

**Stephen McMullen – 11 mars 2020. March**

**Can you tell me about the place where you were born and raised?**

I was born in Brooklyn, New York and raised also in the same place. Brooklyn is across New York, which is multicultural, so I was around a lot of people. Growing up, my family, we got a total of three of natural-born but 13 altogether. My mother and dad adopted, like 10 people. And then altogether we were 13. And I grew up in a big house so I have family – most of them are still in the New York area but I came down here after I retired.

**Can you tell me about the neighborhood where you grew up?**

I grew up in a neighborhood called Bedford Stuyvesant. At one point, it was the largest African-American community in America but it was a working-class community. It's the community known for Lena Horn, Floyd Patterson who's a famous boxer, Lena Horne which was an actress back in the days, Jay-Z, Biggie, Chris Rock, all are from that area and grew up there. So growing up it was fascinating. We would have these things called block parties, where they would close down a particular block and just put up tables of food and music and we would be dancing and have fun all night, it was wonderful. It was New York and it was a great time but most of the people on the block I grew up with were all from the South.

**Really?**

Yeah, there were from some– you always had a connection with the South. My family was Georgia, my mother's side is West Virginia. My friend Alan McCoy is South Carolina, his father is from North Carolina, his mother is from South Carolina. Benny is from Alabama and his mother is from North Carolina. See? We all have that connection and so every summer we would go down South and my mother would send me to Georgia, actually about a mile away. Every summer, I would come here to a place called Scottdale, which is by Avondale Estate and I grew up there every summer. So I knew Georgia from that, from growing up there.

**Can you tell me about these summers that you spent here?**

Oh, OK, so when I came down here, basically what I did here, in Scottdale there was a place called Tobie Grant housing project, it's no longer there, they knocked it down. But it was a block away from where I used to live and I would always go up there and learn sports, play basketball, running and I did a lot of track and field, and running down South. Because that was important to them down here. And I would go to a lot of baseball games 'cause I was a Met fan and they wanted me to convert to Atlanta Warriors. And if the Met came to town, that's when we're going to that game. And we would (03:39) and the (?) was good then so they would beat us all the time. And they said "See? You should be down here." so that was kind of funny. But it was a lot of – when I came down here – it was a different sense of family. Our family in New York – my mother was a housewife and my father always worked, always worked, always maintained and that was fast-paced. Down here, it was more of we sat at the able, we ate, we sat outside and talked, it was no phones, it was communication and I kinda liked, I kinda loved that. It created a sense of life and what it meant to be living as a young boy so I appreciate coming down every summer. I'll be "Summertime, we're going down South!" My mother said "OK." I was the only one that kept coming down here. Because she knew I enjoyed it and I got to see my family – and I knew we had family. So when I go back up and I tell my brothers "You know, we've got an uncle this and we've got an aunt that"

and they go "Get out of here!" I go "For real!" And I would want to go back. And then I was telling my family down here "Hey you know, you've got cousins up there and this and that" and it was kinda like I was in between so it was exciting.

**So interesting. Who did you stay with when you were coming here?**

My father's cousin. So my second cousin and her husband, they both passed on and I'm friend now with all their children. Cause they know me, they like raised me, so when they see me "Oh that's our little brother," it's kinda funny.

**Cause you came down here every summer?**

Every summer. At least 6 or 7 summers in a row.

**So it's your dad's family?**

My dad's family and I was the only one who knew but my aunt also lived in New York. She had two boys and she would send them too to family but I didn't go to that side of the family. That was the Waits family. They would go to the Waits family and I went to the McMullen family on this side, or the Bigsby actually. I was with the Bigsby. Now Georgie and Michael today don't really know the Bigsbys and I didn't know the Waits until I moved back down here and got to know them.

**Because the Waits are also in Georgia?**

They're also in Georgia, that's the Flat Rock family! Johnny Waits. That's the Flat Rock family. So I didn't know them. When I moved down here, my aunt who lived here from New York, she took me around and she said "This is your cousin" and I go Thomas Wait and I met James Wait and then they had wonderful pictures of my father growing up that I did not know about. And my grandfather was so important to the family, didn't know about it.

**Cause your dad was the one migrating from Georgia to New York?**

My grandfather, my dad's father. He was the one. So they came from a family, Imma say about 8. The baby sister – the oldest boy moved to Cincinnati, Ohio for job opportunities, economic opportunities, he moved up there. The baby sister because she didn't want him to be by himself – her name was Tie, Lewis, but we called her Aunt Tie, Grace Lewis – Grace Lewis moved up to be with her brother Augustus McMullen. And so she was in Cincinnati. My grandfather John F. decided – he was working over in DeKalb county at the rock quarrel and after he worked at the rock quarrel – lot of hard work, carrying this on – he got paid 25 cents for the week, it was the time back then! It was actually a lot, it was maybe the equivalent of \$10. So it was kind of like a lot. You can buy with 25 cents some eggs, milk, cheese. So it was a good thing but it was taxing on his body and he was like "I know I can make more money in New York and Chicago." The thing is he flipped the coin down here and it came down head so he said "I'm going to New York." So he got on the bus and he went all the way to New York. When he got to New York, he met my grandmother who was also from Georgia who moved up there, who's also from DeKalb county from a place called Lithonia, in the Back in Lithonia City and she's buried back there today. I want to get to know her people too, that's my next year project. To start working on that side of the family. They met up there and married and had four children, my father is the only boy and he had three sisters. Now,

