



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



Oral History Interview

with

Donald Taylor

Interviewer: *Francesco De Salvatore*

Narrator: *Donald Taylor*

Location of Interview:

510 South Payne Street, Alexandria, VA 22314

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Transcriber: *Bridget Nakamura*

Summary:

Donald Taylor reflects on his life in Alexandria, his childhood. He also describes his experience in the U.S. Air Force. Donald then reflects on his work with the Elk Lodge and Third Baptist Church

Notes:

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General	Disability, Bi-racial, Black Negro Baseball League, Alexandria Rams, Elk Lodge, U.S. Airforce
People	Charlene Taylor, Mother Dear, Christine Jackson, Morris Sideburg, Buddy Ford, Oliver Ellis, Coach Johnson, Mrs. Chase, Helen Day, Reverend Alkins, Duke Ellington
Places	429 Fur Street, Potomac River, Cross Canal, Uptown, Downtown, Alfred Street, Korea

Introduction.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:06] All right. My name is Francesco De Salvatore. I'm 30 years old. It's September 19th, 2022, and I'm at 510 South Payne Street, the home of Mr. Donald Taylor. Um, yeah.

Donald Taylor [00:00:22] I'm Donald Taylor. I'm 91 years old, and it's the 19th of September 2022, and I'm at 510 South Payne Street in Alexandria, Virginia.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:35] Great. Right. So, I was thinking we maybe start by talking about some of your earliest memories from your childhood.

Donald Taylor [00:00:43] Okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:44] And so, yeah, like, can you maybe tell us when and where you were born?

Donald Taylor talks about his childhood.

Donald Taylor [00:00:48] I was actually born in Washington, D.C. July 31st, 1931. But we were living in Alexandria at the time. My mother and father decided when she was pregnant that I would be born in Washington. So, my sister and I were both born in Washington, D.C., at Freedman's Hospital and my childhood was, uh. As I look back, it couldn't have been any better. I had my parents, my grandmother. Grandfather on my father's side. Aunts. Uncles. And good neighbors and of course Canal. Cross Canal was a unique place. We were actually in the country where we could walk five minutes and we would be in the city. We had a-. It was all country Cross Canal on dirt roads. No lights. No. I mean, no electricity. When it when it rained, we had to jump over puddles of water to get wherever we were going. It was always; the home was clean. My mother was a person that made sure that the home or the house was always clean, and we were always clean. And as and as the oldest of the of the four children. I was charged to be. Maybe to take care of the younger of my brothers and other two brothers. When my mother and father were out, I was in charge. I was. That was that was a known fact. I was in charge, and I had chores to do. When I was, uh. When we moved from. From 315 First Street down to 429 First Street. That's when I became more. Not family orientated, but I was I was a take charge person when my mother and father were out. I had I went to school. I went out before I went to school. I had to make sure that. We had in the wintertime that the that we had fire in the stove. I would get up in the morning and make sure that we had a fire in the stove. Come home in the afternoon and come home in the afternoon. I had to check, had to cut wood. I had I had to do everything. Everything that. Most other kids are doing at the same time, too. I wasn't. It wasn't unique. (inaudible) and ever, ever. Every kid, every boy. Out in Cross Canal has something to do. We didn't. It wasn't a. How can I put it? Yeah. Uh, we had playtime, and we had work time. The work time came before playtime. I never went to bed hungry. Never. We always had something. Something to eat. And at 429 Fur Street, my mother had a garden. And we had to at least I had to help her in the garden. Help in the garden. But one thing I didn't like during the springtime. When the dandelions came up. I had to pick dandelions for my grandmother to make her wine. I hate to see them dandelions come up. We had to pick dandelions. It's like the more I picked the faster they grew, and she would make she would make dandelion wine. My grandmother did.

My, my brothers-I mean, Charlene and I. Charlene is my sister, and she was one year younger than me. And we were like a team. And she was, Charlene, became blind. When she was about four years old. She went to school; we went to school that that morning and then. No, not four years old, I take that back. I was in the second grade, and she was in the first grade, and we walked to school

that morning. Everything was all right. Around about 11:00 o'clock. Mm hmm. Teacher came in to say, take your sister home because she couldn't see. And she was blind for approximately two and a half or three years. And I was her guide or her sight. That's why we are so close. Close too now we are I'm close to my brothers too. But boy my sister, she's a queen. She's a queen. She can't do anything wrong. Oh. And uh, the doctor said that, uh, she wouldn't see again. So, with prayers and so-called root lady, I guess you can call it that said that she could -could make her see again, you know, and after-after doing everything that you can -you can do or go anywhere you can go to try and get help. And the doctor said, it's no use. You're trying anything. And so, help me, and across the street from on Pain Street where this lady was. And my mother took her over there and she cut off all of her hair. And she came back with grease on and everything and my mother was upset because the way she came, you know, the way she came back and. She's said don't worry about her daughter. She's going to see. And then maybe approximately maybe three or four weeks or maybe a month later, we were sitting on King Street, from -from the west. Facing the east, watching, and watching the circus come to town. And her sight came back then. And she only had on right now she-she just wear glasses to read. Mm hmm. So that's one of one of the miracles, I can say miracles happened in my in my family.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:09:05] Could you maybe describe a little bit more about your sister? Like what?

Donald Taylor [00:09:11] Oh, she was beautiful. Beautiful. She. She really is beautiful. Young, young girl. Charlene. Her name is Charlene. She was a take charge person also. Mm hmm. And we got to the point where when she was cooking basically the main part of the dinner when my mother came home from work when she was 11 or 12, 13 years old, she and she and I we were we were a team. As far as the other two children other two children were concerned. That's my heart today. Yeah. And., she had about 13 different operations on different parts of her body. She had a heart attack. She had strokes. But she's still a God-fearing leader.

Donald Taylor talks about his sister going blind.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:10:42] Can you walk me through that? So. So can you maybe walk me through, like when you guys first got the call.

Donald Taylor [00:10:49] Of what?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:10:50] When she was going blind?

Donald Taylor [00:10:51] No, we didn't know it was she wasn't it was a case where she we got up that morning and made breakfast and walked to school everything was okay. And about around 11:00 that day then that her teacher came in and got me and told me I had to take Charlene home because she was going blind. Mama was home at the time, and I walked her home and she got progressively worse, and that it.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:20] And how did it feel for you?

Donald Taylor [00:11:26] Oh, it was sad -it was sad. It would say it was sad. The family was sad. It's unbelievable how you can go from seeing a day and blind in the afternoon. In the morning, you have your sight in and in the afternoon you're blind. Yeah. You can imagine what going through her and to my parent and what they went through, trying to. Trying to get medical help for her.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:12:02] You mentioned that her vision did come back. Mm hmm. Was it at the fair?

Donald Taylor [00:12:09] No, no. We were sitting in the car.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:12:14] Okay.

Donald Taylor [00:12:15] On King Street. West facing east. Towards the river when the circus came to town, they would bring the bring the circus up King Street, you know, take them where, you know, to just let people know the circus is in town. And we were we were in the back seat of the car. And Charlene, you might have seen say, here come the elephants or say, here, come here, come the line. You know, I'm just not much. But anyway, she could see them coming. Mama, Mama, turn the head around. Tears were flowing. Yeah. That's one of the happiest days in my life. One of the happiest days in my life. And as a child, I have had other happy days to. I had quite a few happy days, but at as a as a child. That was the happiest day of my life.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:13:43] And how old were you when this happened?

Donald Taylor [00:13:46] I was I guess I was about eight, seven, eight. I'd got about six or seven, but I guess about seven years old. Yeah, about seven. And she was-wait a minute. I was in the- I was in the second grade and she was in the first grade. So, I guess I guess around seven, around seven around seven. And I used to walk her. Take her every afternoon somewhere. We go out and walk. I would take it down to my grandmother's house, walk her back and every morning we be eating at a table. She would say 'mama, said I can see.' Your mama will put a plate down and she will move around, and she can touch the plate. Mama is so huge. A genius she couldn't see. She was just saying that she could see. But that's it for my sister as growing up. She's the sweetest person you'll ever want to meet.

Donald Taylor talks about his parents.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:15:06] You've already started to talk about your parents a little bit, but maybe you could give us a little bit more about, you know, who you know, what was her name?

Donald Taylor [00:15:17] Oh, my mother?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:15:18] And just like-

Donald Taylor [00:15:19] Okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:15:20] More things about them.

Donald Taylor [00:15:21] My mother was named Dorothy Taylor, and my father was Charles Taylor. And they were. Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Normal, normal, normal parents. They didn't show any-how do put it this? We were all. We were all the same. No. No favoritism in the family at all as far as the siblings were concerned. No, no favoritism at all. You went to the store and bought something you had to buy something for the other one too. And they were, uh. [inaudible]. Yes, I mean, what would you say they were people that believe and, in your children, obeying them? Mm hmm. If she. If Mama would, say, 'go and go upstairs and say, get my shoes'. I didn't get to say 'why you got shoes on' or why I'm going to. I had to go get the shoes. Or if my father would tell us to do something, we had to do it right away. Right away. It was no say a thing. Whatever, whatever, whatever, whatever, whatever. They say it. Do. We did it. No questions asked at all, no sassing, and no talking back. Yeah. At all. To neither one of them. And, uh. And they were-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:17:18] Could you maybe describe what they look like?

Donald Taylor [00:17:21] Well, my mother was pretty. You know, they know, they say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. So, I'm saying my mother was pretty. Small built lady. Uh. shapely. Attractive. Oh. Smart. And showed plenty of love. My father was a handsome man. He was real light. He could pass for white if he wanted to. But he was strictly black or colored all the way. All of his friends. All of his friends were colored. He was a good provider, but he was a harsh disciplinarian. Sometimes you think you said the right thing to him, and he would take it the wrong way. He was a harsh he was a harsh, disciplinarian. And he was he really was. But he was a good provider. A good provider and. His family came first for whatever, whatever, whatever. Whatever whatever he were doing or how he were doing it. His family came first.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:19:33] What are some of your favorite memories?

Donald Taylor [00:19:36] Of my father?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:19:38] Or with. With either. Oh, yeah. What was my favorite memories with your mom and dad?

Donald Taylor talks about going to the Negro Baseball League.

Donald Taylor [00:19:43] Well with Mama. She. She, she. You know, well as far as cleanliness and dressing us. My mother taught us how to tie neckties to tie shoestrings. She just did some of the things that my father maybe should've have should have been doing. But my father was basically a provider, you just made sure that we had a roof over our head and food. Mhm. But, uh. He would carry me to sporting events. We will go over to see the, uh, uh, the, the, ah, the Black Negro League Baseball Games, I've seen all the major. Big time. Black baseball player during that during that area of time. I've seen them all. Satchel Paige and. And all of them. So. And plus we would go over to see the Washington Senators play baseball and he made sure that whenever, whenever, whenever we participated in anything, he was always there. He and Mama both, they were always. They were always there, and they supported us. They supported us.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:21:35] You said that. You said that your mom always gave a lot of love.

Donald Taylor [00:21:38] Oh, yes.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:21:39] Where's the memories of her giving you love?

Donald Taylor [00:21:44] And you just.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:21:44] Some of your favorite.

Donald Taylor [00:21:45] Oh, oh, just oh. It just hugs. Kisses. Oh, smiles. Uh. You can just describe love. You know, she was just a lovable person. She just was always, always, always something good coming out of a mouthful for you unless you messed up. She always kept her place as a mother. We couldn't say jokes that wasn't I say appropriate. She never did anything inappropriate around us. I'm not saying she was perfect. Nobody's perfect. But she tried to be a perfect mother. I know. As far as I am concerned, she was perfect. She made sure that that Alvin and John. Charlene and I- She tried to make us as happy as possible under the conditions that we were living in. They did everything that they could do to make life pleasant for us. From going to bed at night we had to say our prayers really get on their knees every night and say our prayers every night. In the morning, we had to thank the Lord for waking us up. That has stuck with me to

this day. I don't go on my knees to say prayer, but I say a prayer every night before I go to sleep. I don't say the 'Our Father' like everybody else. But it's a prayer I say every night for my family.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:24:25] Maybe talk about your grandparents? Mm hmm. And. Where were they from?

