



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



Oral History Interview

with

Jim Lewis

Interviewer: *Francesco De Salvatore*

Narrator: *Jim Lewis*

Location of Interview:
Private Home in Alexandria, VA

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Transcriber: *Terilee Edwards-Hewitt*

Summary:

Jim Lewis discusses growing in the Seminary neighborhood of Alexandria, attending segregated Alexandria Public Schools, and his family's connections to Oakland Baptist Church and the Virginia Theological Seminary. He speaks about his Quander family ancestors on his mother's side and his father's Lewis family. Mr. Lewis shares how he and three other African American players broke the color barrier on the West Virginia University basketball team in 1964. Additionally, Mr. Lewis discusses his father's work for the labor leader John L. Lewis (no relation) who lived at the Lee-Fendall House in Alexandria, Virginia.

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General	Segregation; Education; Quander family history; Basketball; United Mine Workers
People	John L. Lewis (labor leader); Earl Lloyd;
Places	Alexandria, Virginia; Seminary neighborhood; Virginia Theological Seminary Okland Baptist Church; Parker-Gray High School; Lee-Fendell House; West Virginia University; Accra, Ghana

JIM LEWIS:	Hi. I'm Jimmy Lewis. I'm 75 years of age, and this is the 6th of October 2022. And I'm speaking from my home location in Alexandria, Virginia, my hometown.
Francesco De Salvatore:	Great. My name is Francesco and it's October 6th, 2022. I'm with Jimmy Lewis, here at his lovely home. So let's start from the beginning. Um, so where were you born, Jimmy?
JIM LEWIS:	I was born December 15th, 1946, in Alexandria, Virginia. The fifth and only boy of five children of James Lewis Jr and Eunice Quander Lewis. Both of my parents are native Alexandrians and we had just the best in life, through the efforts of our parents, who were the best parents that anyone could ever experience. So being the baby and the only boy, there were certain benefits, if you will, that went with that. Now my sisters were wonderful to me. They really were teachers in a sense, especially my sister Janice, who was 8 years older than I am. And she felt like she was inspired to get into teaching, which she did ultimately, becoming a professor at George Mason University, because of her efforts to teach me when I was a young child. So it was a great, great life early on in our existence.
Seminary Neighborhood	
Francesco De Salvatore:	That's great. So what's the neighborhood that you were born in?
JIM LEWIS:	Yeah. I can't believe I didn't mention Seminary already. No. Yeah, we were all living in Seminary, which is a confluence of Quaker Lane, Duke Street, King Street. Some people back in the day referred to it as Mud Town. Um, there were pockets of Black families that lived in different areas of Alexandria, and the western part of Alexandria was known as Seminary because of the influence of the Virginia Theological Seminary, where my grandfather, James Lewis Senior, worked for 27 years. And my father was actually born on the grounds there and worked there for a short period of time. So Seminary was a fabulous place to grow up, and [the] love and support of our relatives, and neighbors, and friends. And to this day, when people ask me where I'm from, I'll say Seminary before I will say Alexandria. So it, it's close to my heart.
Francesco De Salvatore:	Yeah. Why is it so close to your heart?
JIM LEWIS:	Well, again, you know, you knew what you knew. And we knew love, and we knew support, and we knew encouragement, and we knew levels of expectation. And that was born out of, again, my family, but also our extended family, if you will, because of the proximity in which Seminary allowed our church to impact us. My father was chairman of the deacon board at Oakland Baptist Church, just four blocks from where we lived.

	<p>And that type of supportive and encouraging environment created confidence in us.</p> <p>You know, I'll never forget how my father was so comfortable in leading church services as the chairman of the deacon board for 40 years. And his father was a deacon before him. So those examples of leadership gave me, and I wasn't even aware at the time I'm sure, you know, let's say a 5, 6, 7 year old, young fellow, you know, how that would manifest itself in in knowing that I could, yes, do the same types of things as I was seeing my father do in front of, you know, audiences. And so Seminary, yeah, was special. We, we had a lot of pride in everything we did. I mean, again, being a segregated environment that Alexandria was, the schools were segregated, we went to Lyles-Crouch Elementary School and then all of us went to Parker-Gray High School. So the pride of the City of Alexandria from the Black community perspective was, was powerful. And we certainly benefited from those who achieved before us in all disciplines: medicine, law, the military, the ministry, public service, federal government work, were all entities that impacted the Black community in Alexandria.</p>
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>Right. So what, what are some of your earliest memories in Seminary? Can you paint us an image of like, little Jimmy in Seminary?</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Oh, yeah. Yeah. We live next to the woods. Okay. You know, there was definitely a rural aspect to it. You know, again, in the [19]40s and 50s, we had dirt roads, we had outdoor plumbing facilities, if you will, outhouses. We remember my father tell stories. I didn't see it myself, but my father would share stories about how the great world champion Joe Louis would run past our neighborhood. It was part of his training routines on a dirt road, which at that time Quaker Lane was not Quaker Lane, it was Seminary Road.</p> <p>And then again we lived at 1607 Quaker Lane, but it was just say, very free to be me type of environment where I felt comfortable, uh, traveling, if you will, 3, 4, 5, 6 blocks that, that may have made up the entity, the entirety rather of Seminary. We're not talking about a large area, but I knew everyone, everyone knew me. And, um, you know, those soul stories of, you know, if you did less than what your parents expected of you, then you would be held accountable, you know, from social media. No, [laughs] no social media, just, you know, letting young people know that high expectations were being observed and held for all of us. So now I just, I was an outdoor kid. You know, we have, had quite a variety of fruit trees, cherry trees, apple trees, peach trees, extensive gardens. We raised chickens and we, meaning there were two homes on this acreage, and I want to make it sound so expansive, but our grandfather and grandmother</p>

