

Hello?

JM: Hi, I'm M- Okay, um, first off, I would like to get your address because I need to send, uh, promise you a consent form that you are willing to give this interview. So if I could just have your address?

RF: Okay, the address is 1569 Vest, V like in victory, V-E-S-T Street, in Naperville, N-A-P-E-R-V-I-L-L-E. That's in Naperville, Illinois.

JM: 60137?

RF: 60563.

JM: Okay, 60563, okay. Let's see um, alright, let me start off the interview with this note. Oh, okay. The following interview was conducted with Jeremiah Marks on behalf of the Putnam County Museum for the African Americans of Putnam County Museum Oral History Project. It took place on January 14, 2005. Mr. Freeland is at his house in Naperville, Illinois, and I am at-

RF: Did you say Naperville?

JM: Naperville, Illinois, and I am in Greencastle, Indiana. The interview is with Russell Freeland. Okay, I had to do that preview just to get it all going. Alright, uh, first off, if you could just say your, uh, name and, uh, the day of birth?

RF: Russell Freeland, date of birth is 7-13-29.

JM: Okay, and, uh, where were you born?

RF: In Lawrenceburg, Indiana.

JM: Okay. Um, is that where you lived, uh, for a while, or where did you live, uh, when you were younger?

RF: It's right there.

JM: Right there? Okay. Um, uh, why did your parents move there?

RF: Uh, why did they move there?

JM: Yeah.

RF: I have no idea.

JM: No idea?

RF: In fact, they grew up in that area.

JM: Okay. Alright, um, where was the school located around, uh, in that town?

RF: Where was it located?

JM: Yes, was it-

RF: Right in the town.

JM: Okay. Um, uh, would you have been able to live somewhere else?

RF: No.

JM: No?

RF: No, because I grew up there, you know, as a kid.

JM: Yeah, okay. Um, I was wondering, uh, if this town was, uh, segregated when you lived there?

RF: Was it segregated?

JM: Yes.

RF: Well, the schools weren't segregated, you know, it's a small town. The schools weren't segregated, but some of the, uh, facilities, like, you know, uh, eating, restaurants, and things of that nature-

JM: Okay.

RF: Were segregated.

JM: Alright, um, okay, well, uh, uh, let's see. Let's talk about, uh, your schools. Uh, where- what was the name of the high school that you attended?

RF: Lawrenceburg High School.

JM: Lawrenceburg High School, and that's in, uh, the same town?

RF: Right.

JM: Uh, how long did you live there?

RF: I lived there until I went to, you know, college. Some years.

JM: Okay, alright. Okay, um, how was your teachers and principals, uh, at the school? Did you like them?

RF: Yes, uh, yeah, I liked them quite well, really.

JM: Yeah? Okay, um, they- did they treat everyone fair? Were they, uh-

RF: Yeah, I would say that, uh, they were treated fair. Obviously, there's- once in a while, some things would come up, but nothing, uh, you know, big.

JM: Yeah, do you remember any stories that, uh, you like to tell about there, or is there nothing really that big?

RF: No, nothing really that big. I would say that the person who was, uh, my basketball coach, he was, uh, very, very helpful and supportive. In fact, he's the reason I went to DePauw.

JM: Oh, okay.

RF: Because he went to DePauw.

JM: Oh, really? That's nice. Okay, um, so your school wasn't segregated, uh, I know that you said that your, uh, elementary school was small, but was your high school just as-

RF: It was small.

JM: Yeah, okay. Alright, um, other than basketball? Uh, what other extracurricular activities were you in?

RF: Well, you're talking about high school now.

JM: Yes.

RF: Okay. Well, I was involved in the, uh, football team and, uh-

JM: Yeah? Okay. Um, what positions did you play?

RF: Well, in, uh, hold on a second. In baseball, I played 2nd base, uh, football, I was a quarterback.

JM: Oh, okay, cool.

RF: And then I played guard in basketball.

JM: Alright, um, did you always have, uh, a good relationship with your teammates? And, uh, you said that you had a great relationship with your basketball coach.

RF: I had a good relationship with um, you know with my teammates.

JM: Yeah, okay. Um, how many, uh, what was the, uh, not the ratio, but, uh, how many- Was the school pretty equal, uh, in color?

