Interviewee: Charles Day
Interviewer: Dr. Reginald Shareef
Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

RS: Good morning Coach Day. I still call you Coach Day. (both laughing) Well, they've covered the questions about your background. So I'm gonna start with your education. The way I'd like to do this Coach Day is just to ask you some open-ended questions and periodically, I'll ask you to expound upon something you say. If there's something you want to expound upon, that you think would be important or pertinent to the project, feel free to do it. Carla set this up for an hour so we'll set that as a time frame. We may finish earlier. The goal is to ask you questions and develop some depth about your experiences in the Gainsboro community and Roanoke since you've been here and how you view things, how things have changed in your life, etc? So that's where we're going with this. OK. So the first question under education is: Talk about your school life. For instance, where did you attend school? Did you walk to school, etc.
CD: I attended school in Radford, Virginia. I went to a school they called Home Boger (??) Elementary School in Radford. For the first year, we walked to school. It was a couple of miles. Then, the second year, we went to – had a new school in Radford called Fred Weigle (??) Elementary School named after one of the State Superintendents of school. And, we rode the city bus.
RS: OK.
CD: And after elementary school, I went to Christiansburg Industrial Institute in Christiansburg, Virginia. It was a regional high school which comprised of _____ (??) and Floyd County, Montgomery County, Pulaski County, Radford City and we also had a dormitory for girls and for boys and kids from out of the school district, even out of state, came to board there. That was Christiansburg Institute. Then from that point, I went to Virginia State College at that time, but now its Virginia State University.
RS: Our Alma Mater.
CD: OK, you're familiar. (both laughing)
RS: Yes, I am.
CD: Then, I did my advanced work, Masters, at Radford where you are now.
RS: That's right.
CD: At that time, it was Radford College but now Radford University.
RS: Now Coach Day, during this period, were all of these schools segregated, during your elementary and on through your undergraduate degree?
CD: Yes, they were segregated at the time.
RS: OK. How far did you have to go past white schools to get to the various schools you went through in Radford?
CD: Yes. In elementary and in Radford and then when I went to high school in Christiansburg, Virginia, which was Montgomery County. We had to ride a bus. We rode a bus for about 8 miles one way.
RS: So from Radford to Christiansburg Institute it was about 8 miles.
CD: 8 miles.
RS: 8 mile ride. And these were city buses or -
CD: They were school buses.
RS: Yellow school buses like today?
CD: Yes.
RS: And then when you went to Virginia State, I know that was one of the historically black colleges and universities. So up until you finished college, most of your education had taken place in an all black environment.
CD: That's correct.

RS: What was your impression of the schools? For example, when you were at, in elementary school and junior high school and high school in Radford or in the area, the Montgomery County area, - describe the schools. Were they – How were the schools heated, for example, in the elementary schools?
CD: How were they?
RS: Heated.
CD: OK. In elementary school at the Home Boger (??) school, it was a little pot-belly stove.
RS: OK.
CD: And the fellows, we had to keep it going.
RS: OK.
CD: That was one of your unwritten duties. (both laughing) And when I got - after the first few years in elementary school, we went to Fred Weigle School. It was a new school. So it had a central heating system. Then, of course, at Christiansburg Industrial Institute, it was a campus-style high school. Like a little college campus but they had furnaces in each of the individual buildings.
RS: Oh, OK. So, the pot-belly stove was in your elementary schools and then you went to a new high school and so that did have central air.
CD: It was a new elementary school where they had the central and then from that point on, it was localized in each building.
RS: What about your textbooks? Do you remember any conversations – For example, I know when I was growing up here in Roanoke in the late 60s in high school, we used to get books, old books from Jefferson for example, after the kids had used the books there. Was that something you experienced growing up or do you remember that or anybody ever talking about things like that?
CD: As far as I can remember, it never came up.
RS: OK.
CD: As far as I can recall, the textbooks were adequate as far – I never did hear too much about that.
RS: Any other differences between the schools of your education when you were growing up that stand out in your mind?
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CD: Well, it basically was – it was more travel time because the high school, Radford High School, was only about less than a mile from our home.
RS: OK.
CD: So perhaps I could've walked there, you know. But, we rode the bus and that was the way it was so it never crossed my mind to go there. You know what I mean? I developed allegiance to the Christiansburg Institute. Our nickname was Tigers. So all the little kids in elementary school wanted to be a Tiger. (both laughing)
RS: Exactly.
CD: I guess from time to time, you'd have a flashback as to what the situation was but it never really lingered very long because we were so involved in activities. You didn't want to miss a day from school. You didn't want to miss an activity so that was a – that was the closeness that developed. I tell you another little side-line is that in Radford, the football team from the white high school, they would always let us in when they had their game. They'd let us into the game for free, the football players. The kids who lived in Radford who played football at Christiansburg. And we would do the same for them when we – 'cause we used to play our home games in Radford.
RS: Oh, OK. That was great.
CD: We had a reciprocal arrangement.
RS: They didn't do that here in Roanoke so that was something pretty unique up there. Now, its not on here but since I know some of your history and you just mentioned sports, what sports did you play growing up?
CD: I played football in high school. Basketball and baseball.

RS: Which was your favorite? I heard you really liked baseball.