my grandfather was working a lot of jobs, he was educated, the fact that he could read and write because of Flat Rock – he went to school, they taught him how to read and write. And that was a big advancement and he ended up getting a job in the mayor's office in New York City. So as a little boy, I was taught football in the hallways of New York City. As a little boy. With the mayor. The mayor was a little short man named Abe Beam, it was his name and he would throw the football and I would catch him in the hall but he was no bigger than me and I was a little boy. He was a short dude. But the thing is I grew up – and I didn't appreciate it until I got old and said "I grew up in that New York City hall!" I was around that building a lot! I know that building because my grandfather was the head custodian and retired there. And when my mother took them to the city, she would drop me off there and I stayed with him until she came back and picked me up. And I didn't realize how big that was. When the mayor was looking for me. "Where's your grandson? Where's your grandson? Where's Stevie?" And I'd come in – and it was a fascinating life. Because he built that – he retired from there and he bought my mother and father their first house in Brooklyn. And then my father worked at a construction company where he (10:29) to college and he had a degree and became vice president. So we lived a pretty good middle-class life in New York. We had sports tickets for every game, we had the Mix, the Met, the Highlanders, basketball, hockey, baseball. We would go to all the game so we was the cool kids. We was the cool kids. 'Cause everybody was like "Wow! They've got tickets!" And so for some of them, they still, when I go back to New York "Remember when we went to that game? Michael Jordan scored 60, I was at that game!" It was so big and important and you appreciate this stuff, really, as you get older. 'Cause as it is happening, you don't realize what's going on, the dynamics of it. So that's what my childhood was and my grandfather was the only one who went to New York, the other two went to Cincinnati. And everyone else stayed down here, and some in Florida and some in Alabama. And now they're all connected because of Facebook. Fascinating. Fascinating. 'Cause you wouldn't have connection with these people. Fascinating.

### **And so how was your school experience in Brooklyn?**

In Brooklyn, I went to Catholic schools, private schools, Catholic schools my whole life. After school, I graduated from high school. I had about four different scholarships, academic scholarships. But I didn't take none of them 'cause I wanted to see the world. And so I joined in the United States Navy. At 17. So my parents had to sign me in. It was a big thing but I promised my mother I would go back and get my degree, which I did. So she was happy. So my schooling was just private and Catholic my whole life. I went to a prominent African-American Catholic school called Dwayne Braithwaite. But did you ever hear of the Jack and Jill program? Most of the kids was in the Jack and Jill program. So the Jack and Jill program is a program that is set up for – you heard of WEB Dubois? Yes, of course. Well Dubois has the Talented Tenth. Well, the Jack and Jill comes out of that concept. So you would have that – esteemed educators would go back and bring out their community to academia by returning their gifts. The Harlem Renaissance kind of did that. There are two schools of philosophy in it. You have WEB Dubois and then you have Booker T. Washington. Pull up your boots straps. So work hard and don't worry about academia. The Jack and Jill program, Jack and Jill of America – actually I have it here [on his phone], let me see about Jack and Jill. It was 247 chapters, 40,000 families and Atlanta has its own chapter. But it's basically "is a membership organization of mothers with children ages 2-19, dedicated to nurturing future African-American leaders by strengthening children through leadership development –" I didn't even know that! 'Cause when I was a kid, it was a secret thing, you weren't even supposed to mention it but that's the school that I went to, one of the schools to better our families and uplift our families. It was important that we did that. So and it was important that we know

our culture and know who we came from, we weren't just slaves, to understand that dynamic, to understand that in the White House, before a woman ever stood foot in the Oval Office, a black man did, Frederick Douglass. So to understand the concept of that 'cause if you never know that, you never know what greatness is and what you can achieve. So that's the kind of school I grew up in. Run by nuns, highly-educated nuns who was just dedicated and believers. And my school now, I mean, the alumni, you have Greg Walden, have you ever heard of him? Well, he had three Ph.Ds before he was 25 years-old. He's also the one that Donald Trump was accusing – all of the black kids in the Central Park Five. Greg Walder is the one that proves the innocence and fought for them and wrote a book and the movie is off of what we did. We also have — I forgot her name but she was treasurer of New York state. Another one, Tish James who's the attorney general right now. Well I call her Tish but I think her name is Letitia but we call her Tish. But she's the state attorney general of New York now. So it comes from that that we can do better, be better. So that was my academia.

**And so you were taught about black history and black culture?**

Oh yeah! From white nuns too.

**From white nuns?**

Who was dedicated, like dedicated. They challenged you to know your history. They knew you came from greatness. I remember I was in class one time and the nun was saying – she said "Well, we know Jesus had to be of color" and we were shocked! All the black kids, in our homes, we have a white Jesus. So we're like "What are you talking about Sister?" And she said "Well, we know Jesus was of color. All those people at that time was of color." Northern Africa was Northern Africa from the Middle East now. And she called it that. And she said "That's what it was. And that's why he could be raised in Egypt because his mother had to be an Egyptian." So one of the kids raised their hand and said "Well, no my father Jesus was of our complexion" and so the nun said "Oh yeah, that's true, that's true." And one of the other kid said "Well, there's only two types of olives. There's green olive and black olive. I don't see no green people so what kind of olive was he?" We just fell out laughing. But the nun was pro-active in that, to know your greatness and who you was. And I always do my history, I've always known who I was, which is part of the reason I moved down here, to learn more about where I came from. That's important.

