's I was going to be in it at the end. So, we would fly from Florida to California every time we went on the ship and then we went on cruises on the ship, which took us over to Tonkin Gulf during the Vietnam War. Like I say, I was in the military for three years for nothing, not knowing that they test you and through the tests is how you got to go to school and everything. Well, after being in the service for two years, I didn't like what I did. But I'm the type of person that if that's what you're forced to do, you will master it. So, I mastered it, at any rate. Coming up on my three years to come out the service, I took a test for E-5 second class. I did not want it. So, I. Oh, before I get into that, my transition from what I was to what I became was when I went into the military. Nobody was going to know me in the military.

So now I'm not going to be my quiet, shy person. Now I'm going to be outgoing. So, in the military now, all of a sudden, LeRoy Council is this totally outgoing person, which I played for years, but I became at the end. So as to come up towards coming out in my three years. I took the test to be an E-5 and I said, I don't want to be no E-5 I want to go home, I guessed the whole test. From the beginning to end, math and everything. That looks good. The scores came out and LeRoy Council was at the very top of the list. Now, I must extend the year to get my E-5 and I had only been in the service for two years and four months when I became E-5 and my father worked at the Navy Yard and he would be saying my son is an E-5. He was in the service for two years and four months, no way possible. Oh, yes. Now, I had to come down to the Navy Yard in my uniform to prove to them I was an E-5. Well, it was odd that it happened, but because of the people dying and the billets coming

up, I just happened to require that billet for two years or four months. It was unreal. So, I'm in the service with these people who are in the service and they're E-5 and E-sixes. You see that on my shoulder that tells you I have this control.

Right when I became a E-5. Oh. If you stay in the service, you'll be a chief. Right. No way in the world. I'm going to stay low, man on the totem pole forever. So, I only stayed there for four years because it was not what I wanted to do and I was locked in a billet by being in this special uh, we were working with this reconnaissance aircraft. We were doing the camera systems, and that's what that book is about because while I was in the service, we decided to do our own book versus the ship's book. And that book was done in the Philippines and when I was back from the Philippines with the officer in charge and people in the ship wanted to buy our books from us because our books were more interesting in the way we did it versus the ship's book. There is a color either black or white, but I changed my personality when I came out to service to the point that my siblings were you're not the brother we had before. No, I'm not cause working in a big family and the personalities, the strong, are against the weak. Not that you're weak, but in their mind, they're stronger than you. Well, I came out to be one of the strong ones in the family now and that they can't deal with, because now I have rough edges. My rough edges were that I needed. I can't go through life just being a passive person. Not that I wanted to be passive in that sense, but just living my life comfortably. So now I'm totally the opposite. So now you see that the reunion is in North Carolina. I sponsored it and put that together. We had two busloads from Philadelphia with 55 passengers. That's like 100 something people.

But that's people mixed up in there because the other they're all over the plantation having a ball. They didn't get in the picture. But I went down North Carolina and I'm on the plantation and my cousins in North Carolina were never on the plantation because of the word plantation. But that Richardson family that built that plantation, and our Council, the family are just like that. So that we're a part of them. So, when we went down there with our two busloads and people in 35 cars following the buses on the plantation was another 15 cars. But I later talked to one of my direct lineage cousins who lived to be 103 and her daughter and the daughter was a schoolteacher. And I'm talking about being on the plantation and the daughter like, oh, I wish I had known that I could've took my class on that plantation every year.

But the word plantation kept them off. When we were on there the woman who runs, the plantation is related to our white Council family through the mother, married to our Council on her aunt side and she told me the most people ever on their plantation was our Council family. In 2000 you know, in 2008 it's like and then I have been down there since with some of the younger kids that were down there who then they told me, oh, we still think about that reunion and I'm thinking, y'all are down here in North Carolina. It's like being in Alexandria. Nobody's paying attention but here somebody comes from out of town, shows y'all what y'all are sitting on. Now y'all are having a ball that you witness, that sort of thing. So, that's me now that I am this different person going now when before that, when I came out to service, I had applied for a job and then I went into service. When I came out of the service, I went back to the same company. That's when I got into designing women's clothes and at that point, when I got that job, I didn't know what a dart in a dress was, okay. I'd learned all about sewing and everything else, I made drapes in my mother's house for her smocking, the tops with pulling strings and all that. All because I had that job working on women's clothes. So, my whole life has been one thing leading to another, but always leading me to becoming the historian I ended up becoming. Because unlike all the rest of my siblings, they did not have the background of being around these elders like I did. And even though I didn't have a chance to talk to them as much as I

had wanted in the end. It drove me to the person I am today and so it's a happy thing just to be an historian today and not even do the hard work or anything else. My life now is all about history.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:47:26] When did you start doing research on your family? When did this all start?