CD: I did like baseball. It was – Of course, I liked the others but I felt that I wasn't large enough to have gone to any level beyond college in football or basketball. But in baseball, I had aspirations to go further. And I guess if I were to pick a favorite, it would have been baseball.
RS: I heard you initially say you were born in 1934. Jackie Robinson integrated baseball, I think Branch Rickey signed him in 1947 or whatever, and since you were an aspiring baseball player, do you remember Jackie Robinson signing? Did it impact you or did it have any influence on you at that time?
CD: Yes, it did. I was glad for him and I was glad for the race. It opened up another venture and another avenue of success. I was delighted for him and found later on that he was chosen because they felt he could handle it and everything and I later on discovered that there were perhaps other players who were better than Jackie but they felt they didn't have the complete picture and it was a good lesson in life. It takes more than just athletic ability.
RS: Well that's right. There were other athletes – a lot of athletes in negro baseball that were more gifted than Jackie Robinson and a lot of them sort-of resented it but the fact that Jackie Robinson had gone to UCLA, played football, was All-American Football Player there and he just had, like you said, the social development to withstand the taunts and not to fight or not to respond at least verbally. I understand that sometimes when you stole a base, he came in with spikes up. There was some revenge there but at least not overtly. Now when you went to Virginia State, did you play sports there?
CD: I played football, baseball and a I wrestled.
RS: Oh, OK. Well good. And your experience at Virginia State was a good experience?
CD: It was a good experience. I feel that I could have had a more successful career. Hindsight is always more accurate.
RS: Exactly.
CD: But I thoroughly enjoyed it and I remember the best advice – one of the best pieces of advice I got/received prior to going to college was a white banker in Radford.
RS: OK.
CD: He told me, he said, "You go there as a football player" and he had never played sports but he said, "Go there in mid-season form and impress the coaches, that they can't do without you". Which is true. And I passed that on to other kids that I worked with.
RS: So you feel like a lot of – for a guy like me that came up through segregated schools and went on to Virginia State like you did and – I've always felt that a lot of the lessons, especially a lot of the character lessons that people like you provided for me when I was coming through school, other people, has served me well as I've gone on to the broader society. Do you share that kind of feeling?
CD: Oh yes, yes. A lot of people, people I've known right after high school. I was trying out for the, at the time it was the Milwaukee Braves and they had a try-out camp in Lynchburg and where they would invite players from the area – bring you shoes, your gloves and spikes, and they had about – the scouts from the particular company – um, team would assemble there and you could go there and they'd have maybe 200 experienced professional players there to try out and it was really – you had to be at your physiological peak in order to excel and get the recognition. So, I had gone to one of those that Pittsburgh had, the Pittsburgh Pirates and then the Milwaukee Braves, but I wasn't successful at that time. That's when I went on to college.
RS: Now around this time, when you were 20 years old, 1954, the Brown vs Board of Education decision was handed down and it said that separate was inherently unequal. Do you remember at 20 any impact of that decision? Did you see it in any way affecting or having an impact on your life?
CD: It changed your thinking because you knew there were going to be some changes.
RS: OK.
CD: It kind of sent up a red flag that changes are coming and you think about the dynamics of change. You knew that there were going to be some new routes to go different places. And it made you aware of – it prepared you for some changes down the road.

RS: Yeah, because when you think about your life - you were born in 1934 and in 1947 when you were 13, Jackie Robinson signs, 1948 President Truman desegregates the military, 1954 Brown vs Board of Education – So a lot of things were going on in your teenage and early adult life that really later had an impact on opportunities that you had, decisions you were making, etc. Let's see. I also know – 'cause you were in the military right?
CD: Yes.
RS: What years were you in the military?
CD: I was in the military. I went into the – I entered the service on May 2, 1957. And I was discharged April 23, 1959. I went in under the 6-year plan. Two years of active duty, two years of active reserve and two years of stand-by.
RS: I see.
CD: And I did not get my commission at Virginia State.
RS: Yeah, I was going to ask you about ROTC.
CD: I was in ROTC 3 years but I did not get my commission because I thought I was going to get a baseball contract.
RS: Oh, I see.
CD: And if I had gotten my commission – At that time, you had to make a commitment of up to 5 years in the service and I felt that after 5 years in the service, I would've been too old to have done anything.
RS: Pursued a career.
CD: Yeah. And when I went in the service, a lot of my friends, they were commissioned officers and I was a non-commissioned – and so that was a downside of it.
RS: Overall, where did you serve? Did you do overseas duty during that period?
CD: Yes. I did my basic training in Fort Hood, Texas, and I was lucky I did my advance training at Fort Lee, Virginia, at Quarter Masters, right next door to Virginia State. And then after that, I went to Fort Dicks and we were shipped to Germany.
RS: OK.
CD: And I was over there for 18 ½ months and I taught at the Army Education Center, Math and Science while I was over there - And officiate ballgames over there. And I played baseball and softball and we played a lot of flag football. It was a good experience. Then I went on a service club tour and I had a chance to see that part of the world.
RS: I see.
CD: Europe, Asia and Africa. Travelled around on the service club tour. It was a good lesson within itself.
RS: It sounds like you a lot in 2 years.