RF: Oh, no, no, no, no. It was primarily white, like 99%.

JM: Was it? Okay.

RF: Yeah, yeah.

JM: Alright.

RF: In the high school there was, uh, when I was going to high school, there there was probably only, uh, yeah, I'm gonna say maybe eight, six to eight African Americans.

JM: Yeah? Uh, were you friends with a lot of them or all of them, or-

RF: Yeah, I had, yeah, I had friendships with, uh, you know, most of them there.

JM: Yeah, okay.

RF: Yeah, yeah.

JM: You were a pretty friendly guy then. Pardon me? You were a pretty friendly guy then?

RF: I guess so. And I was the uh president of my senior class.

JM: Awesome. Uh, any other, uh, activities or clubs that you were in?

RF: No, that's a long time ago, so I have to think. I was, uh, well, in the, um, was in the high school band.

JM: Okay. What instrument did you play?

RF: Uh, tenor saxophone.

JM: Oh, okay. Alright, um, after, uh, high school did, uh, what kind of further education did you have? Did you just look at DePauw or did you think of other choices?

RF: Well, I looked at a couple other schools, but I was pretty well set on going to DePauw.

JM: Yeah. And was it, uh, mostly your influences by your, uh, basketball coach?

RF: Right.

JM: Um, did you receive any, uh, scholarships to go to DePauw?

RF: Uh, rector scholarship.

JM: Rector scholarship? Okay. Alright, um, did you feel that you were getting the same, uh, types or kind of opportunities or scholarships as some of the other kids?

RF: Yeah, uh, yeah, I think so.

JM: Yeah? Okay. Um, let's see. Um, after, uh, you went to college, um, uh, what sports did you play?

RF: In college?

JM: At DePauw? Yes. Yeah, I played uh basketball for all four years and I played football just one year and baseball, I think three, I think that's what it was.

JM: Wow, you were pretty busy.

RF: You're right, very busy.

JM: Did you have fun playing, uh, like three sports at once?

RF: Yeah, it was a major, you know, you were pretty busy when you were doing it, but, uh, yeah, I enjoyed it.

JM: Yeah. Were your grades still pretty good, kept up with them?

RF: Yes.

JM: Yes, okay. Um, were your teammates any different at college and coaches were...

RF: Well, college is a little different so you didn't, you know, it wasn't like you grew up with the people.

JM: Yes, true.

RF: I had, um, I had basically a good experience with the teammates and with the coaches.

JM: Yeah? Okay. No, no big arguments, or...

RF: No.

JM: No one on the team, um, was segregated at all? Or did they...

RF: Well, that's hard to say, you know, I, I, not to the extent that it was, uh, bothersome, you know, that sort of stuff.

JM: Yeah. Okay.

RF: I have to say, honestly, that, uh, my relationship with the team, the coaches and such, it was good.

JM: Yeah? Okay. Alright, um, uh, in uh, basketball and other sports, did you receive, uh, uh, any rewards or...

RF: Any awards?

JM: Yeah, like, uh, awards and...

RF: Well, you know, other than just the, the, the letters that, you know, you get for participating in sports.

JM: Okay.

RF: And, uh, of course, after that, uh, finishing that, you know, we were, uh, elected for the Hall of Fame, the DePauw's Hall of Fame.

JM: Oh, really?

RF: Hall of sports, yeah. I think they, they don't just say it's basketball, I think it's, because there's more than just basketball players in it, so, it's Sports Hall of Fame.

JM: Okay. Um, so you are in that?

RF: Yes.

JM: Okay, uh, what year did you get, uh, initiated,

RF: Like, how...

JM: Yeah, like, how long was it, like, after your year?

RF: Oh, it was a long time. Hold on just a second.

JM: Okay.

RF: We'll have to look on the plaque.

JM: Okay, they give you a plaque and everything, too? Mm-hmm. Wow.

RF: Nin... Hold on a second. What year? I was elected in, uh, 1989.

JM: 1989?

RF: Mm-hmm.

JM: Okay.

RF: I graduated in 51, so that's a long time. Yeah.

JM: Yeah. Okay. Um, so, yeah, you must have kept up with your grades, or you're a pretty, uh, successful businessman.