	<p>lived in the same area where we live. So they were at 1609 and we were at 1607. Two separate residences. And one of my aunts and uncles lived there with their families, my cousins, Jessie, Alfred, and Alvin. So we had instant playmates without having to leave our, you know, area where, where we grew up. But, you know, swinging in the trees on makeshift swings. Jumping from limb to limb. Thinking that we were, you know, Tarzan or, you know, we didn't have any kind of gymnastic examples of Olympians doing that. But I look back again with the, with the fondness of always being happy and free and, and experiencing outdoor life and learning how to pitch horseshoes at an early age, and dig in the garden and pick up eggs that were ready from the chicken coop. And so, yeah, nothing but, nothing but love.</p>
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<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>Yeah. What's it like to recall these memories about Seminary?</p>
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The Importance of Local Role Models

<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Well, you know, I go back there, you know. Those homes are now gone and they're business establishments. But I go back there occasionally just to get out and reminisce, you know, mentally and if not visually about, you know, where I learned how to live. And you learn how to make good, smart decisions. And so many of my friends that I grew up with, in fact, I was with many of them yesterday and [on] Wednesday once a month we meet. We call ourselves the old dogs because all of us went to and or graduated from Parker-Gray High School and we were the Bulldogs, Parker-Gray. And so guys in their seventies and eighties now get together and, uh, you know, talk about the old days. And several of my friends, we're lifelong friends in terms of growing up in Seminary with me, so I've known them from the time we all, you know, tried to throw a football, or hit a baseball, or shoot a basket, sometimes on dirt surfaces. Certainly with football and baseball they were dirt. But even basketball, it was, it was a special place, that at the time we didn't even know what role models meant. But we all had 2 role models, in particular 2 Black men who were always there to help organize games. They were about 15 years or so older than we were. One was my uncle, Herman Lewis, and another one, Herman has passed now. Another one is Taft [spelling?] Henry, who we spoke of yesterday at our Bulldogs luncheon. And Taft is 92 and we have let him and my uncle know just how important they were in our lives growing up, because they, they showed us without doing anything except living their lives, about how to conduct themselves. So, yeah, it was special. Seminary</p>
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	will always be special, it was something in the air about Seminary. [laughs] Yeah.
Francesco De Salvatore:	Can you maybe describe some of the neighbors like, like who? Some neighbor that stands out to you, memories with them.
Neighbors and Friends in the Seminary Neighborhood	
JIM LEWIS:	Well, again, some of our neighbors were cousins, first cousins, you know, and a lot of us, if not most of us, the guys especially had nicknames. So when we reminisce again in our meetings, the luncheons, you know, someone may mention a name like Butch, it's incredible in terms of name recognition in memory. And so Butch is a retired Washington, D.C. police officer and detective, and he'll mention a name and I'll say, "Oh, doesn't ring a bell, what was his nickname, Butch?" And he'll say, "his nickname, oh, yeah, it was Shotgun, you know, it was, you know, Fat Daddy. I mean, the getting the nickname, the nicknames were all born out of love. But some of them, you know, were so unique, as we say them today. So, yeah, some were my relatives. Shotgun, I'll give you a quick anecdote, a story. Shotgun, and when we all got BB guns for Christmas, so let's say we're, you know, 11, 12 years old. And we would go out in the woods and, you know, shoot cans or occasionally shoot a bird. And Shotgun at some point became focused on not only shooting birds but hanging them back in trees. [laughs] It's, it's a terrible thing, but it's a memory. And I don't know why he did that, not on a regular basis, but um, and I love him to death, his name is Floyd Clayton Bradby. Shotgun is the nickname. So we can, we can laugh about that today, he lives in Richmond, Virginia. And, so yeah, so many things we did. And, you know, by the grace of God, we all made it through, if you will. Some of us, you know, certainly had setbacks, whether they were injuries or different kinds of challenges. But, uh, we're still here today having fun as friends.
Francesco De Salvatore:	That's great. That's great. Could you maybe describe the house you grew up in for those who, you know, obviously haven't seen it? Like, what did it look like?
Description of his family's house in Seminary	
JIM LEWIS:	It was a mansion [laughs] built on a hill. No. My father had it built and things were added to it as the family expanded. So my oldest sister, Naomi, was born 2 years after my parents were married, and they were married for 61 years. And so initially there were 2 bedrooms where my parents lived and where Naomi, and then Barbara, our second oldest sister, had lived. And then when Janice was born, our third oldest sister, the 3 of them slept in the same bedroom. And then when Ruth was born, our fourth oldest

	<p>sister, the 4 of the girls slept in the same bedroom. So 2 in a bed, maybe 1 on a couch, because we had a little, you know, living room area, and then a kitchen area, and then a bathroom that eventually got, you know, indoor plumbing, and my parent's bedroom. But when I was born, they built a separate bedroom for me. It was my sister's—you're married today, it's just how you know, how special it was to finally get that boy, you know? You know? And I'm James Lewis, the third, I mentioned my grandfather and father of the same name. So. And then eventually we put a porch on the front. There was a garage next to our house where my dad, who loved cars and as a profession, he was a chauffeur for 65 years for a number of presidents of the United Mine Workers of America.</p> <p>So, I remember jumping off those rooftops of the barn or the garage. And just again, feeling free to fly. Yeah. And Michael Jordan didn't have, you know, the copyrights on the "I believe I can fly back" in the [19]50s. So, yeah, it was a very modest house, but nonetheless, one that was filled with love. And in fact, my good friend Butch, again, who is a minister at Oakland Baptist Church, says he always, not always, but he remembers, you know, looking at our house when he would pass and it would be behind the fence. And I had never heard that reference before. But, you know, we had a fence where you would enter our property and my grandfather's property and uh, so yeah, yeah, it was great.</p>
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>That's great. So you already talked a little bit about your, your parents and their families, right? But yeah, let's can we dig into that a little bit? Can you maybe talk about, lets start with your father, so who was your father?</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Yes. James Lewis, Jr. Born October 28, 1910 in Alexandria on the property, on the grounds of the Virginia Theological Seminary, the oldest of 12 children of James Lewis, Senior and Minnie Roy is her maiden name, Lewis. So my dad was brilliant and like a lot of a lot of people of his generation, he wasn't able to finish school because he was the oldest of 12 and he had to go to work to help support the family.</p> <p>And so we always felt like because of his lifelong work and the records, literally, that he would be responsible for, and we now can see them at the Lee-Fendell House Museum, where he worked for so many years. But he kept copious notes with ledgers, with detailed information about the expenditures as he ran that household, primarily for John L. Lewis, the president of the United Mine Workers. So we always felt that our dad could be, could have been and was, a tremendous accountant, someone with a bright mind for numbers. And he believed in saving and investing. And subsequently, he and my mother built a new home in 1963, the summer before my senior year in high school. So we moved because of his efforts and my mother's efforts, who worked outside the home occasionally. She was a domestic worker. She was the first May Queen at</p>