CD: Yeah, I did. Well, you know, we were over there and didn't have a family so – Amsterdam and caught the World's Fair in Brussells, Belgium and went to Copenhagan, Denmark and a lot of those places. I went to Paris, France and Nancy. I travelled around. It was a good experience.
RS: Now as an African-American man in Europe in the late 1950s, how do you feel like you were treated?
CD: You got mixed reactions.
RS: OK.
CD: I tell you a little joke we had – at the World's Fair in Brussells, Belgium, there was a South African official, a white South African – he was at the World's Fair and we were there. We had on our civilian clothes. He asked us where were we from. We didn't tell him we were in the Army, we told him we were exchange students. (both laughing) We were trying to up our stance 'cause the military was a very important part because without the military, we wouldn't have peace, you know. So we were kind of – told a little fib. We told the gentleman that we were exchange students. He was nice. We were talking about the different situations in the country and things like that. It was a good

dialogue.
RS: OK, yeah, it sounds like it.
CD: And later as we concluded the conversation then we explained to him that we were GI's. (both laughing) He enjoyed it.
RS: Well, good. Now when you were teaching in the military, you taught in integrated classes obviously?
CD: Yes. These were gentlemen, soldiers who had not finished their high school diploma so we taught Math and Science so they could finish and get their GED.
RS: Sure.
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CD: So we taught it during the day and it was good duty, in the classroom and everything. They called it the Army Education Center.
RS: OK. It sounds like it was good preparation for your future career.
CD: Yes.
RS: So you went on and you got a Master's at Radford University? Now what year was that?
CD: That was – (interruption by someone coming in the room) I have to do a little reflecting. Let me see. That was in 1970 'cause I had to have that in order to secure the principalship of Loudon.
RS: So that was in Administration?
CD: Administration and Guidance.
RS: So when you got back from – well, they have one other question on here – Did anyone else in your family attend college.
CD: My daughter, my sisters, they attended college for 1 or 2 years. Then my brother finished college. He finished at Virginia State also. He was the editor of the school newspaper when he was there.
RS: Oh really?
CD: Yeah. That's my younger brother.
RS: OK, alright. So, you and your brother were really the first out of your immediate family to finish college?
CD: Yes.
RS: I know that was a major accomplishment.
CD: Yeah, it was. I was delighted for that. I was so glad that I was able to do that.
RS: As you were coming up, did your parents emphasize going to college or, you know, a lot of black families, again, even when I was growing up, there was emphasis in some families on going to college. There was some emphasis on, you know, finishing high school and going to work. In your family, what was the situation?
CD: It was a little of both. Primarily, my mother and father gave me an opportunity to kind of find our own path and then they would support us. I was – I always wanted to go into college and I wanted to try to – as the old Army "Be the best that I could be". So that was – My father was a railroad man. He worked for Norfolk and Western for 51 years and my mother was a housewife. And my father ran a barber shop and he was a farmer. He worked all the time. (Both laughing)
RS: He was multitasking before the term came about.
CD: Yes and he was good at carpentry, brick masonry and he had a cute little habit – He had me do a project and if it wasn't done up to his standards, he wouldn't say a word to me. He would just go redo it himself. And I would get the message.
RS: Sure.
CD: A nice silent treatment and it was a good learning lesson for me – a good approach to use in life. Instead of getting emotionally upset, you know. It was a learning tool and I used that same technique a lot in school work with kids.
RS: Sure, well that's a good way to teach as opposed to getting really upset and fussing and complaining.

CD: Blood pressure up.
RS: That's right. (both laughing) Well now, I find that interesting – your sisters had an opportunity to go to college as well because at the time, a lot of black women that I was familiar with didn't. The families didn't encourage them to go to college so that sounds like there was a lot of focus in your household in education. Continuing that theme, so you got out of the Army in 1959. You graduated from Virginia State. You had taught in the military. Did you then pursue a teaching career?
CD: Yes.
RS: OK, where was that?
CD: Amherst County. Amherst, Virginia.
RS: And how long were you there?
CD: I was there for 2 years.
RS: OK. And then – now I know you got to Addison High School in 1966 because I got to Addison High School in 1966 and you were my gym teacher so I know that. So between 1961/62 and 1966, where were you?
CD: I was in Montgomery County. I went back home, living in Radford and I was the principal of French (??) Elementary School in Montgomery County, right on 460, right out from where Christiansburg High School is built now. Real small black school and the Quakers had given that to the black kids for their education. And that's how that was exceptional. That was my first principalship. And was principal there for 5 years. And I would come back home. I was just as happy as I could be and I got the principalship.
RS: Alright, OK. And then, of course, I have to ask you now what year did you and Mrs. Day get married?
CD: That was in 1961.
RS: 1961. OK. And then, you left there and came to Addison, you came to Roanoke in 1966 right?
CD: They integrated in Montgomery County and the Superintendent had told all the teachers where they were going – the janitor, the cook and everybody but they hadn't told me where I was going. And so there was a little period of uncertainty. So I decided I had better try to find – because I may be receiving something I may not want and all the other principalships in the county had been filled and that's when I applied in Roanoke. I heard there was an opening and so I applied and am very thankful that I got the job.
RS: So now you're coming from Christiansburg and Amherst County, more rural places, and you come to the Mighty Bulldogs. And I know you were a guidance counselor over there at Addison as well, right?