LeRoy Council [02:47:32] Started in Alexandria when I was, I think when I was 18 it struck me that my ancestors were dying out. Like my great, great grandfather, my great grandfather that I had missed, who they were personally. So, then I started doing my mother's family and by 19 I had a full coverage of my mother's family through oral conversations only. I knew all about Orange County and I knew about how they were all intermingled in there from the four children and who was who, because my great aunt told me who her great grandmother was and great grandfather. So, on my block stuff on a tree that I didn't even have to research now when I was 26 and went to Surry. And got down there and found my father's people and I'm like, well, where did we come from? So, I go in the courthouse and in the courthouse was my great grandfather and my great, great no, my great, great grandmother and her children telling me that they were born in Isle of Wight County, which was the next county over then is when I really went in the courthouse. And for Isle of Wight, which was a whole historical courthouse, and they had records dating back to 1600 and I went in there and my first visit in there, they told me there was nothing in there about Black people.

Then they said, oh, wait a minute, there is something here about Black people. He had a folder, and he opened a folder and there were little slips of paper that when you went to get married, somebody had to agree to the marriage when you're one of your parents. So, on these little slips of papers with somebody saying, "I agree" and my child's going to marry, such and such person and signed her name. And I looked at it and said, well, how long was my stuff going to last with everybody you're letting everybody just touch this stuff, right? So, I come away and I'm away for a while, and then it strikes me. Wait a minute. Her family's in slavery. We're somebodies' property. So now I go back to Isle of Wight Courthouse, and I say to them, I need to see the wills of the Councils. and through me reading these original wills in there, in old English and a double F is a double S and all that you must dissect the language, right? But in doing that I, I found my great, great grandfather as a child. In a will and then I said, well, how did he get there? I backtrack and I don't have to backtrack far before I'm back to the grandson of the original Councils that come from England, and it was the father with his children. The one grandson has four slaves. Three males and one female that made it easy four slaves. That's not 50 slaves trying to sort out by age and color who they are this is four slaves. I am now eight generations from the youngest slave, and I know every single generation. And that's because it was easy to do and then I was in North Carolina where that picture was taken years before that, and I was with my cousins. It was like 86 and I said to them, oh, I went to the courthouse, and it was a later time. And I'm like, no, this picture and get me where I want to go. I need to go to the White Councils. And they're like, well, I don't know LeRoy, I need to go to the White Council. So, they take me to the Council of Big House, and Charles Council is living in the big house, and he comes out and he goes back in the house and keeps bringing out books and things and I'm looking at him and I'm like that's not old enough. He goes back in there and he comes out with a book that was written in 1941, the year I'm born by Judson Council of Baltimore, who does this research on the Council family. What Judson missed out of his research was that when the first Council came to Virginia in 1658 with his children, his wife had died in England. So, he had no wife to come with him. So, as he got into Virginia down near the bottom, Virginia, six years after he got there, he married a divorcee. So, he found John

Council with this divorcee and in his book, he says there may had been some relationship to this Council to John, he was the son.

So, he published this book. The book there's a copy of the book now in paperback form. I saw it in North Carolina. I had no idea what the book all told me, except it mentioned Virginia. So, I'm like, the wrong place. Let me go back to Virginia. That's how I got to Isle of Wight Court House and started my research on the family. So, I now have very great documentation on my Council family that I didn't get from my grandmother, I didn't get from my father, I didn't get from any sides of the Council family, even though my granduncle on the Council side got killed on his moped in Surry at 95 years old. And he was very good at history, buddy but, you know, your ancestors only threw out what they want to. So, he. I remember I was down at the funeral and the cousins were from New York, and I said, oh, you got to meet my grand uncle and when they meet him, he says, oh, your so-and-so's child. And they're like, no, my grandfather was so-and-so. He took them to their great grandfather like it was yesterday. They don't even know the great grandfather's name, you know. But that was the kind of person he was, he was fantastic with his mind, his memory. But like I said, he only dropped you where he wanted. So sometimes you have to work harder with doing your research because people say, oh, did they take it to the grave? No, no, nothing's taken to the grave.