Donald Taylor recalls his grandparents.

Donald Taylor [00:24:34] I don't know where they were from. But Evette can tell you where they were from. You talking about on my father's side?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:24:48] On your mom and dad's.

Donald Taylor [00:24:50] I was told that they were from Westmoreland, Virginia.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:25:17] This is your dad's side?

Donald Taylor [00:25:18] No, my mother's side. My mother's side. And they were real close. Close. My mother, grandmother, Great grandmother were real- they were close. That's right there the family tree.

Speaker 3 [00:25:49] And. Oh, wow.

Donald recalls memories from Cross Canal.

Donald Taylor [00:25:53]. And Cross Canal, to get back to Canal. Uh. Uh. When everybody- every family was there. We're just brought in the same boat. You know. We were all poor and we didn't know we were poor. Mm hmm. We didn't know we were poor. And when someone got sick. Any family in Cross Canal. Everybody came to the rescue. Everybody came to the rescue.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:26:41] Can you tell us-.

Donald Taylor [00:26:42] Okay. On the 1900s census. Emily Washington household included her children. Son in law and grandchildren. Jane, Annie, Walter Thomas. Emma Thomas. Virginia Thomas. Walter Thomas and Elizabeth Green, they all lived in Ward 2 on 911 North Fairfax Street. All of them lived on 911 Fairfax Street.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:27:19] In Alexandra.

Donald Taylor [00:27:21] In Alexandra. Mhm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:27:22] And, and is this your mom or dad's side?

Donald Taylor [00:27:26] My mom. My mom's side. My mom's side. My mom's side. They built a hotel on their property on the property, the property that they were living on the hotel on Fairfax and Montgomery Street. They had that hotel there that was that was that was that was their property.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:28:09] And what were some of the stories like growing up? Like, you know. You probably hung out with your grandparents, I assume, like what are some family stories that that your grandparents always talked about or-

Donald Taylor [00:28:23] Let me see.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:28:25] Or that your parents talked about that.

Donald Taylor recalls stories that his grandparents/parents used to tell him.

Donald Taylor [00:28:28] My mama would always talk about when they were coming up. They had they had to go to Maryland to work every day. And they had to catch a rowboat. The man named Mister Thomas, used to roll them across the Potomac River, in the morning. For them to pick peas or whatever they did over there. And they would come back, and he would go and then them take in the morning, come back and get them. And she said one day they were either going or coming from the boat, and they looked and saw a large boat coming down the river and they made a comment and say, 'you better hurry up', say 'the boat is getting closer on us', and he ain't say nothing. So, they said, 'You better hurry up, Mr. Tom, but we're going to. She said, 'if you ain't going fast enough, I'll get out and walk'. Remember that. That would be one of the things she'd always talk about. One of the things and they would ice skate on the Potomac when the Potomac would freeze over. she said that Potomac was at the time the water were good enough to swim in She didn't swim in the water. But the boys went down, to swim in water in the Potomac. But my father spent most of most of his time not across Cornell here. He spent most of his time over with his parents on Payne Street on the 200 block of Payne Street. So, he would take us over there to see her, you know, just to see his see his mother and father and aunts and thing. Every so often we would go over that. It wasn't an everyday thing. We saw them, maybe. Once, once a week or if maybe someone had a party or something we might go over, but it wasn't an everyday thing. On his side of family until we got older. When we got older than we became real close. We weren't close when we were children.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:31:26] You started to talk about this, but maybe let's get more into it. So, what was the neighborhood that that that you grew up in?

Donald Taylor recalls the neighborhood he grew up in.

Donald Taylor [00:31:37] Like I said, it was a dirt road. It was just a country place and at night in the summer, our parents and grandparents would get together. And they would sing every night. They would sing spirituals every night. I wish that they, they could been recorded because it was, uh, and it was called live uptown. And downtown. I mean, Cross Canal was up on the hill. Mm hmm. Then they were people on the bottom of the hill. They were people on top of the hill. They were- how can I put this? They were just the same as the people on the bottom of the hill. The only thing is they were living on top of the hill. Huh. I mean, there was a different section of the of the city, I mean of Cross Canal. And it was unique. It was more or less it was a big field. And you could circle around the people of Cross Canal after you cross the bridge, there was a bridge one time that came from Washington, from Montgomery Street over to First Street, across the bridge, they why they call it Cross Canal because it had a bridge that cross. I remember I remember the bridge we had. It was a wooden bridge. And you can circle, you could walk, you could walk all the way around. Like. Like almost like a square. Like, almost like a square. You could. You could go around and circle where the houses were around, all around that big field. That's where we played softball and baseball and a little bit of football on that big field. And maybe I'm not doing too well in trying to describe what's going on, but it's just. If they come back and forth. So, you know, I just can't remember. Well, my Mother Dear's house she had a porch on the front.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:33] Who was Mother who? Say that again? Mother Who?

Donald Taylor describes his great grandmother's home.

Donald Taylor [00:34:35] Mother Dear, that was my great grandmother, and she had upstairs. There were two bedrooms, upstairs wooden, wooden, nice floors. She kept cookies. She kept cookies for us in some kind of-I don't know where she got the cookies from, but she kept cookies. We would always going into her home and get a cookie, and she always kept a pot of coffee on the table. We couldn't at the time- we couldn't drink coffee because coffee was a grown person drink at the time. We couldn't drink coffee. Oh, she had a nice big black stove with a with a hood on it, and I don't know how she kept it warm, she only had one stove in there, but it kept the whole house warm, and the stove was in the kitchen. The stove was in the kitchen and the outhouse was always, you know, everybody had outhouses. So, you never had running water, flushing water. My father- there used to be an Icehouse in Alexandria, and my father used to go up and get- we had a big milk thing and he'd go and get milk. He would wash that out and he'd go to Icehouse and get water and keeping using the well water. So, we were fortunate in that respect for a we didn't drink- we went to the well and drank well water and everything but most of our water at home, when we went to a Mother Dear we had well water. But at 429 we had water the Icehouse. So. Oh, yes, and in her yard, she had a peach tree, she had an apple tree, a peach tree, and she had grapes in her yard and chickens. Yeah. Chickens in the yard, and she did all of this herself. She had a nice, nice yard.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:37:55] What were things that, that, that she would cook? Where their things she would cook for you guys?

Donald Taylor [00:38:00] Yeah. Oh, yeah. We're basically ate soul food. We, we, we had no getting around it. We had pig feet's, chicken, and collard greens. We had strictly, strictly cold soul food. That's what we grew up on. And that's what I eat now. [Laughing] That's what I eat now. So, and as far as cooking pies, my grandmother used to cook pies and now my mother's mother she was an excellent cook. Excellent cook. She, she cooks for the big white families in the-wherever she worked. She cooked and she was strictly for education. She took Yvette and her cousins, she used to take them every day. I mean, once a week sometimes, and teach them how to cook. How to cook, and she showed Yvette one day, Yvette would tell me, say she [Grandmother] took her around, and say 'This is what I do making beds and things. Say, 'I don't want you doing this. You go to school'.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:39:41] That's great. Can you describe like what the neighborhood looked like more like? What did the homes look like? Like you mentioned, there was a dirt road.

Donald Taylor talks about his childhood home.

Donald Taylor [00:39:50] Yeah, the homes were all wood. All wood. They were all wood. Most of the homeowners had only had one stove that was a kitchen stove. But actually at 429, we had two stoves. We had a kitchen stove and a stove in the middle room. That was a six-room home. This was Mother's Dale home right here.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:40:28] Uh. Okay.

Donald Taylor [00:40:29] She had one of the best looking home in Cross Canal. And that's my that is my grandmother. That's her. That's, that's my grandmother.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:41:01] What is she wearing?

Donald Taylor [00:41:02] She was in the Elks. It was taken out in Cross Canal In 429 we had a big stove in the middle room and that's where we on Saturdays we took our bath. On Saturdays Charlene took her bath, all of us shared the same water, Charlene took hers first, but the only thing about the big stove, it would be hot on one side, and we will still be cold on the other side because

that's where the house where it would go. But Charlie's room had a vent over top of her room over top of the stove and she always had a warm room. And we would be in bed at night and Charlene would be in her room, and we'd be in the other room. She asked me to sing songs for them and I would be singing songs for them, telling stories, and making up stories, telling them stories about schools and everything. She [Charlene] would say 'Don, sing like Bing Cosby', and I would always say no, she would beg me to sing, and I would go on and you know.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:42:35] What were some of the songs?

Donald Taylor [00:42:36] I don't know. I don't know what I was doing. I don't remember the song I sang, Blue of the Night, something like that. I don't know. I would make up songs and sing it for her.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:42:47] What did your home look like? Can you describe like what your home look like?

Donald Taylor [00:42:53] Yeah, well, you mean, 429?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:42:57] Yeah.

Donald Taylor [00:42:57] We had a big, big kitchen, a large kitchen, kitchen stove. We had a tables and chairs and wooden. And the stove had a big warming thing over top of the stove. And it was a cold stove. And in the middle room, we had a dining room table. That's where we ate when we had company. And on holidays, we would eat in the middle room. Mm hmm. But we would never, very seldom would go through the front room was when we had like if it was Christmas, to put up the Christmas tree. And we never did go in the front room. But. And upstairs, Daddy and Mama's room was in the front room and Charlene's was in the middle, and I was in the rear. It was a hallway that ran from the front room to the rear. And we had a thing called a slob jar. There was sitting in the middle, and we'd have to use that at night, and my job in the morning, every morning was to take the slob jar down to the outhouse, and plus I had to make sure that the fire was within the stove. I made the fire and the bread and all of rooms had linoleum floors, and we got up in the morning, regardless of how cold were, we had to step on it. Cold. Cold floor and something that I think about a lot when I came home, and my momma would always have the kitchen floor clean. I came home a couple of times, and she would be on her knees would scrub scrubbing and I wouldn't understand why she didn't use a mop. She was on her knees scrubbing and then when she was finished, she'd put newspapers down on the floor. Keep it from tracking it up and messing it up. And we had a dog, and in fact, we had two dogs. One was a dog, that more or less guarded the house. He was in the back. The other dog was the house dog and that dog we could talk to that dog almost like you could talk to a human being. Tell him 'Do this' 'Do that' and he would do it. Tell the dog and says, 'go find Alvin', he would go and find Alvin. If you say, 'go find Charlene', he would go and find Charlene. We didn't train him to do that, and Charlene had a chicken. It followed Charlene around like a dog. She named the chicken Betty.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:46:46] Where did she find this chicken?

Donald Taylor [00:46:48] In the yard. I mean, one of the chickens that Mama had but just so happened that it was brown. It was a brown chicken. And she [the chicken] would follow Charlene around and I had to get up in the morning, in the morning and get the eggs out of the chicken coop. I had helped clean out the chicken coop when we it's time to clean it out. It was fun. It was it was light farm work. It wasn't heavy farm work, and I didn't like getting up early in the morning and it wasn't that type of farm work, but it was light. Light farm work is what we had, in Cross Canal.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:47:44] Well, as a kid, like you mentioned, how you play in the open field you mentioned. But what were other areas that you used to hang out in as a child with, with your friends?

Donald Taylor talks about his friends and people that influenced him.

Donald Taylor [00:47:57] In Cross Canal Yeah. When in school. I didn't have any. The only friends I had where friends from Cross Canal, and then where I went to school, then I made new friends. But as I got older, I had about three good friends in school. I had about three good friends in my life.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:48:22] Do you have memories of like as a kid, like where did you play in Cross Canal?