**And all your siblings went to that school too?**

Yeah – not the older ones. They went to straight Catholic schools, not the Dwayne Braithwaite. Just the ones in my age went to – so three of us: Troy, Georgie and I. Three of us went there. Sometimes I look back at it and don't know how my parents did it because that had to be a lot of money. I don't know how much it was but we never missed a day and we were never told that they had to see our parents so our tuition was always paid. And that's a lot of money and yet they did it. They make those sacrifices for the future.

**And you said your mom was a housewife and your dad became the vice-president of the company?**

Yes.

**And after that you joined the Navy, how was that experience?**

It was good. After I graduated – I graduated early from high school. I went to a public high school. So after I got out of the Catholic school system, I went to a public high school to play football. And I played about seven sports and enjoyed it but the academia work was easy to me so I was thirteen in the 10th grade, I was two grades ahead so I had to slow down a year. So I remember one year I had all this free time because of New York law at the time, you couldn't graduate at 16 so I had to wait to get 17 to get the degree, the high school diploma. So I was like "Oh my goodness!" So graduating – we had recruiters come around. And the recruiter came and I was like "No I'm going to USC, I got accepted at USC" I got accepted to different schools and I was like "No, I'm going, my parents want me (20:04) California, I'm going to (...?)" and all of a sudden, the guy kept talking to me and you know, recruiter! Dadadah. "You could see the world, it would cost you nothing!" but one thing that he said that stuck out to me. "When you get older, your medical – when you go to hospital, they will take care of you" and I remember that. And not knowing – it's kind of funny now 'cause we have all these medical things going on [Coronavirus + debate about universal healthcare]. That he said that, that propelled me to think about the service for the very first time. And then I started looking into that and then I realized I could get a good job. So I took the test, I didn't study or anything, I just said "Oh, let me go and take the test." I took the test. Well, that was a mistake 'cause when I took the test, next thing I know, an army guy came in and he was taking me. He said "You come with me, I got you." And I'm going with him and on my way with him, an Air Force guy came down and he was like "Hey, who's McMullen? Who's McMullen?" I said "That's me." He said "You just took the test – wanna join the Air Force?" and I said "No, I'm here for the Navy." And the Air Force guy is like "Well, he's not the Navy! Why you got him if he's here for the Navy?" and he said "No, he with me." And then the Navy guy said "What are you doing?" And I said "Hey how are you doing? I'm with him!" So what he did was he signed me up to (21:39) but I had to graduate first. So my parents had to sign me in. So I waited a good 8 months before I could go in. And then I went to the service. My first thing in the service, I went to Chicago, Illinois. I was stationed at Great Lakes, Illinois. I did my basic training, my parents came to see me graduating. From there, I went to (22:01), Mississippi for school. I became (22:08), I'm a pay master, I will pay your salary, that's what I did. It's so funny 'cause math has always been my worst subject and all my jobs have been math-related. I can't explain. But I did that. I paid people. That job allowed me to go all over the world. I've been to so many different countries because of that. Singapore, Russia, I went to the Soviet Union. I've been to Denmark, Sweden, Copenhagen all the time, Edinburgh, Scotland, England, France, Germany. Kiel, Germany, believe it or not, it's North, it's very cold up there. Went to North Africa, went to Sicily. I've been to Barcelona more times than I can't count on two hands. I've been all over and the Navy was an experience for me but I got to see the world. I didn't like they treated me afterwards but that's a whole other story, that's a whole other thing. But we had some good times there but it was very challenging because I was being introduced to things that my parents, they didn't keep it from me, but they didn't communicate that these things to happen.

### **Like what for example?**

Like drinking, like partying, like every port, there's one man. It's just things that they don't – my father went to the service and he could have said something but he didn't. So I grew up quickly and I really had to go on the principle of me going to Church and the nuns and this and that like hu-hu. Hu-hu, I'm not doing that. But it kept me, but it was just being introduced that there's a big world out there and people don't play on the same field. And so you have to adjust. And so it was different. But I left the service, honorable discharge.

