

*Prince Williams:* Good morning. On behalf of the Corners of Highland Heights, Highland Heights United Methodist Church, and Crossroads to Freedom at Rhodes College, I would like to thank you for taking the time to share your story. Today's date is June 8, 2015. My name is Prince Williams, and I attend South Haven High School.

*Allison Henry:* My name is Allison Henry, and I attend Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering.

*Prince Williams:* Let's start out with some basic questions about you and your life. Then we will ask more specific questions about the neighborhood. What is your name?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* John Scott.

*Prince Williams:* If you don't me asking, what year were you born?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* Oh man, a million years ago, 1967.

*Prince Williams:* Where were you born and raised?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* I was born in Miami, Florida, but we moved here when I was a year-and-a-half. This is where my grandparents are from, where we're living, so that's why we moved back.

*Prince Williams:* What is your occupation?

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*John F. Scott, Jr.:* Right now, I am a crew bus driver at FedEx.

*Prince Williams:* Can you tell me how it is like?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* To be a crew bus driver? This is only the third day of my second week, so right now it is still a little nerve-wracking trying to learn where all the airport gates are. We have 150 gates here at FedEx. I have to drive back and forth picking up pilots and bringing them to their check-in station. I still haven't learned where all the aircraft gates are. Other than that, it is fine.

*Prince Williams:* Can you tell me how you got the job?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* It is 20 and-a-half years ago that I've been working there. My cousin set up the interview there on the 800 number. You just call an 800 number and you get your appointment, you go in and fill

out the paperwork, and come back. That is how you get in. You just start at ground level and go up.

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*Prince Williams:* Did you ever marry?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* No. Unlucky in love.

*Prince Williams:* Did you have children?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* No.

*Prince Williams:* Can you tell me about the neighborhood you grew up in?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* I grew up about one mile north of where we're sitting. Whenever I tell people where it is, I tell them somewhere in Highland because that is easiest way for them to identify where it is. The Treadwell/Kingsbury neighborhood I tell them.

What do you want to know specifically? What do you mean "about the neighborhood I grew up in?"

*Prince Williams:* How was it like when you were growing up?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* Oh. You could walk down the streets as a kid, like a child. I'm saying like ten years old. I used to walk to and from the Boys Club that is here. It is probably about half a mile from my house. Even as a 10 year old, 12 –

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year old, you didn't have to worry about any of that sort of thing. The neighborhood then, you pretty much knew everybody – all the other kids in the neighborhood – because you were outside of the house riding your bikes or big wheels or whatever, just general tom-foolery. That's an old people's word.

It was a great place to grow up. I still believe this neighborhood is a great place for families. But, it was – I don't know; I didn't think much about what this neighborhood is like when I was growing up, being a kid. But, I know that I was outside a lot, just being in the neighborhood. I don't know; I've never been asked that question, so I haven't thought about it.

*Allison Henry:* How were your parents? What were they like?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* What do you mean? What were their names?

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*Allison Henry:* You could tell us their names.

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* Okay. I grew up raised by a grandmother, and a mother, and an older sister. My grandfather – who we moved back from Miami to live with – passed away when I was about eight years old. I never really knew my father that well. I didn't know him at all, except for photographs. I've never seen his face or heard his voice.

My mother is the greatest woman I have ever known. That's a fact. I've never seen anyone stronger or smarter. I don't know if that is idol worship or not. A kid looks up to his parents if they're good parents. She worked every day, just a regular working person. She worked at Rhodes College, believe it or not. She moved from there to Methodist – it is now known as Methodist University – when I was in the twelfth grade.

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My sister is just five years older than me, just a regular sister.

Let me think: What were they like? My grandmother was 60 years old when I was born, so she was a completely and totally different generation when I was born. Of course, my grandfather was living then, as well.

What I can tell you about my mother mostly is that she set aside her life for the sake of me and my sister. The reason that that is the way I say that is because they were in their late twenties when I was born. You know what I mean? My father still wanted to be young – which I understand – but my mother was willing to set aside all the young person things that she might have wanted –

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to do to make sure my sister and I were taken care of.

My mother and my grandmother were great. Everything that I know about women – which is very limited; I don't know if it is limited or extensive, I don't know – is because of my grandmother and my mother and my older sister. Because of being raised by

them, in the house, at home, that is probably why I have such a high regard for women: ladies, girls, females.

The male influence in my life came from the Boys Club and the church that I grew up in. There were men who were leaders in those organizations. There were men in my life; they simply weren't in the home.

*Allison Henry:* Would you describe them as your role models?