RF: Well, I worked out pretty well, yeah.

JM: Um, where did you work, uh, coming right out of college?

RF: When I came out of college?

JM: Mm-hmm.

RF: I worked for a company called International Harvester. Now, the name has changed since that time, but that's when I, you know, got out of college, that was the, uh, name of the, uh, company.

JM: Oh, okay.

RF: And, uh, more recently it's called Navistar. N-A-V-I-S-T-A-R.

JM: What type of work was it?

RF: Well, I worked in the uh. Excuse me a second, uh, I worked in the uh. Let's see the different things, I should say, uh, in my career. Are you talking about for the whole time I was there, or just when I started?

JM: Um, well, yeah, you can tell me what, for, while the whole...

RF: For example, uh, probably, I worked in the manufacturing area, in uh industrial engineering.

JM: Okay. Was, uh, engineering your major in high school, or college?

RF: No, I was a student, uh, you learned there from almost like, well, with the company training and on-the-job training type stuff.

JM: Okay. Uh, what made you choose this job?

RF: Well, I was, uh, I went there for, uh, right after college, really, I went, uh, right after me, like the next day or two.

JM: Wow.

RF: I went there and, uh, interviewed for an opportunity and, uh, I guess, uh, really my major was in education, I was gonna be a, uh, high school teacher and coach, but, uh, the opportunity came to go through this training, et cetera, and it did lead to that, I became the, uh, first African-American to, uh, be, uh, promoted to a management position there.

JM: Wow.

RF: That was in Indianapolis.

JM: So that. and that was about, uh, I guess that would have been right after college, a couple that would have been right after college that you got promoted to manager.

RF: No, no, no, no, no, that was after, uh, well, I can't remember the, you know, the total number of years before that, but, no, it wasn't right after, it was several years after that.

JM: Okay. Um, it, so I guess that since you had the job right at, uh, uh, college, that wasn't that hard to get a job, but what about a career? Uh, did you ever, uh, pursue, uh, your education or your study of education and coaching?

RF: Uh, well, not the coaching so much, but, uh, while I was working at, at, at the company, there was a period of time when I taught, uh, night school.

JM: Okay.

RF: High school.

JM: High school.

RF: Mm-hmm. And that was in, in Indianapolis at Crispus Attucks.

JM: Okay. I've, I've never, uh, heard of, uh, night school before. Is it, is it?

RF: Yeah, it was a, uh, a night school program that was for students that, uh, who ended up in night school for various reasons. Some of them dropped out of, you know, the day school program.

JM: Okay.

RF: And that sort of stuff. So, uh, that was our opportunity to finish our high school, uh, you know, education.

JM: Okay.

RF: Some people were working, you know, primarily, almost exclusively with African American school.

JM: Oh, okay. Well, that's a nice option to have.

RF: Right, right. And I did that for about seven years.

JM: Mm-hmm. Okay. And, uh, what is it that you do right now?

RF: I'm retired right now.

JM: Are you? Okay. Yeah. Um, what, uh, what company or what job did you retire from?

RF: When I retired, I was the, uh, director of, uh, technical services.

JM: For, uh, the same company?

RF: Right. Yeah, it's the only place I ever worked.

JM: Wow. You've been there quite a while then.

RF: Well, I worked there for 35 years.

JM: Hmm.

RF: Not, not, you know, not all of it was spent in the Indianapolis. Worked there for probably 25 and then came here in the Chicago area.

JM: Mm-hmm. Okay. Um, while you were working and, uh, getting promotions and stuff, did you feel that they were always fair and that your bosses always, uh, gave equal treatment to all the, uh, workers there?

RF: Uh, to some degree, I think that, uh, uh, just like anything else, you know, if you were, in effect, uh, one of the first to, you know, come along that path, that there were some prejudices, no question about it.

JM: Yes. Okay. Is there any, uh, stories or people that you remember that, uh, you felt you should have been ahead of or?

RF: Well, there were a few times when I felt that, uh, uh, I probably should have been promoted for, you know, job opportunity, but, uh, initially that didn't happen.

JM: Mm-hmm. Okay. Um, let's see um, have you ever, did you ever have to move for your job?

RF: Move?

JM: Yeah.