	<p>Parker-Gray, which was a huge distinction. Back then, Parker-Gray began in 1920, and my mother was born in 1915 and married my dad at an early age. So she was gorgeous, physically, just beautiful woman from the famous Quander family, the oldest Black documented family in this country, straight out of Ghana, Accra, the capital where we visited and where there are references to the Quanders. And she was 1 of 12 children, just as my dad was from his family. So together they made a life for us that we really enjoyed.</p> <p>And my mother was a big sports fan, so she really enjoyed watching my sister Naomi play first. In fact, Naomi will be inducted into the Alexandria Athletic Hall of Fame in 2 days, Saturday, October the 8, because she was a tremendous athlete, primarily basketball player at Parker-Gray, and held the scoring record there until the school closed, and taught me how to play the game. In fact, when I was like 12 or 13 and started to think I was pretty good and smelling myself as the phrase may go, the guys would say, Yeah, Jimmy, you pretty good, but your sister Naomi was bad. So, so our mother really enjoyed, she had more time to follow us and see us play. Joys of my life was, uh, you know, being able to perform with, with your parents in the stands.</p>
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The Quander Family

<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>And maybe talk about, you know, what, what do you know about your, about the Quander family history on your mom's side? Any stories, anything, that you want to share about about that.</p>
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<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Absolutely. And thank you for asking that because, on the third Saturday of this past August, we had our ninety-seventh consecutive Quander family reunion. Which speaks to, again, the continuity, obviously, of the family, the commitment to tell its history in the variety of ways, orally as well as visually.</p> <p>And, um, but yes, the Quanders of Virginia and D.C. and Maryland and Pennsylvania and New Jersey, have all shared in this rich tradition that started from Ghana in West Africa during the slave trade. Then we went back to Ghana in 2016, my wife Karen and our children Jennifer and Chris. And we saw in one of the slave castles. It was a commercial area where they were selling t-shirts and the like, a plaque and a picture. And the plaque said many African Americans have traced their ancestral roots to Ghana, most notably the Quander family. And we're like, Whoa! But here we are across the waters and they have a plaque on the wall recognizing our family. And the picture next to the plaque was taken in the [19]80s, and it was around the dinner table with maybe 12, 15 people. And we saw</p>
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	<p>2 of our cousins who, you know, grew up right here in Alexandria, Linda and Diane Quander, and they were there visiting. So our family roots, roots are deep and it's wonderful to be able to know them and to experience them and to continually tell the stories to the next generation through our annual Quander reunion. We had about 200 people, uh, family members at this ninety-seventh consecutive family reunion. Got my little green t-shirt with the, you know, it's such a source of pride. So, yeah, when I when I say my mother was a Quander, it's something that really resonates in so many ways with people, particularly in the DMV.</p>
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>Mm hmm. Are there any stories that your, that your grandparents shared or your mom shared? Any stories that stick out about the family, about the Quander family?</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Well, we have a cousin who was the first African American tour guide at Mount Vernon, where a number of the family members are buried in the slave cemetery there. And she told stories about the family and about its existence and, you know, the whole relationship between George Washington, Martha Washington and the Quander family. And so Gladys Hansel was her name. And we also have a cousin named Jay Quander, who was the director of Food and Beverages at Mount Vernon Estate for over a decade and developed a tremendous reputation in the culinary field and now has just recently opened a fabulous new restaurant on 110 South Pitt Street, little pub there. And it's called 1799 Prime. And it's quite an establishment. We were fortunate to be there for the grand opening just a month or so ago. And outside, he's hired an artist to do a mural that is extravagant, that that shows pictures of slave ships, ships coming from Africa to the United States, and then the Quander family being impacted through Mount Vernon and this outside area, seating area for about 30 people. Just as a reflection, again, of how the next generation is continuing to share the story, the stories, from a business standpoint and from a historical standpoint of everything that we've experienced. So yeah, the kind of family lives on.</p>
<p>The Lewis Family</p>	
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>That's great. And yeah, maybe you also describe your father's side, the Lewises.</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Yes. My grandfather was from Haymarket [Virginia], out west near Gainesville, and, uh, he at the age of 17 came into Alexandria, his father's name was Mack Lewis. And so we've done the genealogy, and my sister Naomi again was the true historian of the family. The first on either the Lewis or Quander side to go to college at Virginia State University now, where 3 of my sisters attended as well and graduated from. But my</p>

grandfather came to Alexandria and worked at the Virginia Theological Seminary, as I mentioned, as a janitor for 27 years.

And many of the families in Seminary worked at the seminary establishment, you know, because of proximity, obviously, being able to walk to work and being gainfully employed as they literally helped to build the Virginia Theological Seminary and keep it thriving and growing. And so my grandfather's presence started as a teenager in Alexandria. And as I mentioned, he was a deacon at Oakland Baptist Church, which was involved and still is with the Fort Ward area, which is Seminary up the hill and across from Virginia Theological Seminary. And my grandmother's and other family members are buried there. And there's a historical marker with my father, a picture of my father and my grandfather, both in front of the reflecting pool in Washington, D.C., around 1940. And with the history that goes into their involvement as deacons at Oakland Baptist Church and The Ward, they called it Fort Word. Up from Minnie Howard [campus], I guess is T.C. Williams extension, whatever, not T.C. Williams [now called Alexandria City High School]. But anyway, there at the Braddock Road.