Donald Taylor [00:48:33] We didn't have a play area. We had that one big field. We had to go up on there-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:48:39] What did you do in there?

Donald Taylor [00:48:41] All we had was just baseball and a little football. That's all we had. That's all we had. No tennis, no golf, no, no nothing. It was just I mean; it wasn't a play area. It was just-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:49:00] Did you have games that you played like Hide and Seek?

Donald Taylor [00:49:02] Not only-

Donald Taylor [00:49:03] When we would go out in in the summer, when we go up on the hill, Mom and them were singing and stuff, we play hide and hide and go seek and stuff like that. But. No what you call it? games. No, I didn't get to play any games till I went to school. Any organized games until I went to school.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:49:34] Do you have memories of like the businesses in Cross Canal? Where their stores?

Donald Taylor [00:49:39] Only store it I remember was Jacksons, was Christine Jackson. So that's the only one that I remember. They tell me that's there were two of them out there at the same time, but I can only remember, Miss Christine Jackson. You would walk in there and no refrigerator we wouldn't have any kind of refrigeration, anything like that. To be truthful I can't remember, Mama used to send me. Just to get to a penny and a cigarette or something like that. But I couldn't remember buying anything out of the store, but I knew the store was there. And just to get back to Cross Canal, it was an older fella named Morris. Robert. He taught me how to catch a football, how to play baseball. He taught me everything. He's one of the nicest guys that I've ever met. Morris and his mother, it wasn't his mother it was his sister that raised he and his brother, after his mother died, and they lived in 315 after we left. They lived in 315 after we left. And he took me under his wing. And there were some fellows that that I owe everything to. Right now. That's Morris Roberts, Buddy Ford, and my cousin who let me call him **Hoodley** we called him **Rozier Taylor**, and Oliver Ellis, those two. They were my idols coming up and they had a big influence on me and my lifestyle.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:52:34] How did they influence you?

Donald Taylor [00:52:35] By the way they carried themselves. They were good athletes. I never heard anyone of them use a curse word. I never heard. Never heard. And that's the truth. Never heard them use a curse word. And **Hoodley** which was my cousin. Uh. He taught me mainly hygiene, hygiene, and hygienic things. He took me under his wing. He's about three or four years older than me and his place was close down to me. He stayed with on Payne Street, you know. Payne Street. He was the only son. He was the only, only son from where my grandmother, grandfather, and aunts and uncles. So, he had everything. He had everything. He just was one of the nicest persons you ever want to meet. Never heard either one of those men that I'd mentioned. I never heard them say a curse word, and I knew him all my life, and I can't say that about myself. But they really influenced me. And that was after I left Cross Canal. I mean, I mean I started out Cross Canal with Morris Roberts. All of my life, we were friends, and that was it. He would-

Francesco De Salvatore [00: 54; 53] Why did you leave Cross Canal?

Donald Taylor [00: 54: 55] I knew that we were there in 1941, probably. Probably around 41 and 40, around 42 because in 1941, we were there when the war started, when the war started.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:55:16] Where did you moved too?

Donald Taylor moved to trailer courts in 1942. He explains how his family was displaced.

Donald Taylor [00: 55;18] We moved in there, too, a trailer. They moved us from there to the trailer courts. It was a four black square in Alexandria. It was started off in the 900 block of Madison Street, which ran down to Alpha Street, and then from Alpha Street up to Montgomery Street, and Montgomery Street up to Patrick Street. That's where they had the trailer courts while they were building the projects up there. And from there we moved to 105 Madison Street, and from there we went to 46 North Alpha Street. But in between that time, I only spent about a year and a half at Alpha Street because I went into the service after that.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:56:23] Could you describe the trailer court more? Like what did the trailer home look like?

Donald Taylor [00:56:29] Oh, it was. It was a big street. I use the word nasty. It was nasty. They had all of us, we were in the home. The trailer itself wasn't nasty, but the situation was nasty. We had one large bathhouse where everybody had to use. You can imagine how it that worked out. My mother and my father used to take us down to the house on Payne Street to take a bath and stuff and we never did use the- you know what we had out there in the trailer camp. When it would rain, they had planks, we had to walk on. It had roaches and everything, my father bought this thing called boom and cut and put them in and they would fumigate the place, and I would kill the roaches and stuff. That's where we lived until we went to Madison Street.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:57:54] Why did you move to the trailer court?

Donald Taylor [00:57:57] That's when they put us out of 46 North Alpha Street. We had to move from 46 North Alpha Street. I mean when they moved us from 429 first Street. Hmm. We were 429. I take that back. We were living at 429 Fur Street, when we had to move to the trailer courts, because the city came in and took it, and that's exactly where the [inaudible]. What's that hotel out on Cross Canal now? That's exactly where we where we were living. The bulldozer ran right up to the fence. The bulldozer ran right up to the fence before we left there.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:59:04] Yeah, yeah, yeah, of course. Yeah.

Speaker 3 [00:59:07] Can you talk a little bit about what they said, your mother and father would have to do and the people at Cross Canal had to do to stay there?

Donald Taylor [00:59:20] Oh, yeah. The city came in and said they had to upgrade the houses, they had to put in plumbing, they had to put in electric and stuff, and people couldn't afford to do it. That was their way of taking the property. You know, how you're going to put in a sewer when is no sewer there? And we didn't have a recourse. So that the reason why.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:59:56] What was it? I mean, so like as your family started to learn about, you know, about these things, like, like the city said, you know, you have to create your own sewage. How did it feel like? And what did you notice, like where your parents upset?

Donald Taylor [01:00:13] Of course, they didn't know where they were going to go. When we tried to get a project, they were saying one time that we were making too much money to get a project, they were saying we were making too much money to get a project. And it was rough at that time. At that time, it was rough. They didn't know too much recourse. The Blacks didn't have too much power. We didn't have any power at all. You go down to City Hall, there were no colors or blacks in City Hall unless you had a broom in your hand. You know, and no bank at the bank. No, no color, black bank tellers, everything. The jobs that you hear were menial jobs. And so that was it. We were in the south and when you're in south, you're in the south at that time. But then the things have gotten better, and things are better. But you know.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:01:52] Can you retell the day that your family moved? Do you remember what that was like when you moved from Fur Street to the trailer courts?

Donald Taylor [01:02:05] Oh, it was rough. I mean. I mean, we didn't know. I mean, it was all new to us. We didn't know. We just didn't know. I mean, it was rough. I mean, we knew we had to move, and we knew where we were moving to. But the day that we moved. It was hard. I can understand as a parent, if it was me and I had to do it with my children. I can imagine how they felt. I can just remember hardly eating and doing anything in the trailer camp. But we survived in there for I guess maybe about a year or so I don't know. And getting back to the segregation thing. If you went to the store to buy something like a hat or a pair of shoes, you had to know, your size or the person waiting on you would look at you and say, 'this is your size', if you tried it on. That was it.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:03:49] So, you moved to the trailer court. How old were you when you moved the trailer court?

Donald Taylor [01:03:55] Oh, I guess I was in high school.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:04:02] Were you at Parker Gray?

Donald Taylor [01:04:03] Yeah. Parker Gray. I went from the trailer court to Madison Street, and I think I was in the first year-I was a freshman, Yeah, I think I was a freshman in Parker Gray at that time. Oh, yeah. what happened was we had to go and live- there was too many of us in a trailer park. I had to go and live with my grandmother named Annie. That's where I stayed. I stayed down there because it was too many of us in the trailer camp. We were fortunate at the time that we had somewhere to go.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:05:01] Could you maybe. So, you were attending Parker Gray. So, can you tell us?

Donald Taylor [01:05:06] Oh, uh, a lot about Parker Gray, right?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:05:09] Yeah. So, like, what are some of your fondest memories about Parker Gray?

Donald Taylor recalls memories about Parker-Gray.

Donald Taylor [01:05:14] Well to start off with first grade. Yeah, I went to Parker Gray in the first grade, that was first, second, third and fourth. Yeah. Yeah. I went to Parker Gray up to the fourth grade or fifth grade. And then we went to Lyles-Crouch for the fifth, for the sixth, fifth, sixth and seventh grade then we went back to Parker Gray for the eighth grade. And the teachers at Parker Gray, most of them taught our parents. They taught our parents so. And they could say anything they want to us; do anything they want to us. And nothing was done about it because they knew everybody. It was almost like a community thing. They went to the same churches, the same clubs, the same, you know, the same recreation facilities, all of them. They were there, you know, and so but the teachers were really teachers. They made sure that we learned. Oh, we had a teacher named Ms. Julia Pritchett, and she hit one of the students and fractured the student jaw, and nothing happened to her. Back in the day. So that's how close knit everything was at Parker Gray.

Speaker 3 [01:07:26] About the teacher that talked about people's families.

Donald Taylor [01:07:30] Oh, I didn't know him. Yeah. Mama said that. Uh, the preacher, I mean, one of the teachers told us. They said, you dumb, your father's dumb or anybody in your family is dumb. And, I mean, they could. They could say anything they wanted to, and the good thing- I put it this way now. The good part about it was some kids would come-I'm not saying it's good now. They can be wrong. Some kids will come to school and their hair wouldn't be combed. Their teacher would comb their hair, would comb their hair in front of everybody, you know. They were- I'm not saying that's the right thing to do. But at that time, it was accepted. It was accepted. They could smack you, hit you. And I think Mom threatened to give John a spanking in school. And the teachers taught us, taught the mother and father or mother and father went to school with similar teacher that taught us. You know.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:09:03] Who were some of the teachers?

Donald Taylor [01:09:05] I can name them. I can name my high school teachers.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:09:07] Two or three that you really like remember? Can you describe them?

Donald Taylor recalls playing sports.

Donald Taylor [01:09:11] I can remember. Yeah. Yeah. Ms. Helen Day. Which they had the post office named after her up in Alexandria, Helen Day. She was my teacher and Coach Johnson. He was the football, basketball, baseball coach. We only had one coach, that taught everything. And the music teacher I was in the band. I was in the high school band in the seventh grade. I looked back and I played football and baseball. And as I look back on it. I played against. Roosevelt Brown, which was – He was in high school at the time in Charlottesville. He ended up being in the Hall of Fame football. I played against him, and I played against Roy Lloyd. I played against them. Very few people can say they played against those types of people. We had a semi-pro football team and Andrew and I played on it.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:10:53] Can you describe that football team? What was the name of it?

Donald Taylor [01:10:56] Yeah, we have pictures of them.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:10:57] What was the name of it?

Donald Taylor [01:10:58] Yeah, we have pictures of them. Alexandria Rams. And we played in Pennsylvania. In Washington, DC. We played in Washington, D.C. and in Pennsylvania. And it was integrated.

Unidentified [01:11:23] Talk about that. The integration.

Donald Taylor [01:11:30] Mm hmm. If you read the top of that you can read for yourself. Mhm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:11:38] Yeah. So, so, so, so this is, this was an integrated football team?

Donald Taylor [01:11:45] Yeah. They were.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:11:47] What were some of your memories from playing in this football team?

Donald Taylor [01:11:48] Oh we played in Pennsylvania. We played really; it was only really on a Sunday we played on radio. I mean the teams that we played against were, they were like farm teams for the Philadelphia Eagles, and we played against them. And how can I put it, man? It's just hard to say that all of them- and 99% of the players came out of Parker Gray. 99% of them. And for basketball there were state championships for basketball.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:12:39] Did you also play basketball?

Donald Taylor [01:12:40] I didn't play. I mean, I played football. I didn't play. I played football. Mm hmm. So. So. Oh, yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:12:55] And you played baseball? Yeah.

Donald Taylor [01:12:56] Yeah. This is this. Yeah. You can get look at that.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:00] Oh, wow. Okay. Mm hmm. So, when did you start playing sports?

Donald Taylor [01:13:08] When I was in Cross Canal.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:10] Yeah.