CD: Yes.
RS: What was it like coming to Addison High School? It was huge, all black, sometimes unruly high school. (laughing) What was that like?
CD: What – Let me back up a little bit now. When I first came out of the Army, I applied for Roanoke City 'cause coach Price, the football coach, was leaving to go to Fairfax County. And I applied for the coaching job 'cause I had just gotten out of the Army and I thought I knew all about football and everything. But Miss Gibney (??) who was one of the first female Superintendents in the state. She told me, she said, "Charles, you don't have any high school coaching experience. Even though you may be very capable of doing it". She was very sweet. She said, "Roanoke is a football town, so you need a little experience". That's how I got the job at Amherst because she had hired the coach from Amberst to come to Roanoke. So that was a little – I'm going back a little bit. So when I came – When the job opened up in Roanoke then she hired me and that was 5 years later. And so I got the job. And so when I came to Roanoke, I was delighted. Because Addison was a big school and Roanoke was a large city. Born in Radford, about 10,000 people – Roanoke 6 figures. It was a step up, you know?
RS: Sure, sure.
CD: And so I started off as a Physical Education teacher, Junior Class sponsor and assistant football,

assistant baseball – I mean assistant football, baseball coach and JV basketball. I was in hog heaven.
RS: That's right. (both laughing) So now, from 1966 and then I heard you say you finished your Master's at Radford in 1970 so you could _____ (??). So Addison was closing down or being scaled back to a middle school I guess in the early '70s. But, you left in '70 to become the principal at Loudon?
CD: Yes. What happened was I was 2 years at Addison coaching and then Miss Georgia Brown who was the guidance coordinator left to go into the Upper Bound Program at Roanoke College. So that created an opening in guidance. Well, a lot of the staff members were hesitant to apply for the job 'cause they knew Georgia was coming back.
RS: I see.
CD: So me being young, I tossed my hat in the ring. So I got the Guidance Coordinator position at Addison. Which I really enjoyed being a Guidance Coordinator of a large high school. So it was a golden opportunity and I was young enough not to fear her coming back, sliding back. And so I got that job and so my 3rd year at Addison, I was a Guidance Coordinator. I thoroughly enjoyed that.
RS: OK. So then you went to Loudon as – That was your first principalship?
CD: First principalship.
RS: And how long were you at Loundon?
CD: One year because then they closed it.
RS: OK. Alright. And then you went to -
CD: I went to Addison. I was sitting there at my desk one day. My secretary told me that Dr. Alcorn was on the phone. So I went and I got the phone and Dr. Alcorn said, "Charles, I want to appoint you principal of Addison. Would you accept?" And I told him enthusiastically, "Yes". And he said, "OK". So we concluded that conversation. I sat down at my desk and I kind of pinched myself. I said, "This little country boy has got the Addison principalship". My first principalship of a high school. I was delighted. And in those days, integration was taking place in the state of Virginia. There were very few black principals, high school principals and I was delighted. You know, I was among the few. And I think, at that time, I don't think north of, I mean west of Richmond, I don't remember very many being north of Richmond. There were some from that point on, you know, in the eastern part of Virginia. So, I was delighted. I had to pinch myself. I couldn't believe it. I didn't want him to change his mind. (both laughing)
RS: Well that was a pretty quick ascension. I mean, yeah, I mean, you had come here in 1966 and by 1971, you were the principal of the school, that's pretty fast rise.
CD: I think about all the other people that they could've appointed. That's the reason why I was grateful. 'Cause I'm aware there are a lot of talented people in the area.
RS: Well, maybe you – getting back to the Jackie Robinson analogy, maybe it was all of your qualities that allowed the superintendent to say, "Charles – I want Charles Day for this position".
CD: Well, maybe so. I was really happy with it.
RS: Now as principal of Addison High School, you began to interact a lot with – Or did you interact with a lot of the principals, at Patrick Henry, Jefferson and Flemming who were your white colleagues?
CD: Yes. Well, what happened was it was a challenging period because they were integrating – integration in Roanoke City and they had – at first they thought they were going to close Addison. They were going to make it a vocational, regional high school where they would have vocation and academic offerings. So myself and a couple of the central office people, we went to Henrico County to observe a school meeting that particular description. And then, we came back with the plans of implementing that at Addison because the judge had ordered we were going to integrate. Well, what happened, we worked on that and 2 weeks before school opened, a judge gave a decree that stated that Addison was going to open as a comprehensive high school. So, we had to go back to the drawing board and so we opened as a comprehensive high school. So there was a change in philosophy and so we opened as a comprehensive high school. Prior to that, interaction with – the question you asked

interacting with the other high school principals, the principals at Patrick Henry, Jefferson and Flemming and Addison, we met to decide – the judge had ordered that there be a 75% white and 25% black and so we had to appropriate the staff accordingly. I was the new kid on the block and so they were shifting people. So where we had a predominant black staff at Addison, we were the major changed station. So we had to go to 75% white faculty, 25% black faculty. So we were shifting people around to get ready for school opening. So, that's how we had a lot of interacting with the other principals.
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RS: See, so when you were – the first year you were the principal of Addison, 75% of the faculty was white?