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*John F. Scott, Jr.:* Absolutely. Beyond a shadow of a doubt.

*Allison Henry:* What schools did you attend?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* At Leawood Baptist Church, when I was in the first grade, Briarcrest had a partnership with them. I went there for first grade. Second, third, and fourth grade I went to Treadwell Elementary. Fifth and sixth I was at Kingsbury Elementary, and seventh and eighth grade I was in midtown at a place called Miss Lee's School of Childhood. The school is not there, but the buildings are still there. I think it is owned by Grace-St. Luke's now. For high school, I went to Memphis Catholic, which was right there next door to St. Peter's. It is still there.

*Allison Henry:* What was school like for you?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* Just like it is for any of you guys. No.

What was it like?

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I guess it is part of my Greek heritage; I am Greek on my father's side. I have since found out that the Greek culture is about learning, knowledge – learning, learning, learning. You had to be interested in learning. I guess it's really not in the fiber of who you are, but I've always loved learning so I liked it. As crazy as that sounds, I liked school 'cause there were so many things to learn. I just really enjoyed learning. I haven't really gotten over that either.

When I was kid, my grandmother named me Curious George because I was always, "What's that? Gee, what is that? I want to touch that. What is going on over that? I want to walk over there, get into that. Oh man, what are they doing? I want to know what

they're doing. What does that light switch do? I want to touch that. I want to touch that; I want to learn about that."

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It got me in trouble quite a bit. I was sorry to see it end, as dumb as that sounds, 'cause I really enjoyed all the new stuff to learn.

*Prince Williams:* What church do you attend?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* I still attend Leawood Baptist Church. It is about a mile away from where we're sitting, as well, here in [38122](#).

*Prince Williams:* Can you tell us what it is like?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* What it is like now?

*Prince Williams:* What it was like from then, and now.

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* It was pretty big. It was on the rise. Leawood was a church that sort of exploded out of what was known as the Jesus Movement of the '70s where teenagers, literal hippy kids – you could check out history books and picture books to find out – came during the Jesus Movement of the '70s.

When I went there in 1979, the summer of my fifth grade year just before I went –

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into sixth grade; yeah, that's right. It was pretty big. I was part of a very large youth group. It was great. Camaraderie and unity was the name of the game, as they say, because we did everything – even in junior high and high school – as a group, a large group.

Those were the days where if there was something going on it was probably through the church. Any kind of big thing I wanted to do as a teenager was either at the Boys Club or at church because that is where the two large groups of people who I was involved with were. That is where your brothers and sisters were, your family. There are people who I still know; I've known them for over 35 years – more than half –

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my entire life.

What was it like? Man, it was just one giant family. There are people now who have kids who I remember when they were born. I told you I was really old. I do remember when they were born. They were kids of people who I grew up with, and now they have kids. That is kind of weird.

*Allison Henry:* Can you share some of the memories from your childhood that influenced you later on in life?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* I know that growing up at the Boys Club, that's where the men – we have a club director and a program director, two different guys – that were in everything. Just being around those guys and being around all the guys that I grew up with. At the time, it was only a boys club. They have since – here –

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in Memphis – gone to Boys and Girls Club as an organization to match up nationally, probably.

Growing up in this neighborhood, I was with people of every color, of every social and economic background, monetary status. I was with people that had both parents in the house. I was with guys – guys that did not have both parents in the house – like me.

Apparently, I've beaten some sort of stat: coming from a single-parent home, raised by a mother and a grandmother. The things that I learned just being a part of the Boys Club and being a part of church, have made me who I am – I guess.

One thing I have told people is I went there when I was –

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11 turning 12, fifth grade into sixth grade. I am pretty sure that going to the church and to the Boys Club the same summer and being in that atmosphere where we were looked after as kids by the people that ran the organizations where we were thought about, the adults invested in my life, I am pretty sure that is what saved me, kept me out of trouble, literally. This is a tough neighborhood. It remains a very tough neighborhood.

More than likely, this is the reason why 29 years later I still work with kids. I went straight out of high school into youth ministry, or working with teenagers at the Boys Club and working in the youth

ministry at my church as a volunteer. That is probably the reason why. There is just some sort of compulsion –

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that I have to give back. I don't think, "Oh, I want to give back," it just seemed natural to want to be for kids in this neighborhood what the adults were for me. That sounds really pious, maybe, on my part. Like, "Oh man, look how great I am." No, it just seemed natural to me to do that. So, the influence that those places had on me is that they made me who I am. I don't know however good or bad that is. Because of that, now I am doing the same. I hope to do the same, to be able to give what I was given, is what I am trying to say.