## **When was that?**

1986. And then from there I went to work for New York City Board of Education system. And then from there, I wanted to get my government time in so I went and join the Post Office. I did that for a while. I've had jobs in the entertainment business because my brother was Def Jam Music with Russell Simmons. My older brother was in charge of security. So during the summers, I would go and do Def Jam comedy shows. Guess what I did for them? Pay everybody. Pays. That's all I did. I also worked an internship at (25:11) and then on some summers, I would work at the mayor's office in New York. I got back into the building that I grew up in. And I was working for a city councilwoman. (25:30) out of the 56 districts in Brooklyn and I would go with her and give speeches on her behalf and turn on lights in some people's home and make sure that they was eating. So that propelled me to do a job that helps people and I thought it was important. And then I got married. And then I got a divorce and I think that was due because of the service, all the ramifications of the stress of the service. In the service you're taught to put your glasses in a neat way like this and leave it and then you meet someone you love and they put the glasses like this. And you're like "Hey baby, this is important to me." No matter, what you say, that's not gonna work so it didn't work. Got a divorce and was rally trying to figure out what I was gonna do with me life, you know what I'm saying? Where I wanted to go with me life. I really felt lost for a minute. And then I found religion, I found God. And finding God and me being Catholic, the only thing is priest study. So I went into priest study in Washington DC with the Josephite fathers and did that. And that's where my education came from the secondary level. I finally completed the degree as (26:56) universities, at MSW and then (27:01) with the Josephite Fathers. So this was before my mother died so she got to see, for wishing that – I was going one way and this and that but that's (?). And then when I was in the seminary, I found women again. And I just was like "What would happen if I'm preaching and I'm looking down and I see a pretty woman? What would happen if I wanted to talk to her?" and they were like "You have to pray my son, and you have to put it on the altar and God will take care of it!" and I was like "But isn't God the one that put her in front of me in the first place? Maybe he wants me to be with her Father." So we always had – and I just said "It is best I leave" and I left. (laugh) And then I started dating again and started doing things but then I felt kinda guilty 'cause I had all this education that they paid for. But it just wasn't meant to be. So that's where I was at. So... any other questions?

## **I talked to other people that I did interviews with who told me they experienced a lot of racism when they joined the Navy. Is that something that you–**

I did. I did. And that's part of "people don't play on the same field." I give you one story 'cause it's kind of painful and I don't wanna really – but here is one. I got sent over – In the Navy as a company, you have a lot of people you are told to do certain things all together. So I was over there and I was doing push ups. This guy is like "UP-DOWN, UP-DOWN" While I was doing the push ups, I was in the back so I decided not to do it and I decided to just lay down like this. Now I'm athletic and I could do it but I was like – to this day, I don't know how, 'cause I heard him go "UP-DOWN, UP-DOWN", how he was (29:06: waiting on me?) and he walked in the door, the back door and caught me is a miracle. But because I got caught, they send me to extra-duty. For extra duty, I got sent over – and I knew it would be something like I have to wash four hundred plates. It was something ridiculous but it teaches you a lesson. Well I got to scrub stairs, five stair rows with a toothbrush. So you had each step, get the dirt off, wipe it. Well the guy who was in charge of doing it stood over me and

called me every n-word in the book. He would also put his foot on (?), dirty it up and he goes "I know you wanna hit me, come on hit me, hit me, come on, you hit me you monkey, your mother's a monkey." He just kept going on and on and on. And i just start singing to myself, I just black it out. 'Cause he wanted me to hit him and then I found out later that so many of those young black guys go over there, get kicked out on dishonorable discharge 'cause they fought that same guy. But nobody is not looking at what he was doing. I refused to do it. I said "Hu-hu." And maybe because I grew up in New York, maybe because I knew different people, maybe because he didn't represent the whole white culture and maybe because I knew better, and that's what education – and I said "You're just afraid of me, you live in fear and not faith" but the things he said about my mother, I don't know if I could have done that again. But I knew – I never went back to that place again and I was good after that. Not because I couldn't take the pain because I'm very disciplined in my mind but because I think I would have been kicked out, because I would have hit him for real, I would have tried to kill him for what he was doing. I mean he called my mother every name in the book, every monkey, derogatory, she's a dog and anything he could think of. But he kept saying I'm a N, I'm a N, I'm a N, you know you're a dirty N, look at you, you've got a tail, I know you have a tail on you, you're no good. And this dude is sick. He has issues. But I didn't put it on "white people are sick" or "the race is sick." I put it on "That's you dude, I know some good white people that are my friends, man. What's wrong with you?" Not with the race. So being educated, being a Jack and Jill, that helped me out with that and racism. And I've seen racism. I went to Franklin K. Lane high school, I give you another story since you want race, I've got one for you. I was in a high school called Thomas Edison high school first. When I got the (32:03), they discontinued the football team. I was so upset because now I'm committed here when I could have went to schools that played football. So I knew I wasn't staying there long. So I had to do at least a year to transfer. So I was doing, there was a vocational side and a technical side. I was in the technical side. In the technical side, you can count the number of blacks on one hand. It was 5 of us to maybe 400 students, maybe more than. It was bad, the numbers. Well, the vocational side was all Spanish blacks. The mechanics, wood-working, auto-mechanics, plumbing. [interrupted by phone] So I looked at that and I said "Why are all the blacks in vocational?" And I remember I was a tutor to someone at that school who didn't know how to read and write. And I was like "How can you not know how to read and write?!" But I didn't know that would be helping people out. So I would help him. But I had no friends in the technical side except one Haitian dude. We are friends today, we kept our friendship and he's one of the most brilliant people I've ever seen. And we would sit there, and we were both Catholics and black so we had something in common. So we would sit there and he was like "I don't care if they call me –" 'cause they used to call him the n-word and this and that. We had to listen to their music. I grew up on Led Zeplin, Aerosmith, Queen. I grew up on that while there was a rap thing going on! In New York! And I was in this high school growing up. So I knew I was transferring down. But the next school close to Edison was called Jamaica. Jamaica high school was all black. The white kids got out, maybe thirty minutes before, the black kids from Jamaica – 'cause they used to fight them. And those white kids had to run or their parents had to pick them up. I was leaving one day, walking down and it was a riot. The kids from Jamaica were just beating up everybody from Edison. Well I'm black so they didn't know I was going to Edison. And there's this white guy, I don't wanna give his last name 'cause his family is mafia in New York. But he's walking down and they're going to jump him and I see him and I go "Hey, hey, he with me!" I said "Yo, he's with me." And they go "Yo, he with you? You sure he with you?" I said "Yo, this my man, he's not like the rest of them, he's cool." And I didn't know him, I just didn't want the kid to get beat up. I walked down and got to the train station and he said "Thank you, thank you so much, Imma remember this." Now, let's fast-forward. I was in the Edison, I wanted to transfer out because