CD: Yes.
RS: Oh, OK. Did that raise any types of management or administrative challenges for you?
CD: Yeah, it did because there were new people and then the people coming in, they were new to the situation. It was a former all-black high school and they were coming and so, there was pressure on them, adjustments. So you had to look at it from – there was a lot of pressure on everybody.
RS: But you guys go through it OK?
CD: Yes. And most of all, like I told the kids at the reunion, that the truly great Americans were those little kids who were going to the integrated schools.
RS: Exactly.
CD: You know the parents and leaders, they were home. It was those little kids in a black and white school, that was the pressure. They're the ones who had the pressure. So we had to make the most of it.
RS: OK. Now, how long were you at Addison?
CD: For 3 years.
RS: For 3 years. And then, what was your next position?
CD: Well, they decided that they were going to close 2 high schools, that they didn't need 4 in Roanoke City. And that meant that they were going to close Jefferson and Addison and have Flemming and Patrick Henry. So the superintendent offered me the principalship of Woodrow Wilson Junior High School or stay at Addison Junior High School or go to Flemming as its co-principal.
RS: OK.
CD: Or go to Ruffner as principal. Ruffner Junior High – Ruffner was a new high school, air-conditioned, just had been built 3 years. So, I chose Ruffner. I didn't want to go to Flemming 'cause I felt it was – it would be hard on us trying to be co-principals of a high school. Woodrow Wilson was a little out of the area and I didn't want to stay at Addison 'cause it would've been a reflection on that they changed the school. So then I chose Ruffner. And I went there and stayed for 12 years.
RS: 12 years, that's right. Well good. We'll come back to more of your education and your professional history. We've covered that pretty well. There's a heading here – Describe your home life, for instance, and I would assume this is when you were growing up – Did you gather around the radio in the evening as a family? Do you remember when you got a telephone, refrigerator, this type thing?
CD: Yes, we uh, its hard for the kids to realize, radio was the media. That's how you listened to you shows. I tell you a cute little thing my older brother used to do. They used to have a radio show called Inner Sanctum, squeaky doors and it was kind of like a mystery and ghosts and everything. So, he turned off the lights and we would listen. (both laughing)
RS: Oh, OK.
CD: It was kind of silly when you really think about it but it was entertainment. We'd listen to that radio show. It was just tradition. When the show came on, we'd turn off the lights and we kids, little siblings, be around. (laughing) Now that I'm older, it was cute.
RS: You created your own ambiance.
CD: That's true.

RS: Scary program, cut the lights off, it was like being at the movies.
CD: Everybody shaking. (both laughing heartily) But it was 3 of us, 3 girls and 3 boys and we got along very well and my youngest was my brother who lives in Blacksburg, you know. His son's a basketball coach at Blacksburg High School. They just won the region golf tournament at Blacksburg High School. So it was 3 of us. We got along very well and it was a lot of fun. We now reminisce about the good old days, you know. Of course now, my oldest brother and my oldest sister have passed and – little side line – I told my 2 sisters and my brother, "I'm the oldest living one" and I said, "We've got to reverse that order". (both laughing)
RS: You don't want to be next in line. (both laughing)
CD: I don't want to be next in line. They enjoy that little family humor you know.
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RS: Well, you know my father like your father worked for the Norfolk and Western. He worked 42 years. One of the interesting things that I always remember about our home life with my father was that, and like your father, he worked at least until I was about 12 or 13 because there were 3 of us and children going to college. And my mother worked. But he also worked a second job. Most of the men that worked for the railroad worked at least one other job. And so I was thinking about this question because usually, by the time my father got home and sat down for a few minutes, ate dinner, he was going to bed because he had to get back up the next morning and start the routine over. And so, our primary time to be together, I guess, was dinner. And, of course, I guess, as I think back about my father, the guy was really busy. He never complained about it but he was a very busy man 'cause he always had something to do and that type thing and so as far as like, you know, when I was doing things growing up, he was always working. And I heard you talk about your father working for the railroad, being a carpenter, and being a farmer as well. When you were playing sports, did your father and mother have an opportunity to attend your sporting events and things like that?
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CD: Well, not as much as I would've liked. My father worked like he did. I always wanted him to see the game. I think he saw one or two games. See, he worked the midnight shift at the railroad from 11 at night to 7 in the morning. And he was always going and ran a barber shop on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. And in those days, they worked 7 days. A lot of people are not aware of it. 7 days on the railroad, you know. And its something. Let me have a quick little interruption, for me, your father is a good man. He was a very nice man.
RS: Well, they worked and they were really – I know as far as my father was concerned, they felt because they had railroad jobs that they were very grateful for those jobs because a lot of the other black men didn't have jobs and didn't have insurance and that type thing but they worked and that was the whole – My father was never late for work. In fact, he was very proud of the fact that he worked for the railroad for 42 years and he only missed 17 days and so they didn't miss work. They really valued those positions and so a lot of the things that one would think about – I played sports at Monroe Junior High School, but my father never got to see me play. He wouldn't ask off. I mean, I would come home and tell him about the games and he'd be happy for me but as far as getting off from work – In fact, one of the things he told all 3 of us was not to ever get in trouble at school so that they would have to call down to the railroad that he would have to get off. And I guess just before you became principal over at Addison, Julian Moore was there. And one time, we did something that Mr. Moore told us we shouldn't do. We rented a bus and went to a football game and he had told us not to do it. So, I'll never forget it. He called us over the intercom, 3 of us, to come to the office that morning and we went in there and he told us he was going to suspend us for 2 weeks. Now, Mr. Phillips would only suspend you for 3 days so 2 weeks was like, "Wait a minute!".