Donald Taylor [01:13:11] In Cross Canal, I started with Morris Roberts. So, I started playing baseball.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:20] What was it like playing on an integrated football team?

Donald Taylor [01:13:24] Good. It was all right. Well, no problem. Good guys. Everybody were accepted. It was never a problem.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:36] And did you play against other integrated teams?

Donald Taylor [01:13:41] No. If we did, it was a very few. Most of the teams played against were Black. Oh, yeah. When we went to Pennsylvania we played against integrated teams. In Pennsylvania.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:59] What was it like traveling to other places?

Donald Taylor [01:14:00] Oh, good. We-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:01] You never experienced any issues?

Donald Taylor [01:14:02] No, we had no-Well, what happened we never stayed overnight. We played and came back, but we played, and we never stayed. You know, we never stayed overnight and played in anywhere.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:27] Do you have any other memories from Parker Gray that we-

Donald Taylor [01:14:31] Oh yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:31] We haven't touched on?

Donald Taylor recalls his jobs as a child.

Donald Taylor [01:14:33] Oh, yeah, we had. Oh, yeah, we had. Uh. Oh, shoot. Let me see. Oh. Oh, well like I was, uh, a janitor at Parker Gray I was.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:55] While you were a student?

Donald Taylor [01:14:57] Well no, after, after school in my- I think my senior year, I was I was a janitor, a after school janitor.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:15:10] So you would go to school?

Donald Taylor [01:15:13] Yeah, I was. Yeah. Yep. You know what? I never was a person that wanted my mother or father to give me anything. I tried. I had a jar, some type of jar. I made money cause I was about 12 or 13 years old. I sold papers. I worked in the Howard Johnson restaurant, washing dishes. I did everything I could to make some money. I was in the patrol, you know, school patrol and being in the school patrol-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:16:04] What's the school patrol?

Donald Taylor [01:16:04] We would have it in morning. We'd have badges and, and white sash around us and we would be almost like school crossing guys. And every Saturday everybody that's on the school patrol, they could go to the movie, the matinee movie on Saturdays free. I did everything I could to not take money out of. And all the money that I made when I made something, I had it carry it back to mama, and mama gave me what she wanted me to have. I didn't I didn't take all the money and put it in my pocket, I carried it. And they were giving me money. I didn't pay rent and nothing like that. But if I bought in \$20, she might have gave me \$8, \$9, or \$10 and she wouldn't use it for now. And I was a washer at the laundry. I washed. I was a washer. I've done everything that you could do to make some money.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:17:50] Could you maybe. You know because Parker Gray was demolished, right? It doesn't exist anymore. So, could you maybe describe to us what it looked like?

Donald Taylor [01:18:02] Well when I had a picture. We had a picture of the-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:18:05] Oh, yeah. Like maybe can you try? Like, what are your memories of the building?

Donald Taylor [01:18:11] It was a brick building. There it is right here.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:18:16] Yeah, but.

Donald Taylor [01:18:19] what do you want me say about it now?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:18:22] So it was brick. Do you remember what the classrooms looked like?

Donald Taylor [01:18:26] Oh, yeah. Wooden, we had wooden floors. Wooden, wooden, wooden floors and windows. And just an ordinary class, you know. And to be truthful know, I had no idea how it was heated. I really don't know. We didn't have an air conditioning in there. I really don't know.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:19:00] I kind of want to pivot to something that you've touched upon. And I know you've talked about, you know, how this is something you want to talk about. But, you know, you obviously grew up during segregation. And so can you maybe describe to us what it was like? You know, you being a teenager growing up in Alexandria during segregation?

Donald Taylor recalls growing up in segregation.

Donald Taylor [01:19:25] Well, here's the whole thing. If you're grown up. You didn't realize. I mean, the only time you realize any different was when you went to. Like, for instance, they have parades. George Washington High School was represented, and they would come down and they were George Washington 's Cadets. They had George Washington middle school. There was a middle school. That was the pride of the state, George Washington was. And at the parade they be coming, they would be marching down with fake- Oh. Oh. Oh man with guns, fake guns, you know, marching, you know, marching you, you know? And that sort of thing. And like when we played, played our football game at the same time they played theirs. Their noises were so loud it drowns us out almost where we played. And our lights and the lights on our field a lot of time. If you played at the end of the field, you didn't know what happened because the lights were off. That was it. I mean, we played against-It wasn't organized, but we [George Washington High School] played against each other all the time. But it wasn't organized. The city wouldn't allow that to happen. The state wouldn't allowed that to happen. But in Parker Gray, it was. Uh. I can name every teacher almost that I have. I can name almost every teacher that I had in Parker Gray.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:21:44] Who is your favorite teacher?

Donald Taylor [01:21:47] I would say a lady named Mrs. Chase. She was the-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:21:52] What was she like? Can you describe her?

Donald Taylor [01:21:53] She was. She was a teacher that taught typing. And what you call that? She was a nice lovable person, she was. And I had math, and math was my worst subject, but I liked it. Algebra. I never learned algebra to this day. Mrs. Smith, Mama and them got a tutor for me. To

learn algebra and I still failed it. And she [Mrs. Smith] gave me a D. She gave me a D just to get out of her class. And algebra was-

Speaker 3 [01:22:59] No, just say you can't do that.

Donald Taylor [01:23:02] Algebra. Algebra was my worst class. But we had a science teacher, Mr. Harlan. I had an English teacher named Mrs. Tunsil or Mrs. Adams. I had Mrs. Casey. And I had Reverend Atkins, he was a reverend and a teacher. He taught mama and my father. Reverend Atkins. And Mr. Patterson; music teacher. Ms. Helen Day was my six grades teacher, I think. And, and Mrs. Johnson was my teacher out in Lyles Crouch. I knew. I knew all of them. I mean, I could.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:24:17] Doesn't your family have a connection to Parker Gray?

Donald Taylor [01:24:22] Yeah. Yeah. My father. Yeah. - How can I say this? My father's mother's brother was the principal of the all-boys school in Alexandria. And then when they named Parker Gray, then they named it after him. And another lady, named Sarah Gray. And Mrs. Sarah Gray was, uh, was a principal of the all-girls school. So, when they had Parker Gray, they named- they took those two names and made it Parker Gray.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:25:13] Thank you. Got some assistance. Good, good. Um. Anything about, you know, we were talking about maybe growing up in segregation. Are there any other memories or other experiences that really stand out to you as you look back on those time? Like anything?

Donald Taylor [01:25:36] Well, the in the service. I can say-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:25:45] You were in the service. Well, why don't we get into you, into your service? A little bit.

Donald Taylor [01:25:52] Okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:25:55] Like what did you serve for? And-

Donald Taylor recalls his Airforce service.

Donald Taylor [01:25:57] Okay, I was. Well, what happened was I got a draft notice, and instead of going to the draft board. I didn't want to go into the army. And so, I went and volunteered to go into the air force. There's a picture [laughs]. This is me. Well anyways when I went to basic training. I was -it was only two of us in our outgoing flight, you know, only two blacks in our flights. But never had any problem. My basic was in New York in Geneva New York, at Sampson Air Force base. And any way when I left Sampson. I went to Shreveport, Louisiana. That's when I had a little problem. Actually, it was two problems. Well, I was in the chow hall when one day and this guy stood up right beside me, got set up and say, these peas are hard enough. You can shoot them in nigga slings. And I took the bowl and hit him side of his face with him. And, and they were going to add a charge to me and be court martial or staying in or taking the come to punishment, I did come to punishment, which I couldn't leave the area for a whole month, which didn't bother me at all. I didn't want to go in town anyway. And another time they had a thing called a Holiday in Dixie Parade, and they wanted an airman to come down and marched. So, we've got our own photo and imagine him here and here. We're going to get on the bus and go. When we got down there. The whoever's in charge of the parade say they didn't want the blacks to march in the parade, so the captain said 'Okay, that's good'. So, he's put us back on the bus and brought on us back home.

Brought everyone back home, I mean I mean back to the base. So that's the only real bad thing that I can realize that happened to me when I was-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:46] How did you feel in those two instances?

Donald Taylor [01:28:50] Oh, hurt. You know, it hurts you. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Plus, when I came on leave. When you bought tickets in Shreveport. We were the blacks on one side, the whites were on the other side. Got my ticket. Got on the train. And I had to sit on my duffel bag all the way to Saint Louis because there was no seat for the blacks when we got on the train. I had to sit on my duffel bag all the way to St Louis, and I got on a train. So, you know, you felt bad, you know? Yeah, I'm in my uniform. And then another time. I was in I was going to be going to school in Denver. And we're coming home for Christmas. And the four of us were in the car was three, three, three, whites. And we were in the car, and we went to, uh, I think it was Saint Louis again Saint Louis, we went to eat, and the waitress came in, bought placemats for everybody but me. So, they ordered. So, everybody ordered, they ordered. So they say 'how about him'? They say, 'we can't serve him'. So, they waited till they got their food. [inaudible], they said 'come on, let's go. And they walked out. They walked out. That happened. I mean, they didn't. You know, they didn't-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:30:43] Where was this?

Donald Taylor [01:30:44] I mean, it was in Saint Louis.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:30:49] Yeah.

Donald Taylor [01:30:50] And that was. That was then in uniform again. All of us in uniform. Yeah. Yeah. I was, you know, only had one stripe, the other the sergeant, he was driving the car. You know, he was white, everybody in there was white except me. And there were forks in the car. Mhm. And, and that happened. The restaurant. That's the only thing that happened to me in the military that I know of that I could see. I don't know what happened behind the back. The only thing that happened to me then. Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:31:38] How did these experiences make you feel about being in the military and serving your country?

Donald Taylor [01:31:46] Well. Well, you know, in all fairness, it wasn't popular. Commercial Syrian refugee turned it down. It was reported that I had to go. I didn't want to go, but, you know, I didn't want it wasn't important. It wasn't no patriotic thing. It wasn't a patriotic thing for what I was concerned. I'm being honest with you, it wasn't a patriotic thing to say, well, I want to fight for this, but that wasn't it. I had to go ahead. I had to go-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:32:14] Yeah could you maybe, like, walk us through. So, tell us like. What? Tell us. Like when you first received the draft notice.

Donald Taylor [01:32:23] Oh, I was I was working for the American Red Cross, and I came home, and we got a draft notice in the mail, and it said, 'by the order of the president, you report'. So, the next day. The next day, instead of doing anything I been right down to the post office. Now it is closed. You remember the statue that used to be in in the city of Alexandria on Prince Street?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:32:52] The Confederate statue? Yeah, yeah.

Donald Taylor [01:32:58] Yeah, that was the post office right in front of there. And that's where I enlisted from. I enlisted.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:33:07] How did you feel when you got that draft?

Donald Taylor recalls working for the Red Cross.

Donald Taylor [01:33:09] Oh, man. Hey I was. [Laughs] everybody that I knew was getting a draft. It wasn't just me. It wasn't the case where I was all that scared and nervous. But I didn't want to want to go. I was a homesick. I was homesick the whole time I was in the service. I wanted to be home. I loved my family. I loved my family. And I wrote just as often as I could, called as often as I could. I was just homesick. I was just a homesick kid almost the whole time I was in the service. Oh, yeah. At the American Red Cross. Now, I worked at American Red Cross. Right, right in Alexandria.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:34:14] When do you start working there?