they didn't have any football game. I went to a school on the border line of Brooklyn and Queens called Franklin K. Lane where I graduated for the football team. Franklin K. Lane was one of the most racist schools – I didn't know how racism was. It was so bad that the black kids had to go in a different time from the white kids because the white kids used to beat us up.

### **In the same school?**

In the same school. So the principal had it, the white kids going first and we had go in afterwards. And I was like "Wow" but I wanted to play football. 'Cause I couldn't go back to my parents and say "I've made a mistake." They used to beat the girls up, they put (36:44), these sick (...) in a sock and hit the girls going down. They (?) in their hair. It was bad. And it has a history. People knew it too and I didn't know. But we had a program in there called the Encounter program and I'm sure they still have it. But they use to take us upstairs – Franklin K. Lane, if you look at the last Spider-man movie, not the cartoon one, the one before that, that high school is Lane high school. That's Lane! And on top there is where we sat and we had the Encounter Program. What was the Encounter Program? We got to take racism straight down. I mean all kids – white, blacks, Hispanics: why do you hate black people? Why do you hate white people? We would stand there and have discussions and fights and at the end, we was all friends. It was an amazing program that changed the course of my life. Well, one day I'm leaving from Lane and I'm leaving late and it's scary to leave late. I think it was because of practice, wrestling practice. I got to make it to the train station. I walked down the train station and as I'm going up to the train station, there's a bunch of white kids. They see me. They're like "Yo, let's get him." They're coming to beat me up. I know they're gonna beat me up, there's nothing I can do about it. So I'm getting ready to cover my face, to protect my face. Because I can't jump on the train tracks, I have nowhere to go. They got me. But that's part of not leaving the school late. And no one was there to help me. And as they're coming to beat me up, they are six, they're coming to get me and I hear a voice saying "Yo, he's with me." And I look up and it's the same guy, Brian, years later, he was now in Lane high school, he returned the favor. So that's my racism story. And we became friends afterwards and later on I just see that he was in the papers for something but we pray for him, we pray for him. So that's my racism story. So I've always experienced racism and known what racism was. Part of one of my jobs, also in New York – I was a head doorman at the (39:09) hotel and I had a lady who came by and called me the N-word. And Keith Hernandez of the New York Mets who was a pitcher seen it, and see me and I was like "You're ignorant to say that, a nigger is actually an ignorant person and you're ignorant so who's the nigger." I said "You're stupid, you're afraid and you're weak and that's why you're using that term." I had a man spit on me one time, calling me a nigger, the same way. So I have my experiences, it's not new to me. But to say it's a Southern thing is just not always true. 'Cause New York is probably one of the most segregated cities I've ever lived in my life. You have neighborhoods up there today where you know that you don't belong. I could take you to a Middle Eastern neighborhood, I could take you to just Indian Nation, to a Chinese neighborhood, I could take you ta black, a Spanish neighborhood. Black neighborhoods are actually being eliminated up there right now so... But I could take you to them. Because that's how New York is set up. So when I hear the 45th president of the United States fathered and authorized the boundaries of (40:35) and created that whole atmosphere. Not only him but other people too like that. It's always been like that. So I know racism.