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CD: A lifetime. (both laughing)
RS: Yeah, that's a lifetime even for guys that weren't that excited about school. But then, as the added

touch, he said, “And Reggie, I'm gonna call your father. He's gonna have to come over here”. I said, “Call my mother. Please!”. He called him but he didn't kill me when he got over there but that was – They really valued those jobs and those men worked and they – My father's thing was I'm gonna get enough rest at night so I can get up and start this routine the next day and I never heard him complain about it. He felt like that he was providing for his family and he was trying to – Obviously, he set a, he and my mother 'cause she works at a tremendous work ethic and the family was very important. And anything you did to distract from the family, that would really get you ostracized. There wasn't a whole lot of extra so everything had to be used and you had to act like you had some sense out here. So, let's see, they've got a question here, “Do you remember when your family got a telephone and refrigerator”?
CD: Yes, I remember because I remember – See we lived in Radford. To our rear, about 100 yards, was New River and there was a little creek behind there leading to the swimming pool. So if the New River ever flooded, we lived at the end of the street next to the funeral home, and we would get flooded on two sides, the rear and the side. So we lived there and the ice plant was right across the railroad. The railroad track was in front of us about 50 yards. And across the railroad track was the ice plant.
RS: I see.
0.39.58.6
CD: So it wasn't too difficult. If we missed the ice truck when they delivered ice, we could just walk across the railroad track and get ice. So I remember the ice box and you had to get it and you had to chop it up and everything and we were delighted when we got the refrigerator. You know what I mean? It was amazing. And the dairy products were delivered and I noticed an article in the paper where they're starting a new _____ (??) (both talking) So, yes, I recall that and I remember one of my chores every morning, I would have to get up and start the fire so my mother could come in and cook breakfast. Sometimes at night, I would bank the fire, so that, I mean, put the paper and everything in so I'd have a short cut. 'Cause I was the first one up so that was one of my chores.
RS: And when you got to school early, you had to start the fire in the stove.
CD: Yeah, so you had a lot of chores in those days.
RS: Exactly. A telephone – when you – Do you remember when you didn't have a phone at home?
CD: Vaguely. Yes, but I do remember when we didn't. I remember, I even remember our old telephone number 2-0-0-6. But you know, party line, you know.
RS: I was going to ask you because everybody had a party line because they were cheaper, right?
CD: That's true. That's true.
RS: Now this young lady wouldn't know what a party line is but you could be having a conversation on the phone and another party cuts in.
CD: Yeah, sure. That was a common thing.
RS: That was very common and it was cheaper than a private line. Everybody I knew had party lines. So you could be talking, Coach Day and I could be talking and you could pick up and hear our entire conversation. And even become a part of it if you wanted to. (laughing) I was so excited when we got a private line, I didn't know what to do. The question number 11 here is, “Did you and your family, and your friends I would assume, sit on the porch in the evenings in the summer”?
CD: Air conditioning.
RS: That was your air conditioning.
CD: The front porch. Yeah, that's true. That was it. Sunday, Saturday and then you'd – That was where you got your air conditioning and it was a social area. You'd sit there and we could watch the trains go by. Way back then, when I was a kid, they had a passenger train and the number was 42 and it would come through Radford around 11 o'clock at night and you'd see all those people in the cars. They'd be traveling from one part going to New York or Washington and they'd wave. They'd see us little kids, you know, things like that, you know, and they'd be – You know its amazing and you could just check your watch...

RS: By that train. Let's see, we've talked about chores. You banked the fire. You started the fire in the morning. You cut ice for the ice box. Any other chores around your house or neighborhood that -
CD: When I was young, I used to go to downtown to the grocery store to pick up groceries for my mother. She was a housewife and my dad was working. So, I was the main one who, if she needed something, I'd -
RS: Walk to the store.
CD: Walk to the store. And I remember a cute little experience I had. I was going to, it was about a ½ mile and we'd walk down the railroad tracks and they had coal trains and cinders. I got a cinder in my eye and I was in the store trying to get it out, you know. I walked in the store and a young lady, a young white nurse was in the store and she told me, she said, told me how to get it out, how to make tears. How to rotate, you know. She told me, "Blow your nose. Rotate your eye around counterclockwise and blow your nose, cycle 3 times, alternate". And said it would create enough fluid liquid in your eye to wash the cinder out. I remember that always from when I was a child.
RS: Oh, really.
CD: I never knew her name, I would never recognize her. She told, she said, "That's how you can get little particles that get into your eye because" -
RS: Oh, good.
CD: Its amazing.
RS: I've never heard that before.
CD: She told me that and it works and -
RS: It stuck with you. (both laughing)
CD: And I was just a little boy.
RS: Coach Day, question 13, "What were the family stories that were passed down in your family from generation to generation?"