So my grandfather was a quiet man, very humble. I see myself physically in him, even though I look just like my father. But he was tall and rode a bike. And again, he was in the neighborhood, he was in the proximity, you know, just steps away from where our house was. That's where he and his wife and children were raised. So the Lewis family is not as well known in terms of yearly get togethers, reunions, and the like, like the Quander family. But a lot of that is changing with our younger generation really doing the genealogy and the connections and in fact, the Virginia Theological Seminary. As a number of seminary families, including the Lewis family, as recipients of the reparations program that they have begun in this wonderful banquet, a gala ball, that they conducted on June the third, where 200 of the descendants of those who worked at the seminary, including my grandfather, were there to tell the stories and to be recognized by the seminary for the types of injustices that went on there. We're going back on the 16th, a week from this Sunday, of October and will participate in a program that's a dinner and then a play called Dust, D-U-S-T, because they are in the midst of their bicentennial celebrating their two-hundredth anniversary at the Virginia Theological Seminary. So it's a, it's a close community proximity wise. We played there as kids. We ice skated there on the pond. As kids, we were on the big field playing football as kids and always felt welcome. I mean, no one came and ran us off. It was a different time, obviously, but it was home. And, you know, I didn't know all the history that was inherent with the seminary when I was growing up, you know, in terms of my father and my grandfather and their existence there. But it was just a place where we obviously saw opportunities to enjoy ourselves as young people.

His Father's Work with Labor Leader John L. Lewis	
Francesco De Salvatore:	That's great. That's great. I have to ask that, do you have any memories, because you mention that your dad was a chauffeur for—?
JIM LEWIS:	John L. Lewis
Francesco De Salvatore:	John L. Lewis, right. So you have a memory that about John L. Lewis or any stories that your dad shared about him? Probably dozens—.
JIM LEWIS:	<p>Quite a few. In fact, I'll start by saying that I'm really grateful to have been selected as a member of the board of the Lee-Fendall House Museum just 2 months ago. And I'm going to tell the stories of my father's work there as a chauffeur and manager of the house. I alluded to earlier some of his responsibilities. And so, yeah, John L. Lewis was a significant figure in our family, in the work relationship that he had with my father. The stories are told and they're true of where John L. Lewis, his summer home in Fort Myers, Florida, was where he and his family vacationed. And my father and John L. Lewis didn't fly. So my father would drive him from Alexandria to Fort Myers, Florida, in the [19]40s and 50s through the segregated South, North and South Carolina, Georgia, and on down into Florida.</p> <p>And because of the Green Book, my father was aware of where Black establishments existed for housing and for food for African Americans in the Deep South. But occasionally, um, they would stop and enter a restaurant. And on this occasion, the story is told that John L. Lewis and my dad would walk in and the person, the owner, recognizes John L. Lewis, because of his international notoriety as the president of the United Mine Workers. And he said, Mr. Lewis, I'm sorry we can't serve the man with you, whether he said "the man" or not. And [that] is food for thought, perhaps. But John L. Lewis immediately said, "Well, no problem. Okay, then in that case, I'll take 2 steaks and 2 baked potatoes and 2 salads." And so he helped and protected my father and helped to provide my father in a circumstance that was unwelcoming.</p> <p>And so they had an unusual relationship, in that certainly it was employer-employee. But I have learned over the years that John L. Lewis really depended on my dad in so many ways. He was a confidante to John L. Lewis. For John L. Lewis, the relationships with the media were such that they would try to get information through my father about John L. Lewis, because he was a powerful figure and a controversial figure, if you will, for some of his decisions on unionization and the coal industry and the like. And my dad was a very loyal employee and friend. So it was it was unique for a White man and a Black man in the 40s and 50s to have that type of working relationship that was born out of respect. And that's the story that</p>

	<p>I'm happy to be able to continue to tell in the display room at the Lee-Fendall House that they've established to honor my father and his 38 years of working there.</p>
<p>The Importance of Sports in his Life</p>	
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>So that's great, that's great. So we, we haven't touched upon what is a big part of your life, right, which is basketball, sports, and so, you mentioned that your mom was a sport fan. So what's your earliest memory of sports, of you playing sports, of you being interested in it? What are some of your earliest memories of it?</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Clearly just having those role models and friends that I mentioned earlier, Taft Henry, my Uncle Herman, and Butch and Shotgun and guys in the neighborhood just out playing ball, you know, whatever the sport may have been. And I thought, and a lot of people agreed, I guess, that football was my best sport at the time. And I was 12 years old as an eighth grader at Parker-Gray High School because schools were structured that way. And where I could dunk a basketball at age 12, I thought I was going to be Jim Brown on the football field and unfortunately tore my knee, ruptured the ACL and meniscus and all, and that ended my football career. But, uh, I was blessed to be able to have good athletic ability. And I played and worked hard at developing my skills.</p> <p>And by the ninth grade, a year later, you know, I'm the best player on the basketball team, the varsity basketball team at age 13 at Parker-Gray. And for 3 years I was a leading scorer and leading rebounder and leading shot blocker, they didn't keep those stats back then, but the point was, I was All-City for the years that I played for Parker-Gray. And we went to the state championship game my junior year in 1963 and were state runners up. So the competition that I experienced at Parker-Gray, as did many of the athletes before me, including my sister Naomi in 1951. But Parker-Gray was an amazing school with fabulous teachers and administrators who did more with less than many other people. Everyone knows of the great Earl Lloyd. Graduated from Parker[-Gray] in 1946, became the first African American to play in the NBA [National Basketball Association] and became the second African American NBA coach.</p> <p>And so in the mid-fifties, Parker-Gray had a run of 3 consecutive state championships in boys basketball, [19]55, 56, 57, and in 57 they had accumulated 39 consecutive wins and were the number 1 ranked team in The Washington Post. And so the tradition and the excellence athletically, academically was clearly established. And I benefited from that with the coaching that I received, and my teammates as well, obviously. And so I</p>