Donald Taylor [01:34:17] Oh, I was I was 18, 18, 19, 18 years old. Just before I went to the service. I was 18 years old. We were never segregated. When we ate. When we had lunch. They pull a curtain across. We had to eat behind the curtain. We had to eat behind the curtain, everybody else ate out front. We had to eat behind the curtain, right there in Alexandria. But when I came out of the service, I came out they had to give me a job because that's where I was when I- and then moved to Landover, Maryland. And if it wasn't for my brother John. He had a car. Yeah. And he let me use his car to go to Landover, Maryland, to go to work every day, every day until we tell other people, other people, we took turns. Other people worked over there. We took turn it after that. But. Uh huh. But other than that, uh, then from the air force, from the Red Cross. And Landover Maryland, that's when I went into to take the civil service test and passed the civil service test and got into civil service. I was a GS-3, making \$3,001,175 a year. That was my yearly salary. I'll quit a job to make that. So, you know, you know, I wasn't making too much at the Red Cross. So, and then I moved then I started progressing in the military- I mean in the civil service.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:36:10] So maybe walk us through. So, you went to St Louis. So, you get your draft and then you went to Saint Louis, right?

Donald Taylor [01:36:17] No, we were coming home. We didn't. We were leaving Denver to come to Alexandria.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:36:26] No. When you first entered the Air Force?

Donald Taylor [01:36:29] Well, when I first entered the Air Force, I was I was in, uh, in Geneva, New York.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:36:36] So. So, you first went to Geneva, New York, right. And that's where you trained.

Donald Taylor [01:36:40] That's where I trained. And then from there, I went to, uh, Shreveport, Louisiana.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:36:49] Okay.

Donald Taylor [01:36:49] We had to pull KP for three months straight before we went to tech school. So, I went to my first tech school, I went to was up in Denver, Colorado. And while in Denver. Christmas with me is God, Jove. He lived and he lived in Washington. And we drove from Denver to Washington for Christmas. And that's what happened. In Saint Louis. Mm hmm. And my

first tech school I went to, it was a photo interpreter school and that was a 13 week uh, course. But what happened I phase out of that because I made it through the 12th week, and the and the problem solving was so hard. The math from the unit, and we had at the time we had a slide rule. They didn't have the computers like they had now, and I didn't learn. I couldn't learn. The owner gave us a I think about three- or four-hour refresher course on a slide rule. When you take these tests in the Air Force, they assume you know so much because you pass a test. You know, and the slide rule did the math problem was so hard you couldn't do them, you couldn't do them long, long hand. So, I had to phase out of that one and went back to Louisiana. Then I went to a supply school and came out on top. I came out top of my class in the supply school. And from there, the supply school. I went to Puerto Rico. I went to Puerto Rico for two years down in Puerto Rico.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:38:58] For two years?

Donald Taylor [01:38:59] Yeah, that was a vacation. They called that the country club of the Air Force. They call it Ramey Air Force Base. It was a country club.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:39:13] What are your memories from?

Donald Taylor [01:39:14] Everything was good in Puerto Rico. Everything. Everything to the people. Oh, the people were just lovely people. They just wanted to help. And I worked, the whole time I was in the Air Force. I worked around civilians, a whole bunch of civilians. I worked in the office. I work in an office most of the time. And when I was in the Air Force. So uh, uh, I didn't do any training, I didn't do any combat. No combat, nothing. It was good. The Air Force taught me. I'll tell you want, when I went into the Air Force, there wasn't any problems in taking commands because I took command at home, it wasn't a problem and try and do the right thing because I did the right thing at home. So, I didn't have a problem in the Air Force about adjusting in the Air Force, just the routine and how to make up beds and stuff like that, you know, but never had, never had a problem. I took a test, every test I took up at Denver, I passed in the Air Force. Every time you got a stripe you had to take a test for.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:40:45] And so you went to Puerto Rico for two years. And then did you come back home after that?

Donald Taylor [01:40:50] Yeah. And then I was stationed in Columbus, Ohio. Well, that's right. That's where I got out of service in Columbus, Ohio. Then I came home and joined the Air Force Reserve, and I stayed in the Air Force reserved for the- that's where I retired from the Air Force, the Air Force Reserve. That was good duty. You went in twice a month. I think twice a month. You went in twice a month. And you- No once a month.

Speaker 3 [01:41:32] I think you want to.

Donald Taylor [01:41:34] You went once a month. And over at Andrews. And you went from once a year, you went away for two weeks. Two weeks training for once a year.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:41:51] How did you stay in touch with your family and friends during that time?

Donald Taylor [01:41:56] Phones calls. At the time, phone calls and letter writing. No. wasn't such thing as a cell phone, then.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:42:04] What did you miss most?

Donald Taylor [01:42:06] Everything. Everything. Everything. Like I was telling Evette if it wasn't for my family, to come back home, I would probably be living in Florida now, Florida or Puerto Rico. I just could not see. I mean, it would've been cheaper for me to live down there, but I couldn't see myself being down there and my family up here. I wouldn't. I wouldn't. Mhm. It wouldn't have been worth it to me.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:42:48] Is there anything else about the military? Or actually when you returned were there any challenges to returning to civilian life?

Donald Taylor [01:42:58] No, because, basically, you know what? When you working with civilians. Every day, 8 hours a day. Every day is a different is different. I'll be working. I'll be working with civilians. I'll be getting up at 8 in the morning and I'll be on the job at 8'oclock, 4'oclock I'm off. Mm hmm. Especially when I was in Columbus, Ohio. It was just a strictly, uh, office work. So, it wasn't. It wasn't. It wasn't a hard thing. You just came back to get a job. I mean. I mean. I mean, you came back here.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:43:42] You came back here what year was that?

Donald Taylor [01:43:44] 1956.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:43:45] 56. Okay.

Donald Taylor [01:43:47] I went to serve in February 52 and got out in February of 56.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:43:55] Okay, great. So one of the things I wanted to ask. So it means that we're going to go back in time a little bit. Um, I wanted to revisit, um, your memories from Cross Canal.

Donald Taylor [01:44:07] Sure.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:44:08] Um, so, yeah. Can you maybe share some things about Cross Canal that that you didn't mention before?

Donald Taylor recites memories about Cross Canal.

Donald Taylor [01:44:13] My, uh. When electricity was finally brought to Cross Canal. My father bought my mother one of the first washing machines that were made. And that was to me one of the most important things that had happened to us in Cross Canal, because it saved my mother a lot of work. It was appreciative from my point of view, too, because it saved me from doing a lot of after work with my mother when she was washing clothes. Uh huh. Uh. It was my job to finish all the water from the well. Put on the stove for my mother to use. Water had to be heated and on the tub on the stove and each time she would wash something she had to throw that water away. Then she rinses, had to throw that water away. Then she had blue and water, whatever that was blue and water. And. And. When she got the washing machine it eliminated. Uh. For me having to take to the water down. Like I used to, you know.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:46:14] What year did your mom get this washing machine?

Donald Taylor [01:46:22] I guess around 1934-35. Is when is when they. That's when the electricity put out there. And plus-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:46:37] Like how long did your house at Cross Canal not have electricity?

Donald Taylor [01:46:43] Oh, I say about five years.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:46:46] So then in 1934, 35, your house finally got electricity?

Donald Taylor [01:46:51] Finally got electricity. Mm hmm. And we are extremely fortunate because we didn't have an electrician. Once they hooked it up, my father put the wires down himself. We had wires running all over the house. It was just fortunate that nothing caught on fire. We were really fortunate in that respect. And our family were the only family that had an automobile in Cross Canal. And when it would rain. Uh huh. Uh. My father would get stuck, and people would come and push him out because it was mud, they had to push him out to dry land. Mm. And. Uh. Uh.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:47:56] What did the car look like?

Donald Taylor [01:47:58] Oh, I don't know. It was one of them-Almost like a-. I knew it wasn't a T-model, but it was one of those old cars. You figured. It wasn't a new car at the time anyways. It wasn't a new car, so. Right. And no heater in the car, there was no heater. Uh. And when he started it, he had a thing in the front, he had to get out of the car. And put a crank, he had to crank it and crank it and then jump back into the car before it went off.

Donald Taylor [01:48:48] As far as the car is concerned that was it. Plus, the tires, they had inner tubes in the tires at the time. And we had a flat tire I don't know how he took the tires off at the time, but he had to patch the inner tube and we didn't have- you had to pump. You had a hand pump. You had to pump the tires. You had to pump the air into the tires. Into the tires. And when you went to the gas station, you went there, and you gave them \$0.25 worth or something like that. And right in Cross Canal we didn't have ice, we didn't have a refrigerator. We had, uh, uh, icebox and the iceman would come, and we would get \$0.15 block of ice or \$0.25 block of ice and put it on top. Uh, so, uh, all of that wasn't mentioned before. But it crossed my mind.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:50:05] Why are those important memories for you?

Donald Taylor [01:50:08] Why?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:50:08] Yeah. Like why?

Donald Taylor [01:50:09] Because they were memories that I feel formed my life. Those are the things that made me realize later on in life just how fortunate I was. If you lived at that time and lived in Cross Canal. It taught me. It taught me, living in Cross Canal, it taught me how to care for one another. It's made me be respectful too people. Because you had to show respect for older people. And it gave me a sense of knowing that what I was doing helped my family. I was, uh, I realize now that I was a integral part of the family because what I was doing was saving my mother a lot of work. And for them to trust me with the rest of the children when they were out. It was my job to make sure that the housing was ran right while they were away. And my two brothers, they gave me all the respect that they could. And I never took advantage of a situation, there were times when I could have told my mother and father that something happened, [inaudible]. But I never did that. I never, every time they came back, everything was all right. Regardless what happened while they were gone. When they came back, we never had a problem. Never had a problem. And my two

brothers were the closest. We were close. We were closer than brothers. We were friends. And my other brother died about four years. Well, about three years ago.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:52:51] What were their names again?

Donald Taylor [01:52:53] John. I mean, Alvin. Alvin and John. And it just so happened today is my sister's 90th birthday day. Charlene, her birthday is today. She is 90 years old today. So. Yeah. So, I'm fortunate to have grown up seeing my grandparents on my father's side and my aunts and uncles on my father's side. And all the relatives on my mother's side. Very few people can say that. And plus, my family was intact. Up until about eight, seven or eight years ago when my father died. And then my mother died. And then John died. They. Oh, they were fond, fond memories. Fond memories Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:53:51] And so were you close with your brothers?

Donald Taylor [01:53:55] Oh, yes. Oh, yes, we were. And my brother, we talk to each today now. My brother and I were close. And my sister. We are real, real, real close. We are. We are close family. People used too, you know what, people used to call us the kissing family. Whenever we went into a home, we kissed everybody in the house as well as outside, at the Elks my father. We were walking from Elks to home, and I would kiss my father in front, it didn't bother me about me people seeing me. I mean, I know, hey, some of them wish that they had this for their kid. I respected my father. I respected my father, and my grandfather was a member. He was a charter member of the Elks. He was one of the members.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:55:06] Right? Yeah. You're starting to talk about the Elks. Can you maybe explain what the Elks are for people who don't know?

Donald Taylor talks about the Elks.

Donald Taylor [01:55:13] For one thing it is a fraternal secret organization but is a Christian organization. We cannot hold a meeting without the Bible there and certain verse in the Bible is always there. We cannot hold a meeting, an official meeting without the Bible. And our basic thing is to serve people, not ourselves. But we have a wonderful time together. In the Elks, we are nation. Nationwide. If I'm financially in my lodge. Any lodge in the United States. And in the Virgin Islands and Canada. I can go there, show my card. I'm treated there if I'm out of town and having problems. Any kind of problem, I can go to an Elks Homes. Go to any Elks Homes and they will see to it that I'm taken care of.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:56:38] That's great. That's amazing. So, like, what's the history of the Elks here in Alexandria? Could you walk us through like it's start?

Donald Taylor [01:56:47] It started, I think, in 19-The Elks in Alexandria is 112 years old right now. So, if you can count back, I don't know.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:57:02] Not good at math. It's early 1900s. Let's just say that.

Donald Taylor [01:57:07] Yeah, at one time, we had over 200 members. Uh, and the Elks at that time was all we had for Blacks that are concerned was the Elks Homes. We had doctors, lawyers all are members of the Elks Home. And we serve the community. We are nonpolitical. We cannot endorse a candidate, but they can use our facilities, any political organization can use it.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:57:53] Use it. Yeah.