Actually, last year, my baby brother turned 70 in April. In March of last year, I'm connected to my cousin from Waverly, Virginia, which is right out from Surry, and she's coming up to her 80th birthday. In all, she knew who she was and she said, "I don't know who I am. I'm all alone." Well, lo and behold. She was the product of a Council, not in a marriage. Her father was raised by an adoptive family. So that adoptive family raised her. So, she's totally lost as to who she is and three generations did DNA, and, in their DNA, they finally connect to a Council. Now their loss finally. Somehow, they connect to me. When she turned 80 years old, she now knows exactly who she is she's not out of no little family. She belongs to her big family one of her sons married into our Charity family. And I'm down there now I'm talking to the daughter, and I'm learning more and more about the folk in Surry and all-around Surry where you all are connected to. One of my grandmother's cousins had his legs off. He was a drinker and he lived over in Waverly. She took care of him, never knowing that was her cousin. So now she's 80, 81 years old, happy. That she knows who she is that's all she wanted to know was who was she?

Francesco De Salvatore [02:56:20] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [02:56:22] And, and that's what it's all about is really doing research to link families back. So that's why I'm interested in seeing the list of people in Douglass, because I'm sure there's going to be other relatives that I didn't know anything about or buried over there because no one told me, cause my granduncle was dealing with the two graves.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:56:47] Yeah. So, I had some closing questions. But before I go, this question. Is there anything that I haven't asked you yet or that you want to say? Before I go to a couple of closing questions for you?

LeRoy Council [02:57:00] No, I think we sort of been all over the place.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:57:05] Yeah. I'm curious. So, like, what does Douglass mean to you?

LeRoy Council [02:57:11] Well, for me personally, I would love to be able to take a trip to Alexandria and walk into that same cemetery as a child. I see cleaned off graves and saw something that resembles what should represent my ancestors. And that's not that it's going to be perfect because it may never be perfect, but at least be a place that if I was to walk in there and walk on the path, wanting now to sit in the pavilion and commune. Okay. I didn't feel that way.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:57:53] Is there anything specific that you'd want to see happening in Douglass?

LeRoy Council [02:58:00] Well, I don't think there's anything I could personally say that I would want to see if it was in a better state than the last time I was there. You know, what I'm saying now, the fact it was cleaned off when I went there, I was kind of impressed, my first look but after I got there, I wasn't impressed at all. You know, so it's like. I don't know how many stones are there. I don't know how many family relatives are there. Like I said, I know the 'Thomas' are there now, whether their side is ever found located and marked. Which would be whether I don't think the Thomas ancestors that I knew have that kind of interests. So, it's like I probably know more about their family than they know. And even when I was in Florida with the great grandson. His interest wasn't even there I mean, how I got down to Jupiter was there every year around Martin Luther King's birthday is when the Black Seminoles have their big convention down there on the land that they fought the wars but never signed a treaty. So, my first time down there was 2007 and he was supposed to go with me. And then he turns around and says, oh, I can't leave my job. So, I went anyway. When I went, I was taking care of Miss Mattie's cousin who lived in Camden, New Jersey. And she was in a nursing home, and she lived in a Highrise and again, my mother used to take us over there, so that's how I knew her.

So, my mother was dead and gone then but she was in a nursing home. Her grandson, her son, lived in Florida and her grandchildren paid no attention. And the grandson's girlfriend stopped paying her insurance. So, there she was in a nursing home so I would go to the nursing home, and I would look after her. She couldn't walk but her mind was as sharp as a tack. So, I would go over there and there were all kinds of issues. But of course, I was the cousin. I would go over there and if there was an issue. I went right to the head nurse and I'm telling her I'm not accepting this, and she was like, well, you know, Mr. Council, I said, you can go in a room, and she's not going to tell you what happened. But I knew what happened, but I can't tell you what happened to her. But I'm here to tell you that whatever's going on here, I'm here to straighten it out.