I don't know of anything specific, one –

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"aha" moment, if you will, or one thing where I turned the corner and this is it. I will say that thanks to the Boys Club I was able to go to college. It was a technical college, which is an Associate's Degree college here. I was pretty sure though that even though I was getting a degree that I probably would always be with teenagers and college students, that I would always be trying to be some sort of volunteer. Either that, or maybe I just didn't want to grow up. That's probably what it really is.

*Prince Williams:* What does Highland Heights mean to you?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* Family. Home. The place I grew up. The place where my life is, my entire life. I've thought about the fact that some people who live in small towns, sometimes they don't ever leave. They just don't. There's –

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nothing wrong with that. They simply are okay with where they are, with the city or town they live in, and they just stay. I've been able to do very limited travel. But when I think of 38122 and Highland Heights, it really is who I am as a person. I was able to overcome all the negative aspects of this neighborhood and I was able to not be what some parts of the neighborhood seem to say that a kid is. I was able to not be all the negative things that I could have been.

Highland Heights to me is who I am. It is where I am from.

*Allison Henry:* Were the people in Highland Heights different –

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than they are now?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* I don't think so. I'm a member of a church that stayed in the neighborhood. What I mean by that is there is something called white flight that took place here in Memphis, from the river out towards the east. As neighborhoods changed, as kids grew up – I'm talking about different cultures – they moved. They transitioned from what they started off as to what they are now.

My church stayed; well, part of my church stayed. We decided to stay in this community because there are still people in this community that need the influence of a church – everything positive that a church can bring to a neighborhood or a community.

The reason I say that I don't think so as far as that group goes is because we're still doing the same thing that I remember having done for me growing up.

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The neighborhood is different, of course, because the whole world is different. Things are different; people are different. The people who were young adults when I was a child are now senior adults. Their kids are now my age. Their kid's kids are now in their thirties, so they are the ones who live in the neighborhood.

It is always going to be changing, I think, maybe for the positive and for the negative. At its core, it is still families. Just because the skin color or the nationality – are they Hispanic or Asian or Caucasian – is all different, this community is still family-oriented. As some groups get older and retire or move out, other families are still moving in. That's what I notice about this neighborhood. That is actually –

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still the same. I guess it is a little bit of both.

*Allison Henry:* What is the reputation of Highland Heights?



*John F. Scott, Jr.:* I guess I can't answer that; you'd have to ask someone who is not from here. I would suspect that is probably gang-related because in one part of 38122 there is a lot of gang graffiti, so there are people who probably think that is all there is to it. Just two miles north of where we're sitting is the University of Memphis. So, maybe some people think this is a college-oriented community. I guess I'm really not sure.

*Allison Henry:* Where are some places in Highland Heights that makes it a better place?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* We've got a library right in the middle, or close by anyway, and –

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a Boys and Girls Club, and Jerry's Sno Cones. That is near here; I don't know if it would be considered "the Heights."

There's been a focus – it seems like – over the last five years in this community for groups like yours to come and really focus on this community and make sure that it is okay, taken care of.

*Prince Williams:* Is there any advice you would like to leave with the younger generation of Highland Heights?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* Yes. If you live in a neighborhood that is rough around the edges and there is a lot of negative behavior outside of the doors of your home, I would say just remember that that is not all of who you are. You do not have to be what the neighborhood says you have to be. Your –

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destiny does not have to be what the reputation of the neighborhood has to be. You can be more or you can be less. I believe that you should find out who you are as a person and where you fit in the big picture. You just don't have to follow what the negative part of the neighborhood says; you can be more. You don't have to just say, "Well, I guess this is all I will be," because that's not true.

I don't know if anybody can say that I'm living proof of that, me, but I guess I am because I know that some people say that I did not do what the neighborhood said. I've never been to jail, thankfully. I don't pat myself on the back; I'm just saying. Just don't buy into your surroundings, your circumstances. That is not –

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who you are. That is just where you are right now. That is where you are starting off.

Always learn. Never, never, never, stop learning. Always learn, always ask questions. Maybe not in a negative sense like you're rebelling, but just ask, "What is that? What's going on?" Always look for a positive way to influence someone else.

Someone once said that the legacy is going to be what we did to influence the people around us. I still believe that is true. Your legacy can be more than just what you did for yourself, but how can you leave where you started a better place than it was when you were there.

*Prince Williams:* Is there anything you would like to add onto that we haven't covered?

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* I guess I can't think of anything.

*Prince Williams:* Thank you for participating –

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in the Crossroads to Freedom Project.

*John F. Scott, Jr.:* All right. Thank you for having me.

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