Donald Taylor [01:57:53] Can use it so we cannot endorse. We cannot endorse anybody. But during my time. During my time.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:58:02] Really quick. So. So the Elks. They're 112 years old, roughly.

Donald Taylor [01:58:06] Right here. Right here.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:58:07] Right. And so, your dad was the first member of your family. Oh, involved? Or no?

Donald Taylor [01:58:12] I mean, my grandfather, my grandfather and at one time-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:58:19] So how did he get involved? Like what were the stories you heard?

Donald Taylor [01:58:22] Oh, well he was down at Payne Street. He lived- Where did I stop at?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:58:39] Yeah. Yeah, we were talking about. So, what are the stories you heard-

Donald Taylor [01:58:43] Okay. Oh, okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:58:44] About your grandfather joining.

Donald Taylor [01:58:45] Yeah, my grandfather. He was a charter member of the Elks. And at one time it was my father. Uh, I mean, my grandfather. My father and my two brothers were all members of the Elks.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:59:10] Why did your grandfather get in? Like, why did he help? Like help found it?.

Donald Taylor [01:59:14] Huh?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:59:15] Why did he help find it? Like why?

Donald Taylor [01:59:18] Oh, when it first started. When they first got started. They needed somebody. He was one of the members that got that lodge started in Alexandria. Mm. See. And we are the lodge, Elks Lodge 48. And what happened. Once you. Your charter, your number is given to you. If you are charter number one, you were the first lodge, after number two you were the second lodge ever to be chartered. We were the 48th lodge to get a charter from the grand lodge. We have a grand lodge there a lodge over us, the Grand Lodge and uh and on the women's, side is daughter Elks. Yeah, Daughter Elks. And they are- we are their umbrella. They have to come under a male's lodge.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:00:32] Yeah. Was your mom involved than?

Donald Taylor [02:00:33] Now my mother. Uh huh, my sister, she'd joined when she was 7. She been in there for 77 years. My mother, my grandmother. And my great grandmother.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:00:55] Also your great grandmother.

Donald Taylor [02:00:56] All three of them. All three of them were in and my sister. All four of them was in the Elks at one time. I mean at one time all of them were there. All of them are dead except my sister. And I have been in the lodge-

Francesco De Salvatore [02:01:17] Did you ever hear stories from, like, your like. What were the stories you heard from your grandparents about those early years of the Elks? Like did they talk about what the meetings were like or where or like what events? Did they host events like-

Donald Taylor [02:01:34] Well-

Francesco De Salvatore [02:01:35] Did you ever hear stories about that early period when it first started?

Donald Taylor [02:01:38] Only that they were community orientated. That's the main thing. A lot of the things they did were with the churches.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:01:51] What would they do?

Donald Taylor [02:01:52] They would donate money, they would donate money. They would, uh. We visited. We visited churches. That was one of our things, we had to visit a church every so often. And. Uh, well, there are people I can tell you this, the people that come to us that were in need. We would give them not just our members, but nonmembers. They would come to us just for need. And the law is that if you divulge a person's name or family name that you'd helped, any kind of way at all, they can kick you out of the lodge. That's how stingy we were. There are a lot of people that were getting help. Unless they told it. Unless they told it, it never got out.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:03:00] When did you first join the Elks?

Donald Taylor [02:03:04] I joined the Elks in 1950. I've been there 70 years. Never been out. We have this thing called an exalted ruler. He's the same as the president. I mean, I was Exalted Ruler for 15 consecutive years. And during that time-

Francesco De Salvatore [02:03:28] When were you the exalted leader from?

Donald Taylor [02:03:32] From 19. I mean, I retired from the reserves. I was 55. I was 55-year-old when I became exalted ruler. But I held every position in the lodge, up until, every elected position up until I was elected [Exalted Ruler].

Francesco De Salvatore [02:03:57] That's great.

Donald Taylor [02:03:59] Up until I was elected for 15 years.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:04:03] So maybe walk us through. So, you joined the Elks in 1950. So, yeah, well, walk us through. So, like, what was your involvement with the Elks?

Donald Taylor [02:04:14] Well.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:04:15] Yeah, well, starting in the beginning.

Donald Taylor describes Elks dances.

Donald Taylor [02:04:18] Actually I was drawing, but I wasn't really active. I paid my dues. I was paying my dues, but I was a young guy. I didn't have, you know, and I wasn't real active. I would pay my dues; I did everything financially. But when, when I was in, uh, in the Air Force the whole time you're gone. You're considered a member. You didn't have to pay anything, you know, so, you know. So, when I came, I came out of the Air Force. That's when I became around 57 and 58, that's when I became more active in doing things and helping out in the in the community like having projects to raise money. Yeah. You know, how to gives dances?

Francesco De Salvatore [02:05:21] Oh, yeah. What were some of the project's you guys were raising money when you first started in the late fifties?

Donald Taylor [02:05:27] Basically. Basically, it was, uh, the dances on weekends like the big bands and stuff like that. Basically, that's what it was. Basically, it wasn't too much that we could do at the time, you know. And so-

Francesco De Salvatore [02:05:48] Can you describe those dances?

Donald Taylor [02:05:50] Oh, yes.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:05:51] What were they like?

Donald Taylor [02:05:53] They would start off real nice. But soon as it seemed like almost at the end. At the end, we'd have a little disturbance. We'd have a little disturbance. But never, never shooting. Never killing.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:06:13] What do you mean by disturbance?

Donald Taylor [02:06:15] People might get arguing about something about, you know, and maybe some of them, you know, they had, you know, alcohol was involved, too, you know. So, you can imagine from say, from 10 o'clock to about 1:30 o'clock, 2:00 o'clock, drinking and dancing, you can imagine.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:06:32] And that was every week?

Donald Taylor [02:06:34] Just about. Just about every week.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:06:37] Like what kind of music would be playing?

Donald Taylor [02:06:39] Okay like I was saying, it wasn't such thing as a disco then. There were live bands. There was live music. We had local bands, a local, local organization, I mean, local band and the band members after, you know, when they had a break, they come down and go down. We had this thing called a **rest gather** down where honorary members, we had a place in the lodge where only honorary members were allowed to go. No outsider can go unless your member, just for the brothers, we called each other brothers and daughters. And the hardest thing in the world for me was to call my father; brother or my mother; daughter. You know what I mean? And like my father told me when I was getting ready to run for Exalted Ruler, he'd say 'Don don't run', and I say, 'Why Daddy?', and he'd say, 'Because you're going to lose your friends, some of your friends, because you're going to have to go against them'. So, I tell him, I say, 'Well, if that's the case I don't have a friend from the start then, I don't have a friend then if that's the case, I am not going to live like, if they can't, if I am doing the right thing, if they can't accept it, then so be it'. You know, so and-

Francesco De Salvatore [02:08:18] You mentioned the bands that played at the dance, and they were local bands, right?

Donald Taylor [02:08:22] Some of them. Some of them.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:08:24] What were their names?

Donald Taylor [02:08:25] Oh one called Courtney Brooks.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:08:27] Courtney Brooks.

Donald Taylor [02:08:28] Courtney Brooks. Another one was, uh, Muncie, we'd call him L Man Muncie. He was local and Courtney Brooks.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:08:45] And, like, what kind of music?

Donald Taylor describes playing in the Elks marching band.

Donald Taylor [02:08:47] Oh, look at the music at the time, you know, you know, blues and dance music. Jazz, you know, and, we had two of our members, two of our members played in a big-time band, one played with a stint with, uh, with Duke Ellington. A man named Fredric Turner, he was Exalted Ruler there. And a guy named Lloyd Butler, he played with a big band. The Elks at that time had a marching band and I wasn't an Elk then, but I was in high school, and I played the Elks band, while I was in high school.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:09:52] So this is like the forties?

Donald Taylor [02:09:56] Wait a minute. I came out of high school in 49'. So, you figure. About 8 years, 8 from 49 where that was. I was in the seventh grade. And eighth grade, and I played in the Elks band when I was in high school too, and then marching band. We had a big band. We had a big, large band and-

Francesco De Salvatore [02:10:28] What did you play? In the marching band?

Donald Taylor [02:10:29] Saxophone, I played alto saxophone and clarinet. And in our high school band, we won the state championship in the high school band.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:10:44] It was a hospital band?

Donald Taylor [02:10:44] In high school.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:10:45] Oh. High school.

Donald Taylor [02:10:46] I was in a high school band and we compete and we won a championship one year.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:10:51] So you were in a high school band and the Elks marching band?

Donald Taylor [02:10:53] Right. Right. While I was in high school, the Elks had their band, so I was playing in both of them.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:11:04] When, like when would the Elks marching band play? Like, would they play in the streets?

Donald Taylor [02:11:09] Like, for a parade. Like in the parade. Like a parade in the city. They 'd marched in the parades. Like if have conventions. They went to the convention and played in the convention, I didn't go cause I was in school. I couldn't go when they went away to the convention, I couldn't go, cause I was in school. But they at one time when they had a convention, they would take almost the whole city. They had busses, they had trains to start off in, probably in, um, Connecticut or New York like if they had it in Florida, they were stopping all along the line, picking up people, until they got to Florida. That's how it was at one time. We were real, real strong at one time. we were the biggest black organization in the country at one time.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:12:27] Are there any other- So, you know, you became a lot more involved in the late fifties, and there were these weekly dances. Is there anything else? You know, let's, you know, moving forward like any memory that stand out about the Elks? Where there any projects you worked on?

Donald Taylor recalls helping the Freedom Riders.

Donald Taylor [02:12:46] You know one of the thing that I'm most proud of was when the Freedom Riders broke down on a highway. I mean, on 95. They stayed at the Elks home overnight. And we housed them, and we fed them. We fed them and while I was a member, I was fortunate enough to be almost on a first name basis with the people on city council, you know, like Euille and Del Pepper. And Dale Pepper was my favorite. She was my favorite councilperson. She was there for us, and she attended-

Francesco De Salvatore [02:13:47] Why was she your favorite?

Donald Taylor [02:13:49] Well, she attended everything the Elks was involved with. We could always count on her being there and on Thanksgiving we had, um. Up until, uh. Virus up until the virus. For 40 years straight, 40 years straight now. We fed the senior citizens Thanksgiving dinner every year. For 40 years at the Elks home. We raised money. We raised money just for that purpose.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:14:39] That's great.

Donald Taylor [02:14:40] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:14:41] I want to go back to the to the freedom fighters really quick. Could you maybe like, walk us through, like, how that happen. Like, how did- so their bus broke? Like, maybe walk us through-

Donald Taylor [02:14:52] Their bus broke down and a city councilman, a city council person came to us, asked could we keep them up overnight. That's what happened.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:15:09] So. So, where did their bus breakdown? Was it near Alexandria?

Donald Taylor [02:15:12] On 95. On 95.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:15:16] So, like, who went and picked them up?

Donald Taylor [02:15:18] I don't. I really don't know. We just saw them coming in.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:15:24] Got it. Where did they stay?

Donald Taylor [02:15:27] Oh, downstairs and upstairs in the auditorium. And we had a kitchen at the time. We had a kitchen. We had a kitchen and we fed many of them as we could.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:15:41] How many people were there?

Donald Taylor [02:15:43] I guess at about 35 or 40. 35 or 45 of them.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:15:50] Did you talk to any of them? Did you interact with them?

Donald Taylor [02:15:53] No, we just took care of them. You know, and we didn't. We didn't. There was one of the premier things that stuck out with me.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:16:15] Yeah. Why did that stick out to you?

Donald Taylor [02:16:19] Helping people. I can imagine me going somewhere and break down, and nowhere to stay. I can imagine what they were going through. There were no children. They were all grown. They were all adults. I've always been a person I like to help people. Helping people, it makes me feels good to help somebody.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:16:50] How else? I mean, so you mentioned the Thanksgiving meals, like, how else has the Elks given back to the city, you know, to the people in Alexandria?