	<p>enjoyed my time at Parker-Gray. I felt I really grew as a person. I was a member of the band, member of the choir, and basketball became a means by which I could go to college. And so I started receiving scholarship offers early. Earl Lloyd came back and helped to mentor and advise many of us, including myself. And when my family moved, as I mentioned earlier, in 1963, to move 5 miles to the Alexandria section of Fairfax County, where my wife and I now live. I finished my senior year in high school at Groveton High School and made the first team, all metropolitan basketball team in the Washington Post and made All-State and received a scholarship to play basketball at West Virginia University, where I broke the color barrier, along with three other brothers in 1964.</p> <p>So it was a sport I really enjoyed. Couldn't stay healthy, unfortunately, but, you know, we had good teams and great players at West Virginia University and we went to an NCAA tournament and an NIT tournament, and I had my moments where I was able to, you know, show the kind of talent, I guess, that had helped me to get that scholarship.</p> <p>But I just couldn't stay healthy, with two broken feet and another torn lead knee ligament, in my left knee, but graduated with a degree in journalism, which I enjoyed, working on the school newspaper there and won the William Randolph Hearst Scholarship for editorial writing at West Virginia University. And, um, and my college coach there at West Virginia, who did recruit me, Bucky Waters is his name, subsequently hired me three years later in 1971 as an assistant coach at Duke University on the men's basketball team. So that was the beginning of a 50 year, actually, I coached for 2 years before that at Tennessee State and Gannon College and had good teams. We went to the national championship game at Tennessee State in 1969 with 2 future NBA players. But I coached for 50 years on all levels, and it really started at Parker-Gray with the great coaches and teammates and, and the, uh, the legacy that was left by the Bulldogs of Parker-Gray who came before us.</p>
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>Great. So let's talk little bit about Parker-Gray. So, like can you maybe tell us, who are some of the coaches that really influenced your game?</p>
<p>Coaches who were Influential in his Life</p>	
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Well, I had one coach throughout my basketball career there, 3 years with the Varsity and that's Arnold Thurman. And he again was the coach of those 3 straight state championship teams in the 50s. Just a wonderful man, a native of West Virginia who graduated from Hampton Institute after serving in World War Two. And he knew what it was to work hard, to develop team chemistry, to develop all-around players. And so I felt very</p>

	<p>confident with my game because of his coaching. Never raised his voice, never cursed at us. Just always expected the best from us. And that was one of his sayings, just do the best you can, do the very best you can. And so we benefited from his coaching and also from the competition, which was amazing, you know, being a suburb, if you will, of D.C. But we played so many of the Washington teams and their great players. Dave Bing, at Spingarn, um, my sophomore year and he was a senior. And Dunbar High School and Eastern High School and Cardozo. Phelps, and then teams from Maryland like Fairmont Heights, and then some local close, uh, Black high schools, because again, all the schools were segregated then, uh, Luther Jackson in Merrifield, Virginia, which was the first Black high school in Fairfax County and Hoffman Boston High School in Arlington, Virginia. So those were close proximity schools, but we also had to get on that yellow bus before the Beltway even was in existence in the early sixties and drive out to Leesburg to play Douglas High School, or Jenny Dean in Manassas or Walker Grant in Fredericksburg or W.C. Taylor in Warrenton, Virginia.</p> <p>So we were prepared because we had good teammates. I had a 6'6" teammate named Charles Lightfoot who really helped me because I had to compete against him in height in practices every day. And I know he helped make me a better rebounder. Lewis Harris, who was a starting forward with me on that state championship runner up team in [19]63 who later was an All-American football player at Kent State and played 2 years with the Pittsburgh Steelers. Um, I mean, we really had excellent, uh, homegrown, you know, guys didn't transfer schools and, you know, the private schools weren't as dominant as they are now back in the day. So, yeah, Coach Thurman was a great coach.</p>
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>That's great. And can you talk about Earl Lloyd, right? Like when did Earl Lloyd come into your life?</p>
<p>Earl Lloyd</p>	
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>At age 12. Earl Lloyd came back, as he frequently did as a member of the Syracuse Nationals. He was also the first African American to be on an NBA championship team in 1955 with a guy named George King who I'll mention in a second. But Earl would come back because the NBA players weren't making that much money then, and he would work the playgrounds, run the playgrounds in the summer or substitute teach. So I remember vividly seeing this giant of a man at age 12, and he was always, you know, kicking somebody's butt on the playground. [laughs] You know, the guys, you know, who thought they were good. I mean, he was a pro, man, and 6'6", 225 [pounds]. Hey, you know, they called him the Moonfixer, Big Cat. But next to my father, who I loved dearly, Earl Lloyd, was the most significant male figure in my life because he cared. He cared</p>

	<p>about a lot of us. And so when I was being recruited, uh, his former teammate, George King, there's that name, with the Syracuse Nationals Championship Team in [19]55, had moved up from an assistant coaching job to the head coach at West Virginia University. And the scouting services and recruiting mechanisms were not as sophisticated then as they are now, and where I had some offers from, you know, local schools, American University in particular. But George King called his friend Earl Lloyd and said, Earl, I'm looking for some good players. And Earl said, have a guy right here named Jimmy Lewis. So they saw me play. They liked me. They offered me a scholarship, which I signed.</p> <p>And Earl also helped me with my first job before I got into coaching because he was an executive with Chrysler and because of my degree in journalism, there was an opening with Chrysler. I interviewed, didn't get it, but I got another position in the company and went to Detroit in 1968 right after the riots. Had a ball in Detroit, love that city, played semi-pro ball in Detroit at Saint Cecilia which is like the Rucker is to New York, St Cecilia, this cracker box little gem and Detroit had all the great players, Magic Johnson later on, and George Gervin later on, and Dave Bing, Jimmy Walker, members of the Pistons at the time would all play there.</p> <p>So fortunately I stayed healthy because as I said, I couldn't stay healthy at West Virginia University and I had a good experience playing there, but I was going to graduate school at night, working at Chrysler during the day, and where I didn't grow up wanting to be a coach, I wanted to be a pro basketball player. The role models that I had, Coach Thurman say Parker-Gray and Bucky Waters said West Virginia. And then Earl Lloyd, with his being a coach, assistant coach and scout with the Pistons, um, I asked if he could help me get into coaching, and Earl made a phone call to Tennessee State University in Nashville, Tennessee, and I was hired as the graduate assistant coach in 1969 and started coaching there. The freshman coach, um, didn't know what I was doing, but I had Ed "Too Tall" Jones, the former All-Pro defensive end with the Dallas Cowboys. Six foot, nine inches, 230 [pounds], was a center on our freshman team, and it was a lifelong beginning love affair with basketball as a coach from 1969 until 2019. So Earl Lloyd played a major role in my life and I'm so indebted to him. I was happy to be involved with the unveiling of the Earl Lloyd statue three years ago on October, April the third, which was his birthday, at the Charles Houston Rec Center.</p>
<p>Breaking the Basketball Color Barrier at West Virginia University</p>	
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>Can you maybe briefly talk about, um, you mentioned how you, you broke, you and 3 other guys broke the color barrier when you went to West Virginia. Can you talk about that experience? What was that like? You</p>