RF: Yeah, I moved from Indianapolis to the Chicago area here in Naperville, well, I worked downtown Chicago, but I moved from the Indianapolis plant to the Chicago area.

JM: Okay. Um, was it, was it a move that you wanted to make or?

RF: Yes, it was. It gave me an opportunity, you know, to broaden myself with the company and to get some new exposure.

JM: Okay.

RF: And new experiences, so, yeah, it was something I wanted to do.

JM: All right. And you didn't feel at all like they were uh being prejudiced at all and uh just trying to move you from the company or trying to move you around?

RF: Oh, no.

JM: No? Okay. All right. Um, let's see um where uh. have you been a part of any organizations uh, such as uh the NAACP? Or?

RF: I was a lifetime member of the NAACP.

JM: Oh, okay. Um, anything else?

RF: Well, some of them were around, uh, from the job aspect, you know, I was a, uh, member of the Industrial Engineering Society.

JM: Sorry, what was it?

RF: Industrial Engineering..

JM: Okay.

RF: Society.

JM: Okay. Um, in the NAACP, uh, what role do you play? Um..

RF: Well, I don't know. You mean now?

JM: Uh, now or in the past.

RF: It wasn't an active, active role, but it was, you know, a participant in some of the activities of the NAACP and uh being concerned about African Americans.

JM: Yeah.

RF: Having the opportunity to, uh, whether it be, uh, advancing job opportunities or housing or, you know, that sort of thing.

JM: So you're, so you'd be a supporter, basically?

RF: Pardon me?

JM: You would, uh, be a supporter?

RF: Of the NAACP?

JM: Mm-hmm.

RF: Oh, yeah.

JM: Yeah?

RF: Oh, yeah, sure.

JM: Um, sorry, I'm blacking out. Um, oh, yeah, I'm sorry. Uh, what uh? You were saying earlier how uh you've gone to some organization and some meetings or something for the NAACP?

RF: I'm not that active, uh, anymore as far as attending meetings, monthly meetings or things of that nature.

JM: In the past, or?

RF: In the past, I, uh, I was involved with the NAACP in their meetings and also involved to some degree with the Urban League there in Indianapolis.

JM: Okay. Any stories or any uh special things about that that you'd like to talk about or?

RF: No, I'm trying to think as we're talking about it that, uh, uh, what I tried to do primarily was, uh, uh, particularly within our company to, um, try to see that, uh, African Americans had the opportunity to, uh, you know, to advance and to get, uh, some job opportunities. So, uh, worked with the, um, with management along those lines, uh, with people who uh, young people who,

you know, came to the company and, more importantly, or as important to to makes sure that uh some of the hiring practices and things of that nature, that uh blacks had the opportunity, particularly younger blacks had the opportunity to uh, you know, not only be a part of the company but to advance, as their skills, you know, provided the opportunity.

JM: Okay. That's nice that, uh, you were able to work with the, uh, be a supporter of the NAACP and, uh,

RF: Well, that, that wasn't so much of the, from the NAACP standpoint as it was internally within the company.

JM: Yeah, and you're, yeah, you're saying you were a member of the technical, the, yeah.

RF: What we try to do is to make sure, because there were a lot of training programs going on, uh, during that period of time, particularly earlier in my career, we tried to make sure that uh, blacks had the opportunity to, uh, get into, exposed to some of the skill trades area, that sort of thing in, in manufacturing.

JM: Okay. Um, do you know anyone else who has been involved in any, um, uh, any strong organizations or,

RF: Say that again?

JM: Uh, have you known anyone else in the past or, um, now that's, that are a part of an organization, uh, like the NAACP or any other ones?

RF: Oh, yeah, there, there are quite a few people I know that, uh, you know, there's a very, some of them are in the NAACP, some of them are in the Urban League or they are associated with, you know, some other organizations that, uh, uh, promote, uh, diversity.

JM: Well, can you tell me a couple of those, uh, other organizations? You were saying something about, uh, the Urban...

RF: Urban League.

JM: The Urban League?

RF: Mm-hmm.

JM: And, uh, can you tell me what that is?