Donald Taylor [02:16:58] Okay. Like I said before, we finance. We'd helped people with their-. Some of them were getting ready put out of their home. Some didn't have food, some in the cold weather. They didn't have heat. And that was basically what we did. And the children like on Easter, we had programs for the children for Easter. We gave out Christmas toys for the children. And we had a thing called for unwed mothers. We had set up a once-a-year unwed mother. We'd have clothes. And that sort of thing for people to come in and pick up whatever they wanted or whatever we had to give them. And sometimes we give out vote vouchers.

As far as the Elks are concerned, we had a thing called an oratorical contest, and each lodge is supposed to have a contestant. And that contestant, you start with the lodge, then you go with a state, then a state. Then the region. Then if you win all that, then they go to a national convention, then they have it, and we won. And when I was exalted Ruler, we had a national oratorical contest winner. And then from there competed from all over the world, from Canada, Virgin Islands. What else? and our candidate won it. We won. And Nelly. Nelly Brooks. Which is Leo Brook's sister. She won it when she was in high school. And that is the convention. So. So that's. Uh. And. And. And, uh. As long as we are doing education, the tax people will not bother us. That's a that's a tax breaks. That's a tax thing for us.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:20:01] Yeah. The one thing I know you've talked to me about this. I've also heard from other people, like, like big names came and played at the lodge here. Ray Charles. Can you maybe recall all those musicians and performers who came through Alexandria and played at the lodge?

Donald recalls the musicians that came through the Elks Lodge.

Donald Taylor [02:20:17] Yeah, I can. I can name all of them. I can name all of them. Yeah. Uh, okay. There was, uh, the Clovers. The Oreos, Ruth Brown. The Del- Vikings. Johnny Hodges. Uh.

What else? Let me think. The lesser-known ones we got from Washington; Bull Moose Jackson came from Washington. And Little Jimmy Scott from Washington. And Ike and Tina Turner and uh, Little Richard, Ray Charles. Uh. Oh. Mm. There're were some lesser-known ones. There was Savannah Churchill. She came their and. Oh, Wynonie Harris. I mean, well, I'm just trying to remember. Oh, yeah. And the Sweethearts of Rhythm, that was an all-girl band out of Arlington, an all-girl band. Yeah. And they performed there. And. Uh. Duncan. Duncan had a group while he was the music director of Howard University. Duncan was, and he had a jazz group. And they played there. I mean.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:22:47] So are there any performances that that that stick out to you? Any memorable ones?

Donald Taylor [02:22:54] Ray Charles. Especially.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:22:56] Yeah. How come?

Donald Taylor [02:22:58] Cause we had to stand in line to get in. Uh, you know. You know, you know, Ray Charles at that time was the biggest name Ray Charles at the time. And he, uh. And the Raelettes. They were, you know, we had to get in line to buy the tickets and get in and right now, the city will come in and close you down, it was packed like sardines in there. No way in the world the city will allow, or a neighbor will allow well, you know, it happened, see? And nothing else. It was no such thing as a noise. And we will. We open the doors of the Elks home, and we bless. Now, now. No, no. We have to. We have to. We had to close at a certain time. Yeah. Then there's a no US curfew now and we again, you know, so and, and plus, uh, they have a sign on a hammer and people can come in. You know, the, the fire department came in and say, we only have X amount of people if people come in and they close you down at one time. That was that was unheard of. Unheard of. I'm not saying that was bad, but it didn't bother anybody. And nobody complained about the noise or anything or the parking and nothing. So, and. We, uh. We were. We had, uh. We were able we were able to have a little bit of. Joy. Music. Joy. Joy. Spirits residential. It. A lot of it was a lot of it wasn't a lot of it was it wasn't in the open but that they didn't. Long as a one time, as long as you didn't bother anybody, you could do a lot of things that you can't do now. Yeah, the longer the long. As long as long as nobody complaining. As long as nobody. Uh. No. Don't anybody complain. No complaints. You could just about do almost, almost, almost anything. Yeah, but, you know, the Police. Police never had to come to the Elks home for anything.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:25:38] That's great. Is there anything else about the Elks you want to mention before we move on to a different topic?

Donald Taylor [02:25:45] I'm trying to think. I'm trying to think now Oh. Our Elks Lodge room is the only lodge room set up exactly the way a lodge is supposed to be set up.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:25:59] Okay. Yes, I was actually going to ask, like, can you describe the space for people who've never seen it before? Like.

Donald Taylor [02:26:07] Well, upstairs is a large building is a real, real, real large building. We have three floors, uh, is on 200 block of Henry Street, in fact its 227 North Henry Street, that's where it is, and it's been there forever.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:26:36] What does the inside look like?

Donald Taylor [02:26:37] Well. Uh huh. I mean, how can I? How can I? I don't know. Yeah, it is hard. It's hard to. Hard to. We have, uh, our lodge, uh, if you walk in the front door straight back, is

the auditorium. And a stage. And a stage. And, uh. Oh, yeah. We had a play, and I was involved in, and the play was called Purely Victorious. And it was all Elks members. And we had it at the Elks home at one time. And then it got so large. We had it at George Washington High School stage because it was a bigger place. And we have-

Oh, yes. This is important. When I was Exalted Ruler, I would have memorial- not memorial, honoring services for brothers if so, so many years and we would have it at the hotels here. We had honoring services for brother and for people in the community for meritorious service and for longevity and that sort of thing. And Dale Peppers was always there. And for Thanksgiving, she was the first one was there for Thanksgiving. She and her husband, Dr. Pepper. Which people don't realize; he was a member of NAACP. He kept a card in his pocket. He gave out the cards for people to join the NAACP. Dr. Pepper was. And Dale Peppers she helped me at City Hall. I had a problem at City Hall. And she came to bet for me again. That's why.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:29:09] That's great. Is there? I was going to move on maybe to the Third Baptist Church, but is there anything else about the Elks?

Donald Taylor [02:29:16] No, I think I think that's about it, man.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:29:19] No, I think that was great. I mean, I learned a lot.

Donald Taylor [02:29:22] Okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:29:22] I'm curious, you know, so now, you know, I know maybe. Let's start with, can you explain sort of for those who don't know, like what is Third Baptist Church?

Donald Taylor describes Third Baptist Church.

Donald Taylor [02:29:33] Third Baptist Church is a Baptist Church; you can say it's a Southern Baptist church. Uh huh. And, uh. I've been. My whole family grew up in Third Baptist Church. My grandmother, great grandmother, was a charter member. A charter member of the church. Uh-

Francesco De Salvatore [02:30:05] What was your grandmother's name again?

Donald Taylor [02:30:07] Uh, Emma Thomas.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:30:09] Emma Thomas. Helped out.

Donald Taylor [02:30:12] And, uh.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:30:14] When was it found?

Donald Taylor [02:30:16] Uh, it's 109, 110 years old, so it's that old. And I was baptized about 29 years ago. I wasn't baptized until I was a grown person. I was grown. I was going to church, but I wasn't baptized, I wasn't baptized.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:30:46] Why weren't you baptize?

Donald Taylor [02:30:48] Oh, I just didn't do it, you know. Just didn't do it. You know, I kept saying that I was young out in the street and doing things that maybe I shouldn't have been doing and I didn't want to join church and still do the same thing. And so that was basically the reason

why I didn't. I wasn't doing real bad things, but the point is I wouldn't be, I wouldn't be comfortable going to church every Sunday. Mhm. And I would down at the Elks home that Saturday night. Jump up and down like a like a rabbit. You know what I mean? That's. That's what I'm talking about. Yeah. And. Oh, Lord. Now to get back to the Elks home again, we had ministers. We had ministers. I mean, ordained ministers that are members of the Elks. Uh. Uh, uh, Reverend Stanton was a member. And we had an Exalted Ruler about four years ago, that was an ordained, ordained minister. See when some things come up, I go back on some things. I hate to do this to you.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:32:24] No, it's fine.

Donald Taylor relates on what he did as leader for the Elks.

Donald Taylor [02:32:25] But when I was Exalted Ruler, I didn't have any friends. And, I mean, I had a, I had a saying every night. Meeting started. I would say, 'The only reason you are here at this meeting here tonight is to vote yay or nay, for the benefit of the lodge'. I don't have any friends. No friends. When it came to lodge meeting.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:33:08] So when you were the exalted leader in the Elks, like like what were some of the decisions that you, you know, that have been made? And like what were some of the things that that you helped start?

Donald Taylor [02:33:19] Okay, okay. Okay. Okay. We had a, uh. The city made Elk Week. Elk Week. They didn't recognize us, and the city council voted one night. When was.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:33:33] When was that? When did they start Elk Week?

Donald Taylor [02:33:35] Just. Just. Just a proclamation saying that-

Francesco De Salvatore [02:33:38] No, I mean, like, when?

Donald Taylor [02:33:40] Man. I don't I really don't know. I don't want to give a date and it's wrong. And at the Black History Museum, they had a whole month of **Elkdom** up there, for a whole month here. We had a display up there with our regalia. Pictures on the wall. Everything for. Just for a whole month, up at the Black History Museum. And, as I was Exalted Ruler, I made Earl Lloyd, which is the first black NBA basketball player. I made him an honorary member of the lodge. I have pictures with us when we we're doing that, you know, giving him his honorary membership. That thing is, you know when I'm talking, one thing leads to something else. And it hardly just makes everything-

Francesco De Salvatore [02:34:59] Cohesive. I mean, I get it. Yeah. You know, the. You know, its organic, you know. That makes sense.

Donald Taylor [02:35:03] So. And.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:35:04] Uh. Yeah. Was there anything else during your time? When you when you're the exalted leader that that you, you know, like what were some of the decisions that had to be made?

Donald Taylor [02:35:13] Okay. Uh. We had a lot of structural problems. For one thing we had a financial problem, we had a loan at the bank. And it was a- what do you call that kind of loan? We had to pay it off in so many. So many, so many years, and we didn't have the money to pay it off at the time. So. Uh. I've got the daughters and the brothers; we had a meeting and we decided how to

do it so in one year we paid all of this. We paid off all of this off. I forget what you call this, but all the money basically went on a principal- on an interest and very little on the principal. Which we didn't know at the time. We know that it was a low Bank note. But at the end of end of that year, you had to pay it off. You had to pay it all. And I had the brothers and daughters. And we just went on trips. We sold dinners. And the daughters, they say that we have X amount of money. I can't tell you what it was, at the end of the year. We have X amount of money if you [the brothers] had X amount of money. And that's what we did. And at the end of the year, we went and paid it off. They didn't want to take the money. They wanted to refinance. They wanted to keep doing refinancing, you know? But we paid it off. Uh huh. We paid it off. Plus. Uh. Uh.

We had to put in a new roof on the lodge and we had a problem with a pipe breaking inside the wall. And when they came in, they took it off there, they said, it was in the kitchen to the bathroom to the kitchen, the pipes. And when they came in, they had to take the whole wall out. Plus. Plus, in the bathroom they dug up. They found out that we might have had to have problem with. Uh. What you call it? When. When the, uh. Uh. So much waste had gotten into the ground. Yeah. So, we had to have that fixed and uh. What else? I'm trying to. I'm trying to. The problem we had was basically seemed like if you owned a home, you have to update it and keep it-And this is what I think is important. At one time they didn't have too much as far as the city coming in and looking at your property and stuff. Yeah. We had, um. We had a stove and we cooked. The city came in and said that we can't use the stove anymore because we don't have a vent. Alright, then they told us that we can't do any cooking because we don't have a certified food handler, person. Alright, then they will come in and they will come in and check the refrigerators and make sure that they were correct. And then the police came in and said that we had to put a crash bar on the doors. One, we didn't have any. I'm not saying that it's bad. A crash bar is a good thing to have. But what I'm saying is that. Uh. Every time you turn around somebody from the city was coming in inspecting you. Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:40:55] How did it make you feel? That this is happening?