**So how would you compare the racism you experienced in the North with your experience in the South?**



Well here, you know that it exists and so, therefore, two people can hurt you: friends and family. You know why? Because they know you? A person can't hurt you who's an adversary to you or enemy to you because you already know where they're coming from. The South, they don't do certain things and I think that now, they get a bad rap. Because it's not the same. Now, is there racism? I'm sure if I go outside of Atlanta, 60-70 miles, we would call that what? Georgia. Georgia is different from Atlanta. Case of point, when I first moved here. My girlfriend lived in Cumming, Georgia. It's in Forsyth county. It is the county Oprah Winfrey said she would never go back to. She lived up there! And had a house up there and everything. She's in corporate America, got a good a job. I said "How did you get up there?" We would go on the grocery stores, – now she's (42:11) but when I walked around, they would hold their purse. And I said "Look at this." And (...) go, I get into my Linkdin navigator, and I see them getting a (?) and I go (...) It's just that – I would go walking in the community and the neighbors know me "Hey, hi Steve! Hey, hey, how are you doing?" But in their yard, they had signs "Trump is the next thing to Jesus." "Make America Great Again" "White Power." But they come out and they're like "Hey!" That's the difference to me. You're my friend, you're talking to me. You're nice to me. And yet, you want to stand to this ideology that is weak-based and really out of fear. So it's kind like in New York, they don't let you know, they will be your friends and they come back and they will hurt you. And I think that that's more dangerous, to act like it's the liberal capital of the world, the greatest liberalism, they accept everybody and anybody but yet, they (43:29) in a box, quick fast and tell you to stay in your place. So how much freedom is that? Me coming down here and I can be myself, and no one will care. Another story, it's not racism but on relations with whites down here. I'm at Publix in Stone Mountain, I'm buying my food, this and that. I come out and I see this little old white lady and usually, the people in Publix, they come out and help you with the bags but they didn't help. I guess she might have told them no, she can make it but she couldn't make it. She was struggling. I see her, I throw my bags in my truck real quick, I ran to her and I go "Ma'am, let me help you" and she goes "I don't have any money, I don't have no money." I said "Ma'am, I don't need no money, I just wanna help you get to your car." And she says "Well, that's nice of you, thank you so much." I helped her put her stuff away, this and that. Then I'm leaving "Ma'am, you have a good day" I said "The priest at my parish told me to help somebody, I (44:35) in you, I felt good, I did what he asked me to do for the week." So she said "Can I ask you a question?" I said "Yes ma'am." She said "How did y'all get everything so fast?" I didn't know what she was talking about. I said "Get everything so fast? What do you mean?" She says "What kind of car do you have?" So I showed her the Navigator truck. She said "How did you afford that truck?" I said "I worked for it, what are you asking me." She said "I lived up here, this was all white. There was no black people. Did you know that Stone Mountain was the birth place of the Ku Klux Klan?" I said "Oh? For real?" She said "Yeah. My father, my grandfather was big people in the organization." She said "They wouldn't believe how it is now." And then I realized she got stuck. All the people she knows has died. And she's stuck and can't move on. (45:40) And now Stone Mountain is black middle class. Doing well. And she's stuck there and she don't understand it. And I said "What a life." (45:59: phrase suivante à confirmer) You're in this life with white powers, that we're gonna win the world and it's our world and they have never been (?) and they're ignorant and they're dumb and now we're driving better cars, and having better lives than you. And I felt sorry for her. I looked at her with empathy, and I was like "You're stuck in a time capsule." I said "Well, ma'am, God bless you and have a good day." So that's something I'll share with you.

**Do you actually live in Stone Mountain?**

Yes, I got a house in Stone Mountain but I'll be moving soon so you got me right on time. I'm moving to Rockdale county so. In May. I'm getting married in May.

### **So what attracted you to Stone Mountain?**

Ok (laugh). It's kind of – God – What was going down in Lithonia, by Flat Rock – because that's where my family was. I got to know my family. I was like "Okay, I need to be close but not that close." You know what I'm saying? Like it's good, I need to be close but not that close. 'Cause you know, it's still family, it's still people. So I said to myself "Let me move somewhere close." So I was looking and I wanted to be in DeKalb county because I was comfortable with it, I knew it, (47:14) I grew up here. So I knew to be here. I just couldn't fit in the perimeter, you know what I'm saying, because it's too expensive. It's too much, it's too much. And you get smaller homes. So I said "I'm gonna spend \$400,000 for a home when I could get a home for 225." The house in Stone Mountain is 3,000 square feet, 5 bedrooms. I'm good! So that's what made me look – So I went around, looked around in Lithonia. I went around – and in Stone Mountain, they're not gated communities but they're close to it. Because those communities, those HOAs (??? 47:56), the grass is cut, the houses are maintained. I wanted that life. In New York, we live in boxes. And I didn't want to go back. What happened – When I moved down here, not experienced, and got to my backyard and sit out there in the sun and feel good. And have the space. Have a barbecue. Nobody's bothering me. Than living in the size of this room in an apartment in New York. It makes no sense. So that's what made me look to Stone Mountain.

### **'Cause Stone Mountain is predominantly black now. Is that something that you were also looking for?**

No, not necessarily, it just so happened. I was like "Oh, this is refreshing." It's different. It's different. And then I read at the time, when I was looking for homes and reading up on DeKalb county, at the time DeKalb county was rated number 3 at affluent African-Americans in America to somewhere in Maryland and New York City. And I was like "Okay, I can make this work!" and it just felt refreshing. And my next-door neighborhood was white. Down the street is another white guy across — so there is white people in here but it just felt good. You've got people who care about their homes – I've had since two sisters moved down here, one in April and one in January. They both live in Stone Mountain – one lives in Stone Mountain, one lives a block away from Stone Mountain, in Lithonia. But they both live on those kind of communities and they both (49:34) and they love it. And now we got us three (?)

### **They came from New York?**

From New York!

### **And so why did they choose to come here?**

Well because of the living cost. New York is good for making the money but I felt – I was making 6 figures in New York and I felt crunched, I felt pressured. And I can't explain – sometimes I look back and I say "How people do in New York when they don't make that kind of money?" I was making money and yet I was like "Phew!" And now, coming down here it's just relaxing. And it's stress-free. It's stress-free. It's not that fast-paced. You take

your time down here, it's a different life-style. And I feel like I'm living and it's a good feeling.