	<p>know, going over there, knowing that, you know, that you were doing this, right?</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Yeah. You know, again, going back to Earl, Earl taught us how basketball was a great equalizer. He would use that term because in 1950, October 31st, 1950, when he broke the color barrier in the NBA, you know, he was from this small school, West Virginia State College, and he was the 99th person drafted in the NBA draft that year, almost an afterthought. And a lot of his teammates, his rookie year, were from larger predominantly white schools, Ohio State, Southern California. But when practice began and the ball went up, everything became equal because it's a meritocracy. If you can play, you can play. And I think that my experiences on the playgrounds in Alexandria and in Washington, D.C., because the best players gravitate to where the best games are. So, um, where the schools were segregated, we played against interracial teams on the playgrounds and then my senior year in high school, to keep it in context, uh, I was the first basketball player in Fairfax County to break the color barrier then in 1963.</p> <p>So I had some experience, if you will, interacting and competing in the classroom and on the basketball court with White students. But my preparation from Parker-Gray and from my older sisters, who were teachers and principals and professors, and my parents who always emphasized education, my preparation was, it was more than I could ever dream of. And so when I decided to go to West Virginia University, my parents and I believed in Earl Lloyd, that what he told us about the head coach there, George King, his former teammate, was all we needed. And then we felt comfortable after we met the coach. But I didn't go there thinking, and it really wasn't discussed, that we were going to be the first African American basketball players there. I made the decision because of a lot of reasons, the academics, the coach, the basketball, certainly, because at that time, West Virginia was the second winningest program in the country behind Kentucky. UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] had not begun their 10 year championship reign then. And they had produced, you know, the great Jerry West 4 years before we went there. So I knew that I would be challenged in ways that would help me grow.</p> <p>And we were fortunate to have a great, all of us were pretty good. You can't get a scholarship to go to Division One college basketball unless you're talented in some areas obviously. And so I could do some things, I could really rebound. I was strong, I was quick. And I had been prepared through the coaching and the competition that I explained earlier. But my teammate, who I didn't know could walk and chew bubblegum at the same time, he was an all-American from West Virginia, Ron "Fritz" Williams and he ended up being an All-American at West Virginia University and was drafted by the Dallas Cowboys after we finished our basketball eligibility. And he never played one down a football at West Virginia, but</p>

	<p>he was a high school American football player as well. Sounds a little bit like an early LeBron James, just a tremendously elite world class athlete. So the four of us, Ron "Fritz" Williams, his teammate from Weir High in Weirton, West Virginia, Ed Harvard, who I just had lunch with last week here in Dumfries, where his son lives. He's a retired principal in New Jersey. Fritz, unfortunately, passed away in 2004 after a 9-year NBA career. He was a first round pick with the San Francisco Warriors, and he played with the Milwaukee Bucks, with Kareem and Oscar and finished with the Los Angeles Lakers. He was the best man in our wedding, but he was a better person than he was a basketball player. And I'm his daughter's godfather. And his son is like a son to me. And our fourth member of that class was Norman Holmes, who was a Marine out of Washington, D.C. He was my roommate early on, so I'm a 17-year-old freshman. And here's this 22-year-old man, a Marine. So he helped in so many ways from a maturity standpoint. So, yeah, it was great experience.</p>
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>That's great. And I mean, your injury in basketball really changed your life in some ways, right? Because you never anticipated becoming a coach, per se. So can you walk us through like what was it like for you to pivot away from playing to coaching?</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>I cried like a dog. I cried like a baby. Either one. No, I, I knew when we lost in the NIT, our senior year, our fourth year, my junior year, because I was redshirt, I had another year of eligibility left. But after blowing my knee out at West Virginia and breaking my foot twice at West Virginia, I knew that that was the end of my college career and I was in a position to graduate on time in 4 years. So, yeah, I cried in that locker room in Madison Square Garden because I knew that it was over. And, you know, the relationships and the experiences that you have with your teammates, just as I talked last week, as I said, with Ed Harvard. That's priceless. And so, thank God the opportunities presented themselves and the people helped me along the way. And coaching did provide a means by which I could have a profession and a career. And I don't regret a second of the 50 years except those games that we should have won. But it was a joy to work with young people on the high school, college level, boys and girls. USA Basketball level, professional level with the WNBA [Women's National Basketball Association]. I look back on it with nothing but the gratefulness.</p>
<p>Being a Basketball Coach</p>	
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>Yeah. Well, so like, what are some of your proudest moments from coaching basketball?</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Right at the top, it's easy for me because any time, you hear this all the time from coaches and players who have the opportunity and are fortunate</p>