CD: Well, there were a lot of them. Of course, I had my mother that was a part of about 12 siblings. And they had their respective families and they would always come and visit. I had an uncle who worked around the families that had horses and fairgrounds where they would have show horses. He would always have his stories about the horses and which one was the most valuable horse, you know, the most talented horse. You know and everything like that. And then I had other uncles who worked for the railroad. They would travel down from Radford to Roanoke to work at the railroad yard and they had to leave 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning so they'd get down there on time. So, they would have stories relating to that. I had uncles and aunts who lived in West Virginia. So there was a dialogue. There was always something going on.
RS: Interesting you would mention that because, and I mentioned about my father being on time to work and I probably drive my children crazy about being punctual but there was something that I know that I got mega-doses of, "You've always got to be on time, Reggie. You've always got to be on time". Was that something that you heard a lot about?
0.46.20.4
CD: Yeah. I mean, it was a must because you know they would let you know, "We don't have to wait for you". That was driven into me.
RS: That's something that my children – they have a hard – I guess it shows how much society has changed. Because, again, as an African-American, every institution I was in, from High Street Baptist Church to school to getting to your class, to getting – getting everywhere – punctuality.
CD: That's right.
RS: And it prepares you, I mean it was a preparation for going out into the broader society. And it was almost like, you know, the broader society could never say you were late for anything. So, you were always there. And if there is anything – I love my children to death, but they seem like to me that they are the biggest procrastinators. I mean, its just like, you know, they get places but they don't – like I was here 20 minutes early this morning. Now, my son, if he was doing this interview, he would get

here 5 minutes to 9, right and he would be on time but it was almost, to use a term I've learned since I've gotten older, it was almost this compulsion.
CD: Yes.
0.47.37.5
RS: But I think it reflected – black people, at least, it felt like it reflected on your character if you weren't on time or if you weren't even a little early for things.
CD: That's true. It was such a stigma attached to it if you were late. And you didn't want to be a part of that.
RS: That's right, exactly. They have a question on here, "Did your family have stories about memories or anything about the Civil War and slavery?".
CD: Of course, the concept and the world as related to slavery, that was always uncommon. You could be talking about – what effect this would have on it. Not – My dad never liked to bring in the negative because he was afraid it would cloud our thinking, you know. You'd have too much on your shoulders and you couldn't concentrate. I remember one time, we went to Cleveland to visit some of my wife's relatives and they were talking about this candidate who had won the presidency and some of them were not in favor, you know. They had another favorite candidate. So the word was, I said, "Regardless of who wins, he's your president. And you have to -" The key to you success is what you do not what he does. You know what I mean? And I remember when I was principal at Ruffner, a delivery man came in one day after an election, a presidential election, and he said, "Charles, did your candidate win?" I didn't say who. I said, "My president – my man won". Because that's my philosophy. And that kind of was the philosophy of the family. Whoever got in, that's your man and no need worrying about it. (both laughing) He's in there! Just make the most of it. Don't sit up there and agonize for 4 or 5 years and worrying about something you have no control over.
RS: I think that was the general attitude and I think we talked – I know in my family, we – there wasn't a – like you said, I think things were so dire that nobody wanted to talk about it, you know. Because it would just discourage you and so I found that blacks of your generation and previous generations had a lot of faith and a lot of confidence in this country and that things were going to improve for us. And, they really thought of themselves as Americans. And so a lot of the, almost what some would consider anti-American sentiment, complaining about things that happened in the past is a lot more common with my generation and on than it was with your generation. Because, I can't think of – when I think about this question, I can't think of anybody really having any real negative attitudes about slavery or discrimination. The whole emphasis was, "Well, its here and you've got to do something about it. Do the best you can do". And people had a lot more hope and confidence in many ways in making progress than many of the young kids do today. You hear 'em talk and I know you've been around kids in school a lot more than I have but it is somewhat hard to believe the attitudes they have given all the opportunities -
CD: That's right. That's right.
RS: That are available. I mean, you would think it was 1920 the way some of 'em talk sometimes and they can go anywhere and go to any school, just opportunities – society is more accepting. So, its really interesting. I think a lot of that does come from that – not using history as an experience but almost as a cop-out not to do.
CD: I remember when I was in the Army traveling around to different countries on those Service Club tours and you would see the situations in some of those other countries, you have a fond appreciation for this country. You know what I mean? You really do. Now, another philosophy that I use, if I run into a person who has a hangup about me, my color, my weight and my wealth, I balance that out – I'm gonna run into about 90% of the people who do not have a problem.
RS: That's right. (laughing)
CD: So, I'm not gonna let that 1 or 2 distract me and put me on a detour.
RS: Exactly.

CD: So I just chalk that up as par for the course. You know what I mean?
RS: Well, I think that's the way to look at it. I really do. And that way, that one person doesn't upset you.
CD: That's true.
0.52.38.3
RS: OK, well we have questions here, we've got about 5 minutes with Coach Day left. Do you have – We talked about Mrs. Day. We know you served in the military. I know you have 2 children, neither one served in the military, right?
CD: No.
RS: Let's see, community – When you moved to Roanoke in 1966, what was your general impression of Roanoke, the black community, the broader community, things like that?