Donald Taylor [02:40:57] At the time, I felt like they were taking advantage of us. Maybe they were or maybe they weren't, maybe they were doing it for, you know, but I look back on some of the things that they did recommend should have been done. I mean, we should have done it, like the wiring, some electrical wiring that was right. And we had that done so far. It was good up until this point. All them years they were working. They were functioning right. Yeah. You know, but then all of a sudden, everything is bad. And we had to have it corrected. And one thing, when I first came across what happened, we weren't supposed to sell alcohol. Which we were doing. Which we were doing. When the ABC people came in and with the undercover people, and they closed us down for a while. And I hadn't been sworn in [as exalted ruler] a week.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:42:25] Yeah.

Donald Taylor [02:42:26] But then all that fell on me. I didn't know. I didn't know where to get started. But. But we overcame it. We overcame it. And that's it so, and I'll like to give a shout out to the **Fallon people**. They looked out for us as far as knowing we got to the point where we couldn't pay all bills and so forth and they never came down on us hard on anything. You got to give the devil credit if its due, you know. Yea. Yea.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:43:11] No. Thank you for sharing all that. Yeah, I think its all very- And I'm sorry that you had the experience.

Donald Taylor [02:43:18] Yeah, well, it was an experience that teaches you different things, though. I mean, that's part of life.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:43:25] What did it teach you?

Donald Taylor [02:43:29] That all that glitters is not gold.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:43:31] Yeah, sure.

Donald Taylor [02:43:32] I mean, I mean, you can get away with something for so long, but sooner or later, if you go alone, you catch up with you. We knew. We knew. We. We knew we were wrong. But it was a way of making a buck, a way of making a buck. I mean. I mean, we weren't supposed to sell liquor over the bar. And now it is a strict thing right now. The brothers have their own locker. We have our lockers. And ABC board has authority to come into any place where liquor has a license. It can go into any locker that it wants to go into. And we have to have a key. A key to get in anybody's locker. We have about 40-50 lockers down there, but the key. If they [ABC] want to come in and say, 'I want to go into this locker', you have to open up for them, if you don't, they break it open. And you need a license. One time, we had the bands. We didn't have to go down and get a license. But now. But now you have to go down and get a license. Get a license for everything.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:45:08] Yeah. I want to make sure that we, we have about 10, 20 more minutes. I want to make sure we get to the things that you had wanted to get. Is there anything about the Third Baptist Church really quick. That we really kind of talked about, you know, that, you.

Donald Taylor [02:45:27] We are a giving church.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:45:34] Why did you decide to get baptized?

Donald Taylor [02:45:36] Why did I?

Francesco De Salvatore [02:45:37] Yeah, like why?

Donald Taylor reflects on his faith.

Donald Taylor [02:45:38] I just felt so much stuff happened to me. That just felt like it had to be a supreme being over me, cause so much stuff happened in my life.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:45:52] What? What? What happened in your life?

Donald Taylor [02:45:55] Oh, man, from operations. Uh. you know, from my operations and, uh. And my sister. Mm. And, you know, and my sister and that's the bad part. But then I looked at it. Uh, how fortunate I was, uh, how fortunate I was. So, I had to be thankful, so, I'm just thankful and as a trustee, we just had our church remodel. Another part of the board that, uh, signed off on the money and getting things done right, I was a part of that. So, I feel good about that. Plus, I sang in the choir.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:47:02] Yeah. How long did you sing in the choir?

Donald Taylor [02:47:05] About three. About four years.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:47:08] Oh, so, like recently.

Donald Taylor [02:47:10] Recently. Yeah. Recently

Francesco De Salvatore [02:47:13] Can you think of a song?

Donald Taylor [02:47:15] Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Singing song. Uh. Just a Closer Walk with Thee. Yeah, yeah. And, uh.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:47:24] That's a good song.

Donald Taylor [02:47:25] Yeah, that's my favorite. That's my favorite song.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:47:29] That's great.

Donald Taylor [02:47:30] So, and the Pastor made a comment saying that, uh, 'I know your mother would be proud to see you if she was here now, if she was living. I'm just thankful person and I'm thankful for my wife. I've been married since 1952. We got married in 1952. It would have been about 70 years now if she was living. And during that time-

Francesco De Salvatore [02:48:07] What's your wife's name?

Donald Taylor [02:48:08] Jean. Jean.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:48:12] How did you guys meet?

Donald Taylor [02:48:13] Oh, we knew each other, we've known each other all our lives because of Alexandria. And we went to the prom, the high school prom together. And that's when we started dating. Yeah, so that was it.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:48:34] And how would you describe her? Like. Like what was she like?

Donald Taylor describes his wife, Jean.

Donald Taylor [02:48:37] Oh, she was full of life. Full of life. Bubbly. Uh. Free as you can be. You couldn't ask for a better, better mother. You couldn't ask for a better mother or a better wife. She was, uh. I don't believe any other person would have put up with me the way that she did.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:49:08] What are some of your favorite memories with her?

Donald Taylor [02:49:13] Going to the Elks Convention with her. Going to the dances. And, uh, what else? Going to the dances.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:49:33] You just danced a lot?

Donald Taylor [02:49:34] Oh, yeah, she was a good dancer. She was a good dancer. A good dancer. And what happened, she was head strong. She was in the Elks, while I was Exalted Ruler. And what happened one day, we had a meeting to make a decision, I had to make a decision against the daughters, and at the meeting one daughter said, 'You know, you can't get mad because he's over us.' And Jean say, 'Let me tell you something, he's over y'all.' She got up and walked out and never came back. I mean, she never stopped me from going to the Elks home, but she never liked the idea that she was under us.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:50:35] What was the decision?

Donald Taylor [02:50:38] I can't you, Its Elks business.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:50:40] Oh, you can't tell me.

Donald Taylor [02:50:41] There was just some things that were going on and I hate to stop. That was part of my [inaudible]. And she said, 'He's over y'all'. And she got up and never came back. [Laughing]

Francesco De Salvatore [02:51:07] And you had how many kids with her?

Donald Taylor [02:51:09] Two.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:51:10] Two. Okay. And what are their names? What are your kids' names?

Donald Taylor [02:51:14] Yvette and Darnell, see I am the only one that calls Yvette, Francine. I call her Francine, I am the only one that calls her Francine. The only time I call her Evette is when I am around people that knows her as Evette, but I keep forgetting and I keep calling her Francine. And she's the sweetest. I just. I don't know what kind of adjective I can use to describe how sweet she is. She's a loving person. I'm at the point right now where I can't go and have my toenails done unless she's there. She's on pins and needles until I get back. I have to call her when I'm there, call her when I'm leaving, have to call her once I get home. And when she goes to the store, she's always buying me something. She's everything that a father asked of a woman and her husband is the same way. I was a mean person, in a way, when she got married, I didn't want her to get married. She just finished college. I didn't want her to get married. And that poor fella, man, he caught hell from me. But now, I keep telling everybody that If I have a son, I want him to be like her husband is. That's how close. That's how much I love him right now. Mm hmm. He made a good father. Uh. Oh, man, I can't beat him. He can't be beat as far as I'm concerned. I don't know what's going. You know, things happen that you don't know about. But I'm just saying, as far as I am concerned, he can't be beat.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:53:38] What are some of your favorite memories? You know, raising Yvette and Darnell.

Donald Taylor [02:53:45] Okay, when Francine. Yvette.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:53:52] Francine.

Donald Taylor [02:53:53] Yeah. Just seeing her in school. In high school as a cheerleader. Seeing her at a parade, George Washington parade. She walked down the parade with the cheerleaders. She was a good student. I fear and I know that I was too hard on her coming up, I didn't feel anybody was good enough for her, as my daughter. You know what I mean? That's I love them, both of them the same way. And my youngest daughter is ten years difference in Yvette and Darnell, and when Darnell was born, we never had to have a babysitter. Francine. Francine took care of her sister. She took care of her sister. And right now, they are still close.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:55:10] That's great.

Donald Taylor [02:55:11] They are close.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:55:15] As we close out, I'm just curious and this relates to what we're talking about with your children like. You know. If they. Like what advice wisdom do you want to give to your family? Is there anything that you know you want to impart to them going forward?

Donald Taylor shares advice for his family.

Donald Taylor [02:55:40] Have love and respect for everybody. If you have love and respect, everything else falls into place. And put nobody, nothing in front of your family. Your family. Your family should be first. Your family should be first in everything. And don't be afraid to share bad things or good things with your family. Just be honest. Be honest. Be honest with yourself. If you're honest with yourself, and you try and be the best, best person or best people that you can be. Most of the time, things are gonna work out good for you.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:56:52] What do you hope for your children? For Evette and Darnell.

Donald Taylor [02:56:56] Basically, I hope good health. Cause if you have bad health, then nothing else matters in your life. Good health. And I would like for them to be successful in whatever, whatever they desire to be or whatever, whatever they want, whatever they decide to do in life, I want them to be successful. I want them to be the best that they can be at whatever they're trying, they're trying to accomplish.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:57:39] What about for your grandchildren? What do you hope for their future?

Donald Taylor [02:57:44] For the grandchildren to look after, to look after their mother and father, to make sure that the mother and father are taken care of, just like me. I am just so blessed. Young man. Very few. I won't say very few, but I've seen cases when a family member reaches a certain age, they don't wanna be bothered with them. But for me, I am included in everything that they do. I get calls from our grandchildren. In fact, I got a call from my granddaughter the other day. I feel like I'm wanted. And I don't say it embarrassing sometimes, but sometimes they slightly going out of their way to show how they feel toward me. And the great grandchildren are coming the same way. All my children got keys to my house. My grandchildren when they come in, they'd go to the refrigerator. They don't have to ask me for nothing.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:59:28] That's great. And I have one more question. So, if you could hold on to any memory from your life forever, what would that memory be?

Donald Taylor [02:59:43] Let me think. I got to think on this one.

Francesco De Salvatore [02:59:46] I know it's a hard one. Take your time.

Donald Taylor [02:59:50] Well, there's a couple of them. Marriage. I have so many of them. Marriage. Oh, when Francine was crowned homecoming queen. Oh. Uh. I had my first grandson. I remember my first. So many. You know, for me to say just one thing.

Francesco De Salvatore [03:00:35] It would be a lot.

Donald Taylor [03:00:36] It would be a lot. I can understand the question, but I can't answer that way that. [Coughs] There's so many good memories.

Francesco De Salvatore [03:00:58] Do you want some water?

Donald Taylor [03:01:04] Yeah. The good memories outweigh the bad ones all the time. I don't have too many bad memories. The only bad memories are when I lost a loved one. But as a Christian you're not supposed to think like that. But I'm only human.

Francesco De Salvatore [03:01:34] Well. Thank you, Mr. Taylor, for sharing all this with me. Is there anything before we close out that you want to just say?

Donald Taylor [03:01:44] I just want to say thank you for trying to decipher what I'm trying to say.

Francesco De Salvatore [03:01:52] No, that's not deciphering. You're a good storyteller.

Francesco De Salvatore [03:01:57] You're a good storyteller.

Donald Taylor [03:01:59] And just I wish you the best. You and your partner, the best in life. And you're welcome to stop by here anytime you want to.

Francesco De Salvatore [03:02:11] I'll be back.

Donald Taylor [03:02:12] You and your wife and anybody can stop by. You're welcome to stop by any time. You can stop by. You can call in unannounced.

Francesco De Salvatore [03:02:21] I'll definitely stop by.

Donald Taylor [03:02:24] All right. And this has just been an experience to me. I've never done this before. So, you have to overlook all the mistakes that I made.

Francesco De Salvatore [03:02:33] There's been no mistakes. You've been great. Yeah, no thanks again. Thank you.