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Interviewer: Today is June 18th. On behalf of the Crossroads to Freedom, Rose, and Team for success, we'd like to thank you for agreeing to speak with us today, and I'm Conard.

Interviewer 2: I'm Cedrick Kimble.

Interviewer: Today's interview will be archived only at the Crossroads to Freedom website. Can you please state background information? What is your name?

Gregory Ross: Gregory Ross.

Interviewer: If you don't mind can you tell us what year you were born?

Gregory Ross: In 1966.

Interviewer: Was you born and raised in Lake County?

Gregory Ross: Yes I was.

Interviewer: What was it like?

Gregory Ross: For me, because of sports it was good. I enjoyed growing up in Lake County. Sports gave me the opportunity to do things that most people don't get the opportunity to do. So I really enjoyed growing up in Lake County.

Interviewer 2: Would you say that being involved in sports kept you on the right track?

Gregory Ross: Most definitely. You know sports teaches –

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Gregory Ross: -- you life lessons if you take heed to them. There are many lessons taught in sports, and I thank God for the things that were taught to me through sports.

Interviewer 2: What sports did you participate in?

Gregory Ross: I participated in basketball and football.

Interviewer 2: Which one did you participate more in?

Gregory Ross: Well see growing up in Lake County when I was coming through, school wise, basketball and football was the only two sports. Later after I left baseball came up. So I did a lot with both basketball and football.

Interviewer: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Gregory Ross: I have a brother that just passed two weeks ago. He played on the 1985 state championship team in Lake County high school, and he passed in at 44.

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Gregory Ross: I have three sisters, and they don't live here.

Interviewer 2: What place did you fall in? Are you the oldest?

Gregory Ross: I'm the oldest of the siblings.

Interviewer: Do you have any kids?

Gregory Ross: Yes I have three kids. I have my oldest daughter. Her name is Akira. My middle child is Hope, and my son who just graduated from Lake County High is Gregory.

Interviewer: How did you like raising your kids in Lake County?

Gregory Ross: Once again, it was good for me, because you know when you go in a grow up with the opportunities with God blessed me with being able to leave and see how other parts of the world worked knowing that a lot of things that go on in Lake County is not real rural. It made raising my kids a lot easier. Also, when you come up without a father, and the way that I looked –

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Gregory Ross: -- it is being a father, I wanted to be the best father I could be. So I think raising my kids was fine here.

Interviewer 2: You said you grew up without having a father. So did you explain your relationship with your mother?

Gregory Ross: Oh very close nit relationship, because at that time my mother, other than my coaches is what I had. I said my dad wasn't in my life, but he wasn't here physically. He was in Michigan and I was here, and my mother played the role, because she was a basketball player at the Lincoln High, the all black school that was here. So she was able to teach me some things in basketball, which also turned over in football.

Interviewer 2: So since we're on that subject, who would you consider throughout your life being your role model growing up?

Gregory Ross: My role model growing up was I had an uncle by the name of Charles Rice.

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Gregory Ross: -- who played on one of the better basketball teams here. He graduated in 1975, and also it goes back to my mother, because like I said, my mother was mother, father, and everything, provider; she was everything. So you know between the two, but if I narrowed it down to one it'll always go back to being my mother.

Interviewer: What's your occupation?

Gregory Ross: Right now I coach football and basketball at Lake County High School. I'm also a ISS instructor there, and I also own a cleaning business, Greg's Janitorial Services.

Interviewer: What would you say would be the best part of your job?

Gregory Ross: I guess interacting with the young people. Trying to lead them to places that I would be in, or even lead them to greater places.

Interviewer: Can you describe the church you attended?

Gregory Ross: Attended or attend?

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Interviewer: Attend.

Gregory Ross: I attend the Major Church of God and Christ here in Tiptonville at 809 Lake Street where Ella Kurtson Lyndon is a pastor. It's a church where everybody and somebody be knowing that Jesus Christ is a star, and you know it's a bible teaching church, and I really enjoy it, but you know if I would say anything I really don't do go by a name on a church. I go by the teachers that are in a church. So I can attend any church, and get something out of it as long as they're teaching the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Interviewer 2: You told us the church you attend now. So what church did you attend growing up?

Gregory Ross: Growing up, really Chapel of Ridgely Baptist Church down in Ridgely.

Interviewer: Being that you grew up in Lake County, and still reside here are there certain things that kept you here, or is it just the love that you got for the county?

Gregory Ross: You know once I graduated –

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Gregory Ross: -- and was fortunate to get a scholarship in Memphis, and after that you know I was fortunate enough to be drafted to the NFL. I didn't quite make it, because I got hurt, and I played in a couple of little leagues, I knew at the end of the day I would come back to Lake County, because I feel like Lake County did so much for me.