RF: The Urban League is an organization that's somewhat like the, uh, NAACP. Uh, probably the Urban League, uh, for the years, uh, focused a lot on, um, education and focused a lot on, uh, for blacks to, um, you know, advance.

JM: Okay. Um, let's see, um...

RF: When I was at DePauw we used to also have a, uh, well, I'm gonna make sure I'm right about this. I'm right about what the organization was. I don't know that it was called the Minority Council, but, uh, that I'd have to, I don't really remember the name, but the Minority Council doesn't sound right, but, you know, there's an organization like that to, uh, the purpose of it was to promote, uh, at DePauw, to promote, uh, improve racially and that sort of thing.

JM: Uh, was there, uh, while you were attending DePauw, was there, uh, a pretty, uh, big number of minorities there?

RF: No, no, no.

JM: No?

RF: When I was at DePauw, the, uh, I'm gonna say now, it hasn't been the first year, but then at DePauw the, the highest number of African Americans when I was at DePauw was probably like nine or ten.

JM: Wow. It's kind of hard to imagine now, yeah. I'm, I'm trying to think if, I'm sure there's some kind of organizations at DePauw now, but I can't think of it.

RF: I'm not familiar enough with them, you know with that right now, but at that time, like I said, the, the, the, probably, like I'm using the term Minority Council, that's not the right term and I can't think what the actual name was, but it was, uh, an interracial club type thing, okay?

JM: Okay. Alright, um.

RF: And that was the purpose of it was more than, it primarily was to, uh, promote a better understanding and a, and a better, um, a better relationship at DePauw, but it also spilled over into, to some degree, into improved relationships within the, uh, within Greencastle.

JM: Okay, so, uh, so you, uh, the, the group kind of broadened, like went to other students and everyone?

RF: Mm-hmm.

JM: And trying to, okay.

RF: Yeah. It was, uh, like I said, it primarily was to improve relationships at DePauw. Keep in mind that when I first went to DePauw, for example, blacks were not, uh, uh, welcome, I used that term, welcome to live in the dormitories.

JM: Oh, really? I, I was not aware of that.

RF: Yeah, yeah. And that, uh, and for, for me, that, uh, ended, uh, uh, at the end of the first semester of my freshman year, uh, then blacks were welcome to, uh, live in, uh, in Longden hall or some of the school dorms. Not the fraternities or sororities, but I'm talking about the school dorms.

JM: Okay. Uh, where did you guys live before, uh?

RF: We lived in town.

JM: In town?

RF: Yeah, we had, uh, uh, you know, with some of the residents, uh, had a room or whatever, you know, at their homes.

JM: Okay. So the school didn't provide housing at all for you?

RF: No.

JM: No. Okay. Hm. Um, later on, uh, throughout your four years, did they ever, uh, come up with a, a, a minority, uh, frat that you guys could join or?

RF: No, I belonged to a fraternity, but we, it wasn't a, it wasn't a minority fraternity on campus. I'm a Kappa.

JM: Okay. Uh, how did you get, uh, involved in that? You said it's not on campus?

RF: It wasn't at the time. No, it was, um, a combination of things. It, it, so that, um, people like myself who were, you know, going to get into fraternities, it was kind of a combination of, uh, uh, well, I don't know if you, I wouldn't want to put that in the interview, but it was a combination of, uh, you know, students like myself from DePauw and others from, uh, the Indianapolis area, like, you know, some went to Butler or something like that.

JM: Okay.

RF: So it was a, you know, kind of a combination thing.

JM: Oh, okay. I understand.

RF: We all belonged to, uh, the new chapter in U, but that was really a chapter that was IU.

JM: Okay.

RF: Something you gotta be careful with, uh, and saying, because, you know, we didn't go to IU campus, so to speak, but, uh, they were kind of like the sponsors of those of us who, uh, were at DePauw or, I think there were a couple guys from Butler, as I recall, but, uh, that's the way that worked.

JM: So IU and Butler was a little like the...

RF: IU was like the, uh, they were the, uh, they supported our group, so to speak.

JM: Okay.

RF: Okay.

JM: So they were a little more, uh, willing to...