CD: I had a very favorable impression of 'em. I thought about the number of doctors, lawyers, professional people they had, you know, in Roanoke. It was a new experience for me because I had come from a small city in Radford. And then down here, you see all the black hospital and the number of doctors and lawyers and then it had a lot of good jobs and everything. It was a very positive experience.
RS: OK, good. What about this library? Do you remember the first time you knew the Gainsboro library was here or did people talk about it when you got here?
CD: Yes. I was – I used to come down to this area a lot because that was a focal point and even before I moved to Roanoke, we used to come down to the American Legion Auditorium when the top performers would come here and then I had some friends – 'cause when I went to high school at Christiansburg Institute, we used to play Addison in football. Then I had some friends here in Roanoke and we would come down and go dancing with them. We'd go to the train station. They had a train station, you could go there, you could be served the food you wanted and everything. So, I had good vibrations about Roanoke.
0.54.45.1
RS: There's a question on here, Coach Day, "Who were your role models when you were growing up and also when you got to Roanoke"? Who did you sort of look at as a role model?
CD: Well, I've always liked people. I would see these – Don't think I'm materialistic, but these people that had all this wealth – As a little boy, it was something I always wanted. I haven't achieved it yet and I'm ready for the graveyard. (both laughing) But, I still have that as a hidden goal, a hidden agenda. And so I maybe mocked those people who were very successful and I respected those people who were trying to be successful. Like one gentleman told me, a very successful business man, he said, "When you go into business, you are talking to people who are successful. You are also talking to those who are not successful. You can learn from both." And so, I guess, I was amazed at how the like the families that had all the drug stores, the president and CEOs of the big banks and the big firms, you know what I mean? The college presidents – I remember when I had a hidden agenda, I wanted to be a president of a small black college. That was one of my goals. I never achieved it but you know – I never achieved it, you know what I mean? – but that was a – I suppose if I had – but that was one of my -.
RS: And the men who, most of those people were men, they -
CD: Inspired you. Yeah.
RS: Yeah. Well, those are good role models. I mean, when you see people achieve in areas that you didn't know people were achieving in.
CD: That's true.
RS: I mean they can inspire you 'cause you think, "I wonder. How did that guy do that?".
CD: That's true. And I would ask 'em. Not trying to get personal. Not trying to get nosy. But you could learn something from 'em. That's one thing that makes American great, they would talk with you. They would pass some good helpful hints. I remember when I had surgery one time – a little side

line – I was reading this book – I carried it – You know like when you go in for surgery, you carry a lot of reading materials and I was reading this book about this agent, this Russian agent who had come to America. He was a double agent and one thing he said, "You learn from all – One thing about America, people will talk with you and they will tell you things, sometimes even personal". And he said even the agents say they gave information on this factory or this thing.
RS: Just give you the information. (both laughing)
CD: And you learn a lot. And I remember when I was at Virginia Western as a counselor for a couple of years. I was teaching an orientation class and then a How-To-Study class and I did my research and I always told my kids, I said, you have 2 ears and 1 mouth and use them accordingly. (both laughing)
RS: That's a good advantage. In closing, is there anything else that we didn't cover that you would like to share with us about your life, your experiences?
CD: I was on the school board for 11 years and 9 months, a beautiful experience. I felt because I had taught for all those years and had been in education that I could make a contribution so I appreciate the opportunities that Roanoke City gave me to serve on the board. I enjoyed working with the kids and teachers and everything and their parents and that just sort-of added a little icing on the career.
RS: Yeah. You found that experience very fulfilling?
CD: Yes, it was. I learned quickly that when you're on a committee, you can't pull things through unless you have majority vote. You can influence things. Sometimes more than others. It was a challenge. But I enjoyed that.
RS: Well, Charles Day, I've known you for the past 40 years and you have been a good influence in my life and I'm glad I was able to conduct this interview with you.
CD: Well, it was my pleasure and like I said before, I remember your very sweet mother. She was really a nice lady and a beautiful lady. I remember – a little sideline – I was principal of French Elementary School and I had a teacher, Miss Dowell (??). And my mother came by the school one day to visit me and Miss Dowell told me, said, "Mr. Day, You and Albert have some beautiful mothers". She was talking about herself. (both laughing) That's certainly how – what she was. She was very attractive. And your father was really nice, quiet, a very quiet gentleman. Tall, he was about 6'3" wasn't he?
RS: Yeah, 6'4".
CD: I knew he was tall.
RS: Actually, my son is big like my father.
CD: He is? He played basketball, didn't he?
RS: Yes sir, he played basketball and a lot of the men – My father went, lived in Salem so he was a big basketball star up at Carver (??) and he and Irving Canaday (??) were always competitors and they were also good friends but this was after my father had died and Malique (??) was about 14 or 15 years old and they had the court basketball camp over at Addison and Irving Canaday (??) walked in there one day and looked at me and looked at my son and he said, "If that's not Elmer Thomas' child". And he does. Now, every time I look at Malique, he favors my father more and more every day.
CD: Its amazing. Small world isn't it? You've done a quite a good job. I'm proud of you.
RS: Well, thank you Coach Day, I appreciate that. Alright, thank you sir.
CD: Pleasure seeing you. Thank you young lady. [Mr. Day Addressing Alicia Sell who was running the recording equipment.]