	<p>enough to represent their country. But we won the first ever gold medal for the Junior World Championships with USA Basketball in Natal, Brazil, beat the Australian team with the great Lauren Jackson. We had the great Tamika Catchings and being a member of that coaching staff with USA Basketball was a source of pride that I had never experienced before. So I remember talking to the team and to my fellow coaches that in 1969 I came close to my first year at Tennessee State to winning a national championship. And here it was some 40 years later, and we had a chance. And I wanted to let them know how much I missed by not winning that championship at Tennessee State, and we got it this time. So, yeah, that was that was a highlight of my coaching career, working with those tremendous athletes with USA Basketball winning the gold medal for our country.</p>
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>That's great. Are there any other moments that stick out to you?</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Oh, yeah. So many games, you know, buzzer beaters and great players. And, you know, we had a great run at South Lakes High School as the boys coach there in the early eighties. Had a great player named Michael Jackson, who was a starting point guard at Georgetown when they won the national championship with Patrick Ewing. Um, 20 years later, had another great guard at T.C. Williams High School from Seminary, three blocks from where I grew up, named Tierra Ruffin Pratt. And she was a high school [All] American and later played in the WNBA for an 8 year stretch with the Washington Mystics and, uh, Los Angeles Sparks.</p> <p>And then, speaking of the Mystics, I was the first head coach of the Washington Mystics when Wes Unseld hired me in 1997. And that expansion team was, it was an exciting time for all of us, certainly for those of us who grew up here in the DMV [District, Maryland, and Virginia] and for me to help bring women's professional basketball to the Washington area was a sense of pride. And I'll never forget the first night of our home opener, we won the game and who's who in Washington, uh, power circles, females were there. Tipper Gore, Abe Pollin's wife, the mayor of D.C., Sharon Pratt Kelly, just on and on and on. And we had 22,000 people, you know, standing room only. And it was a great, great scene at the Capital Center or whatever they called it now, uh, in 1998. So yeah, a lot of great memories.</p>
<p>Coaching Women's Basketball</p>	
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>And can you talk about like. How did you get involved in coaching women's basketball? Because that—. How did that happen?</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Okay, that's good question. People ask me that a lot because I had coached men for the first 15 years of my life. Tennessee State for a year, Gannon</p>

	<p>for a year, Duke for 5 years, Tulane in New Orleans for 5 years, where our children were born. And then 3 years as head coach at South Lakes High School. So my sister Naomi again was a great player. And I saw, and I wasn't, you know, any kind of visionary, but I saw the great talent that was on the women's side with Cheryl Miller and some of the other iconic players in women's college basketball. There was no women's professional basketball then, and I was offered the head job at George Mason University to help them start their Division One women's program. And I really enjoyed that, moving into the Patriot Center and moving into the Colonial Athletic Association, and we had good success there. I was there 14 years and won over 200 games and had great players. So those experiences on both sides of the locker room, if you will, men and women. I just remember so many wonderful young people that we hopefully had an impact on their lives. And, uh, and again, once the USA Basketball coaching experiences were presented, you know, we won 3 gold medals and 1 silver with those 4 teams that I coached, uh, going to the WNBA with the Mystics to me was, was a no brainer because I was 50 years old and here I am, 75. And I remember thinking, I don't want to be 75 years old and wondering if I should have done that. So, um, with the end result, you know, they said if you're hired to be a pro player, a coach, rather you getting hired to be fired. And that's just part of the things that can go on at that level. But, but I'd do it again in a minute.</p>
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>What like what were some of the challenges that you dealt with coaching basketball?</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Well, as always, the obvious challenge of developing a team and developing a program that hopefully can be sustainable, not just for, you know, 3, 4, 5 months of a season, but for years and decades. And we were able to, you know, do that with the help of a lot of really good coaches and administrators at various schools. So the challenges were natural for a coach to try to be a leader and lead by examples that others set. I think being in coaching situations where the balance is not there between the commitment that the university or the franchise, college and/or pro, didn't feel like they were ready to make one hundred percent, we're all in this for the championship potential that they can present. So those were difficult challenges, knowing that with greater support, with greater media exposure, having games televised and the like, you know, the teams that did it on the women's side early on, the Old Dominions and the Southern Cals and the Tennessees, their commitments from their administrations were key factors in the successes that they enjoyed. And where it grew at the schools where I coached, it was that much more challenging when you had to go through those incremental baby steps, if you will, to build a sustainable program.</p>

<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>That's great. I mean, and during this 50-year career you've had, you also were creating a family, correct? And so, like, you maybe talk about, you know, we have really talked about your family like so maybe let's talk about your wife, maybe tell us a little bit about your wife.</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>My wife, Karen, is a saint. She really is an angel who has been a equal partner for 48 years in our marriage. She is brilliant and has had an amazing professional career herself in corporate America. So she's been with me every step of the way. I met her when I was at Duke, and she was a student there at North Carolina Central University in Durham. She's a Washingtonian native, so we had a lot in common. And she is the mother of 2 wonderful children. Daughter Jennifer is Dr. Jennifer Lewis, who went to the University of Virginia and Columbia. And our son is Christopher Lewis, who played basketball and graduated from Harvard. And so the spouse of a coach is a special person. And with all the travel and commitments to the profession, Karen really was the MVP [most valuable player] of our family year in and year out, decade after decade. And she knows the selflessness that was necessary for us to raise 2 wonderful children and to live a life of purpose. And I'm so blessed to have had her and still have her in my life.</p>
<p>Juggling Coaching Career and Family Life</p>	
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>Yeah. Talk a little bit more like what was it like balancing coaching life and family life?</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Well, it was different depending on where I was. When I was a young assistant before I got married, you know, I was the kind of go-go recruiter at schools that had big national profiles. Duke, I mean, I would go on the road and recruit for 10 days at a time. And so that was easier. But once I got married and we had children and we were at Tulane University and the Metro Conference, of which we were a member, the teams were spread out from Virginia Tech to Memphis to Louisville to Cincinnati to Georgia Tech to Florida State. And we were gone a lot. And I remember when Jennifer was learning how to talk, and I called home and she said, "When are you coming home, Daddy?" I mean, those kinds of things would just, you know, eat at your heart, if you will. So the balance of work life and family life, um, are challenging in any profession. But sometimes when you have the type of travel requirements that are inherent with coaching, it can really be more difficult. And I remember, again, the timing being so perfect, we thought, to be able to come back to this area with our 2 young children and to be off the road. So South Lakes High School was a real respite in a weary place, if you will, where I could be home every day with the family and coach and do well with these young guys at South Lakes High School. And so that really was a good buffer for us as a young family.</p>