RF: Oh, IU, there wasn't a problem with IU. You know, a lot of blacks went to IU at that time. So, um, what they did, uh, what was done was that the uh, through the efforts of those who went to IU, uh, and, if you might ever, I don't know- a few, three or four guys that were, you know, ahead of me in school, who, uh, they all came out of the Indianapolis area, really, and then, um, you know, it just kind of grew from there.

JM: Okay.

RF: But they were DePauw students.

JM: Oh, okay. Alright. So how was, uh, the whole... because you're saying, uh, that there's a lot of, uh, black people in IU and how there's a few here. Um, what, uh, I'm pretty sure that DePauw was just as prestigious then as it is now.

RF: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

JM: Was it, uh, did some of the white kids that went there, did they ever, uh, do you know any that felt that, uh, blacks should not be there?

RF: Oh, I'm sure there were. Because... I didn't have any confrontations with them, but, uh, you know, there's no question about that. At the time there were those who, uh, weren't necessarily enthralled about the fact that black students were there. But they didn't bother, it wasn't one of the things where it was, you know, big time demonstrations and all that stuff. But they, uh, there was no question about the fact that uh, you know, their concerns were of such a nature that, uh, you know, they didn't have a loyalty thing to the African Americans.

JM: Okay. Let's see where where we. Oh, yeah I was just saying, I was wondering if there were any, if you ever experienced any rude comments or anything like that when you were here.

RF: No, I don't think so, you see, one of the things that about when I was there, one thing about DePauw, DePauw is heavily Greek-oriented.

JM: Yeah.

Okay?

JM: Okay yeah.

RF: So there weren't any blacks in the fraternities and sororities and there weren't any asked to be in them.

JM: Okay. Yeah so, I know now that DePauw is 75% Greek so it was just as large then as it is now?

RF: Oh yeah.

JM: Oh okay.

RF: Yeah, might even have been more although I can't say that as a fact but uh, it was heavily Greek.

JM: Okay. Um now, living in town, outside of uh, DePauw, um I know even till today that there is still segregation in the town uh, the town isn't very fond of DePauw students and uh uh I don't really mind but I know a lot of students don't really like a lot of the town people. Uh did you ever face any trouble with the town?

RF: No well, I won't say trouble but like for example, when I was there, firstly at least, that changed before I graduated but uh, for example um, the uh, movie theatres were pretty, were very segregated.

JM: Okay.

RF: Yeah there was a certain section blacks had to sit if you went out to the movies. You weren't free to sit anywhere you wanted. And I'd say most of the restaurants, uh, were um not open to African-Americans.

JM: Okay.

RF: You know, eating and dining restaurants. And like I said, you know a lot of that changed by the time I got to be a junior or senior.

JM: Oh okay. Alright, well, uh is there anything else that you, any memories of stories that you, anything else that you'd like to talk about?

RF: No I would say that uh, overall, the experience at DePauw was good, it was good education, there were obviously some restraints, uh to being free to doing some of the things other students were open to but uh, overall it was a good experience for me and I uh would say I enjoyed going to DePauw.

JM: Okay.

RF: In spite of some of the things we talked about.

JM: Alright. Well, thank you very much for your time and um, this has been a great help and um we'll send you the consent form in the mail, and I think that's it. Again, thank you very much.

RF: Okay, and your name again?

JM: Uh, Jeremiah Marks.

RF: Jeremiah Marks?

JM: Mhmm.

RF: That's M-A-R-K-S?

JM: Yes.

RF: What year of school are you?

JM: Um, I'm a freshman here, at DePauw.

RF: Where do you, where's home for you?

JM: Glen Ellyn.

RF: Glen Ellyn?

JM: Yeah.

RF: That's like, that's next door to where I live.

JM: Yup, um.

RF: Where'd you go to school up here.

JM: Um, Glenbard West.

RF: Okay. I know quite a few people, where I went to church, I know quite a few people.

JM: Oh okay.

RF: Okay, so you're a freshman?

JM: Mhmm.

RF: Okay and you, um, let me think now, okay you're a freshman, okay, that's good.

JM: My roommate actually lives in Naperville and so...

RF: He lives in Naperville?

JM: Mhmm. And so, um Mike Fatigatti?

RF: I don't know him. Alright, well you have a good experience at DePauw.

JM: Alright, thank you very much.

RF: Okay.

JM: Alright, bye bye.

RF: Bye.