**That leads me to the next question, even if you maybe already answered it. Why did you chose to move to Atlanta as opposed to any other places when you retired?**

Well, I was looking at Florida 'cause it's a New York thing. New-York-Florida. And I was looking at that like "Hey, I'm going to Florida." And all of a sudden, my aunt, her name is Betty, she came down here first when my mother and father died, which was her best friends, she just felt like it was time for her leave New York. So she came down and moved to Flat Rock. She bought four homes in Flat Rock. So I went to go visit her, I said "Auntie, next year I'm leaving New York, I'm thinking about going to either Temple or Jacksonville, Florida, I don't wanna be bound to Miami." And she said "Hey, why don't you come here? I have homes for you and you can stay in the home for a year and find somewhere to live." It was almost an offer I couldn't refuse. And then she said this: "Plus, I don't think your father would want his only sister to be by herself." But she has two sons here but she used that line and I was caught. So I said to myself "OK, I'll try it out." And I came down here and I stayed with her for a good two weeks before I decided to move back for sure. And I thought "I could make this work" and then I knew the Scottdale family and this and that so I was looking forward to it. So that was my reasoning.

**So you were already retired when you moved?**

Yes.

**So you didn't have to look for a job or anything?**

No. Now, the funny thing is my son, he came with me and when he got down here with me, what happened with him is that I told him – because he was going back to New York – "I'm buying you a ticket for you to go back" and he kept looking weird and I said "What's wrong?" and he looked at me and he said "Pa, I don't wanna go back, I like it down here." I said "You like it down here?" Like for me, it was slow, and retirement and this and that. He said "Pa, I like it down here. I really like it down here." And when he said that, I said "OK, let me see. You need to get your license." He went on and got his license. I said "You need to get a job." He went on and got a job. He is now deputy sheriff at DeKalb county. I'm so proud of him. And he loves it down here and everything. So I'm proud of him.

**Does he live in DeKalb county too?**

Yes he lives in Stone Mountain. The whole family! 'Cause that's what it takes: you get one person, the rest is gonna come. If I moved to Dallas, surely, they'd be over there. If I moved to Clayton County, they'd be there. But I came to Stone Mountain. I didn't like Clayton County at all to be honest with you.

**Why not?**

They – all the real estate agents for some reason were New Yorkers. The minute that we come down here, they (53:32) us to Clayton County. And I just thought it was like boom. And I went down and looked around and they've got some nice homes and this and that. The resale value. And the price. I have a friend, she bought a house for almost \$500,000. She bought the

home in McDonough, GA, and the home just next door to us just sold for 200,000. So I'm looking at her like "What?" So I didn't like that. And I think it's a place where you – and then also, economically (54:08) In the gas station, I felt scared. I was like "Why do I feel like there's a crack epidemic at the gas station." So I didn't want to come down to Georgia and live in that environment when I didn't have to. If that's the case, I could stay in New York. So I didn't want to do that.

### **I guess I could also ask the question: why didn't you want to stay in New York?**

The cold. The weather. Economically, it's just not sound. Like I said, I'm making \$100,000 a year and yet i felt pressured. And I wasn't living paycheck to paycheck. I'm not gonna say that. 'Cause that's not fair to people who are. But I still felt pressured. I felt like going to vacation was a test (? 55:00). I was like "What is going on? (55:05) in New York. To go from one place in New York to another part of the city, like I came here and see you in Decatur, right? I left Stone Mountain and came here to see you, it cost me what? What the train ride is and I get a half discount for being a vet. So whatever the price is, I paid half. If I had to meet you in Staten Island in New York, during rush hour and had to come and see you, it would cost me 18 dollars to cross the bridge. In the same city. To cross the bridge! (55:45) to get to you. Boom boom boom. So I didn't understand. You've got all these people, you've all this money and you're not investing back in them. And then how is it the same city and you're charging me to go to another part of the same city? I never understood that. And then what really got me, when they say it, that they were thinking about charging on the Brooklyn and Williamsburgh bridge. So to go to Manhattan, they was thinking about putting up tolls at the time. I don't know what's going on now but at the time, there was a big push "We need tolls!" You're gonna charge me to go to the same city? And I just think that a lot of time, New York is just thinking. And I was like "I don't need this." I love the food, I love the culture, I love the atmosphere but I don't have to go through – I can always visit. It's easy, I go up there and I leave. I know where to go, I know how to (56:46), to see the Broadway shows, do my thing and I leave. I love it. But those was the things. And then I remember when it was the mayor that just came in. He had just came in and when he came in to office, what he did was racism again. A young black kid had been killed, struck by a car in Bedford Stuyvesant where I live in. And they drew big (57:20), beautiful paintings but that was it. A young white kid got hit by a car on Atlantic Avenue. And I'm sure if you google it, you'll find it. And he had to change the laws. He said "We must change the laws." Any kid getting hit to me is wrong. you should have changed the law when the black kid got hit up but you change it – I think that the law is even named after that girl that got killed. And now in New York, they went from 40 or 30 mile an hour to drive and now the speed limit is 25 miles an hour. It's ridiculous. That's racism. This is why I left New York. When I see that kind of stuff happen. I said "Then, what is that? What is that?!" Even with the Crown Heights Riots. You know about that? Crown Heights Riots happened – was a Jewish member driving his car and he lost control of the car and he killed a black kid. Hit him, hit the kid, the kid guy. The Jewish community is tightening. So they rush to the scene and they pull the guy out before the cops can get there. New thing we know he was sent to Israel. Instantly. Like the next thing. We was like "Hold on, he left the scene of a crime! Hold on." Black people were so upset – and this wasn't black Americans, this is Caribbean Americans. They was so upset they started to riot, they tore churches and buildings up. This is doing the time (59:24) and this is racism (that is going/at its core?) They went off, they went on. They overdid it. They call a Jewish kid who had nothing to do with nothing. This one guy stabbed him to death and the guy was killed. Of course they prosecuted the guy and this and that and that. And they should because he killed a man. My thing over this is that how come no one ever ask for that dude to be brought back to