<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>That's great. What are some of your fondest memories with your children?</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Well, when they were born, obviously, you know, they're both natives, not native. Yeah, they're born in New Orleans and so, uh, when you think about the flooding that's going on currently in Florida, we didn't have it to that extent, thank goodness, in New Orleans. But I remember when there would be water issues in that city that's 6 feet below sea level and living in a cul de sac and pulling our daughter Jennifer in a little red wagon, it look like a boat because the flood excuse me, the water was so high there in our cul de sac. So, you know, but seeing them grow and develop and have the curiosity and wanting to excel, you know, they were self-starters. And we, you know, we provided leadership and guidance, certainly, as parents and gave them exposure to other individuals and organizations and talked about expectations and aspirations. And so to see the wonderful adults that they have become, those are the memories there, they're being made every day, 45 years later and 43 years later in Jennifer and Christopher's lives.</p>
<p>The Importance of Parker-Gray School</p>	
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>That's great. I do want to revisit Parker-Gray. You know we went by it but could you maybe talk a little bit about the school. Like were there teachers that stood out to you? I'll start there, like are there teachers that that you recall that were important for you to shape you from Parker Gray?</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Absolutely. Teachers and administrators. And I saw what our principal, Mr. Pitts, um, a former football player, Virginia State and a real leader, just a dynamic personality. And he ran a school that was built on excellence. Recruited some outstanding teachers, most of whom had gone through the Black college experience, as he had. And, and again, because of the time, um, of Parker-Gray in the [19]20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, it closed in 1965. And these teachers really poured their lives into the lives of young people. I think the Alexandria African American Hall of Fame is a perfect example that illustrates the type of individuals that Alexandria and specifically Parker-Gray has produced, where there are representatives from the military, generals, from the legal profession, judges, from the medical profession, doctors, from the ministerial perspective pastors, from the educational perspective, principals, teachers, from the athletic perspective, college, professional, and high school coaches. So it was a special place. A small enrollment. It fluctuated sometimes from certain periods of years. When I was there in 1959 to 1963, there were probably 300 students, approximately. But we knew that we were loved and had a teacher named Jube Shiver who became, he was a history teacher. He also became a real</p>

	estate entrepreneur. And the area in which my family moved in 1963 that I reference was his development, primarily for middle class African Americans. And we lived at 2207 Shiver Drive, named after Jube Shiver, my history teacher.
Francesco De Salvatore:	What was the neighborhood that you moved to?
JIM LEWIS:	It was called Randall Estates, yes. In the Groveton High School school district. So as I tell people, I was 5 miles away from where I grew up in Seminary. So it wasn't a big move, it may it may have been a big move in some aspects, you know, the social and the integration aspect of it. 1963, the year John F. Kennedy was assassinated, I was there at Groveton High School. And so, but Parker-Gray, you know, when you get together now with other graduates, as we do frequently, there's just a sense of pride, of having experienced something special. So you can't put a dollar figure on, you know, how valuable those teachers and administrators were. You just look at the fruits of their labors, the students, the graduates that have moved on. And again, as I said, the Alexandria African American Hall of Fame really demonstrates that and in so many ways, the results of their efforts.
Final Thoughts	
Francesco De Salvatore:	That's great. And as we close out, I have some general questions for you. And so one I always ask, you know, if you could hold onto any memory from your life forever. And it's probably many memories, but if it was one memory, let's just say, what would it be?
JIM LEWIS:	Wow. My marriage to my wife, Karen. I mean, how lucky. At age 27 to find a soulmate who is so equally yoked. And for her to be greater now than she ever was, to see the maturity and growth through her and in her that has helped me to be a better man, better person, and to help our family become a loving entity. So, you know, I'm really blessed to have Karen in my life for over 50 years.
Francesco De Salvatore:	That's great. And as you reflect on your life, what are some of the most important lessons you've learned?
JIM LEWIS:	Well, one of them is what Pastor Wesley, our pastor at Alfred Street Baptist Church says occasionally, is to be humble, because somebody did this before you did. And so I've made references already to Parker-Gray basketball in the fifties and then following up the years I played there and so many other examples of how, you know, Taft Henry, who's 92, set an example of how to be a role model. And, you know, you can't be anyone else, but you take parts in aspects of different people's lives that have impacted you and hopefully, you know, carry it forward to have that or

	<p>similar type of impact on other people. So as a coach and living my life in a public environment, if you will, I know that my parents did the best they could to show us right from wrong, to show me respect. When my sister spoke at our father's homegoing, it was it was a love fest of how he loved all of us. But they knew as young girls and women that he loved them, and that's, that's a special thing, especially, when young girls can see the love of their father manifested through their mother and how he interacts with her and with them. And so yeah, yeah. As Earl Lloyd would tell me, I'm from good stock. [laughs] Yeah, my parents were the best. And, uh, I'm just very blessed and grateful.</p>
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>If you could talk to your younger self, what advice would you give your younger self?</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Don't play football. No. Now.</p>
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>Especially after the Bengals and—.</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>Yeah.</p> <p>Okay, that's a great question, and my immediate thought that just came to my mind was that my father always told me, you know, be patient, you know, don't try to do too much, too soon, let things develop. And, you know, as a young teenager, you know, you want to experience new things. And he was excellent in being able to balance that by allowing me to make a mistake, try things, you know, grow from it, get back up, but also to understand how patience can really be a virtue. And so, uh, you know, I mean, regrets, we've all had them. I think there's a song written about it, but my goodness, you know, I'm now writing my obituary by saying this, but I mean, I've lived 75 years and, uh, I've been impacted by so many wonderful people, and I'm blessed by God to have known about relationships with Him and with others and I couldn't have asked for a better life. I'm just so, so grateful.</p>
<p>Francesco De Salvatore:</p>	<p>That's great. Is there anything you want to say, like what are your hopes for your children?</p>
<p>JIM LEWIS:</p>	<p>That they'll be happy, uh, that they'll be successful in their hearts, in their spirit and the joy that will come from them working at being good people will be enough for them, you know, and that, that others may not see it, but they'll know that they tried to do their best by people, for people. And we see that through their actions daily. Now, we really have 2 wonderful individuals who love each other, who love family and love others and love God, and who could ask for anything more.</p>

Francesco De Salvatore:	Great. Well, thank you so much, Jimmy, for sitting down with me today and doing this interview. I really appreciate it.
JIM LEWIS:	You're very welcome. You're very welcome.