Well, when I went to Florida, I'm in Georgia at one of my Council cousins, and I call her to say I'm on my way to Florida and she said, oh, when are you going? I said, I'm leaving tomorrow. She said, "Well, you can go visit my son." I may have talked to him once or twice, but I never met him. So they were in Cocoa, Florida. So, she gave me the information and I talked to him. He said, "When are you coming to Florida?" I said, "Tomorrow." "He said, okay, I won't go to church I'll wait for you." Sure enough, I drove to Florida, and I will stay about a week and a half with them but the next day I'm in Jupiter for the Black Seminoles. So, when I went to Jupiter and I came back from Jupiter, his wife said, oh, LeRoy, I didn't know you were a Council. Yeah, that's my name and she said where the Council are Living in the next community. Oh, they do take me there. So, she takes me and sure enough, when he comes to the door, all I see is a larger, taller version of my great granduncle. And I'm like, oh, my God. So now I spend time with the Council family and one brother takes me around, to introduce me to everybody, and he says, where are you going LeRoy? I'm going to Alabama. He said, well, when you go to Alabama, if you have any problems, just call me, I'll come to you. Well,

before this reunion, he died in 2007. He tells his daughter, if anything happens to me, be sure and tell LeRoy Council. So, the daughter called me up and now I have met the brothers and sisters who never told me he had a daughter there. And, and she said, well, my father told me.

Now she told me what happened to him. I was hoping he would be able to go to this reunion and so it was only through Auntie Gert, mother's cousin, that I'm even connected to them through my mother again. And I'm over there looking after Cousin Ruth, who in the end gets buried. Because I go to a social worker and say she has no insurance and they say, oh, no problem. Mr. Council with the state, well bury her. That's kind of odd that the state doesn't do that in Philadelphia. So, each time at the service or as I told you, it's not a problem. Sure enough, when she died, I knew who the undertaker was and went down there. The son comes up from Florida we go down they take out two books. One of the people who have insurance and one of the people that the state buries the state buried her in the ground in a cemetery and a metal casket and everything else. All because I knew if my mother was living, my mother wasn't going to let her be over there by herself. You know what I'm saying? So, I'm that kind of person due to my mother's influence in me that I'm not about to turn my back and not be there for you. And so, I'm sure my feelings about Douglass Cemetery would be if my mother was living and went down to Alexandria and went in Douglass, what would my mother want to see?

Francesco De Salvatore [03:04:18] Mhm.

LeRoy Council [03:04:19] Definitely not what I saw. Yeah. So there comes the difference between me and other people is that I want to be a part of seeing a change. And whatever the change maybe it's going to be better than it is. So, I know it like I said I know I'm not going to go and see the cemetery like Eliza Chew Mason is buried in. Yeah. Those stones are all in place from when they got put there, so I know it's not going to be but at least not come down there and go into a cemetery that I feel so uncomfortable that my ancestors are here. And I think in the case of my great grandmother, her stone was flat on the ground. Wasn't even in place and so, you know, it's like, how in the world do we just act like our ancestors came and left and we don't care? So that in me would be my next time down there with my cousin Rosie or Debbie or one of the Fords says, okay, Cousin LeRoy we're going over in the cemetery, and I see a difference. But that I haven't seen.

Francesco De Salvatore [03:05:44] Hmm.

LeRoy Council [03:05:45] I mean, I haven't been down there. I don't, you know.

Francesco De Salvatore [03:05:47] Yeah.

LeRoy Council [03:05:48] Right now, because of the pandemic, I'm not traveling. So, I'm in Philadelphia. I'm not going up and down the road like I used to.

Francesco De Salvatore [03:05:58] Well, yeah. Mr. Council. Thank you so much for sharing all of this, this has been really an honor for us. So, yeah. Thank you so much.

LeRoy Council [03:06:08] I wish I was able to delve more into the families in Alexandria. Or...

Francesco De Salvatore [03:06:14] What you did know it was great. It was great, I know you did a great job, but yeah. Thank you so much. Yeah.