the United States? And the senator Chuck Schumer played a role in that. And that to me was racism that I seen with my own eyes. And also you have – there's a guy who was at my Catholic church. What was his name? With Al Sharpton. They was running out to meet, ran across the highway and got hit by a car and died. I grew up seeing that. So racism has always been there for me. It's not different. Now, is it down here? Of course it is. But that's why I left New York 'cause I seen those things and I said "That's not right. I don't feel right about it" and I don't have to participate in that, don't have to pay taxes there and do those kinds of things there for this system. That's why I say it's liberal, we are one (1:00:49) but racism is racism. So that's why.

**And why are you moving to Rockdale now?**

Oh me and my wife. We wanna – it's more land out there and we wanna live like this. She's from Louisiana so she wants the land. So she wants that land like that.

**So you have better housing there?**

Better housing. Much better. Bigger. Huge. So we move to a 7,000 square feet home. It's huge. And it's just better.

**I also had a question about – some of the people I interviewed before told me that when they moved here, they were sometimes seen as Yankees or Northerner or even foreigner—**

You are.

**— is that something that happened to you?**

Yeah. You are because there is a difference. There is a difference. It's a different norm. They see us as aggressive. Personalities. We speak up for ourselves – I'm not saying they don't – but we speak up for ourselves. An incident in the whole Yankee thing. I'm in school, studying to be a priest, I'm doing undergraduate work in New Orleans, Louisiana. And I pull up, I'm driving a car and I see a spot. And there's another car coming this way, way over here. Well, I see the spot, so I pull into this spot. So this car comes out – as a matter of fact, we're out of the car now, that's how much time we had. The car stops here and this old white couple (1:02:38) "Excuse me! That's our spot, we seen it!" I say "Are you kidding me?" I was like "No, no one was here, I seen you (1:02:49) and I moved in here so how could I know that you were coming up for this spot?" I was like "Listen, I'm not gonna argue with you, I'm out." And they was like blowing up their horn and I said "Listen, (1:03:03:02), we're good." So we're going into the restaurant. When we get into the restaurant, it was a black guy waiter and one of the guys from the kitchen – he was a black guy – asked me to move my car. "Can you not start no trouble and move your car 'cause they come here all the time and they're good people." I said "No, I'm not gonna move my car. Why would I move my car? I've got the spot." And he was like "Oh, he's from New York." And I was like "What does this have to do with anything?" I am from New York but – maybe you heard it in my accent but what does that have to do with anything? I didn't understand the ways. I didn't! I didn't get that and I was not gonna move my car. So you have that mentality here that to me the blacks here are more laid back. Now, do they fight racism and all that? Of course they do. But it's just a different approach. It's a different approach. We come from a place where we can be bodacious and in-

your-face and say "NO." "Yo, get away from me." They come from a place where we don't say anything and it go away. So there is a tension. It is a tension. It is a tension.

### **So you were recognized as being from New York?**

Oh, big time! Quick fast. My house is known as that. When people come in, if somebody else come in and they're from New York, they go "Oh, Steve is a New Yorker! That's the New Yorker, that's the New Yorker!" and they point us out and stuff like that. And it's like "OK, now where are you from?" And we sat and talk and things like that.

### **Even though your family is from Georgia?**

Yeah, I'm a New Yorker. And I'll always be. And I got the accent so they – this is a difference. And you feel the difference.

### **I also noticed that you say "y'all" for example and that's a very southern thing, right?**

No, "y'all" and "yo."

### **No "Y'all" instead of "you guys."**

Oh "you guys." I say "you guys."

### **No you said "y'all"!**

Oh then that's something that happened. Yes that's not here. They ask me to say "water" ['wɔrə]. I guess they say [wɔtə]. Can I get a glass of water [wɔtə]? And we say water ['wɔrə]. I need some water ['wɔrə]. And they laugh at that. There is a difference and they pick up on it. And the way that we dress, there is a big difference. I can be in a store and somebody will come up and say "You're from up North." That's what they say. "You're from up North?" And I say "Yeah, I'm from New York" and they go "Hey! I'm from Baltimore! I'm from Washington DC." and they can only pick that up from the way I'm dressed. By your shoes, they pick it up real fast. They do, they do. And then down here, I don't know if you know about it but here, every year, we have a Bronx day. If you get a chance – I don't know if you're gonna be here in the summer but if you get a chance, it's fascinating. It's all of the New Yorkers in one park. It's close to about maybe 4,000 people with tents and barbecues, music playing, us dancing. Oh it's phenomenal. It's called the Bronx day and you can look it up.

### **So it's all the transplants from New York just gathering?**

Gather around and it's packed. And we dance and then we have fun. It's funny, it's worth it.

### **Where does it take place?**

They used to have it in Grant Park but they was fixing Grant Park with the Zoo so they moved it to Perkison Park but I think it's back in Grant now. Think it's going back to Grant. We'll see this year, I can't wait. We all meet up and see each other. So there is a culture within the culture down here.