I wanted to come back and so something for Lake County, and also the young people. So you know my love for this county is huge.

Interviewer: Have you done something for Lake County yet, or the young people?

Gregory Ross: I believe I have. I do something for them all the time. You know one thing about coaching at a small rural school is just like when I was coming up is my coaches were like father figures. They had to do a lot for me, and likewise with me. I do a lot not only for the athletes, but for any kid that needs my help.

Interviewer 2: So we've learned that you are a part of coaching at Lake County High School. Can you talk more about that?

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Gregory Ross: Well you know I always said if I did coach, which after I finished playing here I didn't know if I wanted to coach, because coaching is a tough job, and at times I really didn't care for how my coaches coached me, and I knew they were doing their jobs, but in coming back, and coaching in Lake County I love it here. Growing up I told you a few minutes ago, my brother who just passed, Bobby Ross played on a 1985 state championship team, something that eluded me in my days here, but I was able to win a championship in basketball. The first and only one in school's history, you know we made history, because we had a female here coach. So coaching here has meant a lot to me, and it ranks very high on my list of things that I've accomplished in life.

Interviewer 2: Sorry to hear that about your brother, but I want to know what inspired you –

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Interviewer 2: -- to want to coach? You know be a part of the youth of the school, what inspired you to do that?

Gregory Ross: Well you know I knew how important my coaches were to me, and I knew that if I could break into the coach's ranks here, or

anywhere coaching, I could be a game changer, or a difference maker, and being from Lake County with the young people at heart I wanted to be a game changer for them. I wanted to make some things happen that would help them in life. I really feel like I've accomplished some of those things.

Interviewer 2: Can you tell us what it was like around the time the basketball team won state?

Gregory Ross: Oh it was awesome. You know in my life I've been blessed to attend two super bowls, because of course my brother-in-law is Jerry Reese, general manager of New York Giants, and I was fortunate to –

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Gregory Ross: -- go to two super bowls, and I texted him after we won, after each game, and I told him that this is just like what you all did in the NFL, of course in the Super Bowl, and I compared it to that, because it was just that big, and I felt like it was something that brought this community at the time close together.

Interviewer 2: Could you talk more about your relationship with Mr. Jerry Reese? I know you said that's your brother-in-law.

Gregory Ross: You know before he became my brother-in-law, once again, I met him in church, and I'll say the same today as I said about him then. He's one of the most humble, professional men I've met to be from right here in Lake County, which I am, I feel like we have something in common. I broke into the NFL in 1989. I can't remember the year that he became a scout for the New York Giants, but unlike me –

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Gregory Ross: -- he went on to higher heights, because he's a general manager of the New York's Giants, and that's next to an owner, but my relationship with him is I say he's my brother. We're like brothers, and I have a lot of love for him.

Interviewer 2: We've also learned that you were a part of the NFL. Can you tell us how you were able to get to that point?

Gregory Ross: Hard work and dedication; you know I was taught as a kid to dream and to dream big, and you know if you don't think you can it doesn't matter what anybody else thinks, you can't make it. From my days here in Lake County, if you look around, you all that aren't from Lake County, there's not much here, and I knew I wanted more out of life. So when I took my summer vacations in the summers and I went places I was like you know I want that, and through hard work, a lot of work, and believing in myself, --

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Gregory Ross: -- and believing what my coaches were instilling in me, I was able to work my way from Lake County High to Memphis State, it's now the University of Memphis, and then to the NFL in minor offense.

Interviewer 2: In your own words, how do you think Lake County has changed over the years?

Gregory Ross: In some ways I want to say it's changed for the better, and some ways I want to say it's changed for the worse, because I see young people not desiring to really become anything, whereas when I was coming through we all wanted to be something, and no one thought we could be. Who would've ever thought a poor kid from Lake County could make it to the NFL, and it's been a couple. Michael Swift, who grew up under men in Ridgely, he went to Austin Peay State University, and if I'm not mistaken he played for the Carolina Panthers. Myself, I was in the NFL draft in 1989 --

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Gregory Ross: -- with the Miami Dolphins. Of course Jerry Reese went to UT Martin, and was a star at UT Martin, coached at UT Martin, and he ended up with the New York Giants. In that era we all wanted something. We didn't worry about what wasn't here. We knew where we wanted to go, and what it was going to take to get there; hard work, dedication, and a whole lot of God.

Interviewer: So what advice would you give to the youth of Lake County?

Gregory Ross: First of all, I would tell them to take advantage of the opportunities they have, like with the free education. You know a lot of young people here talk about the school system. Well the school system is what you make it. When you sit in the classroom, it's not mother, father, it's the teacher, but it's also you. My thing is I use this a lot, and it's a phrase that we've been hearing for a long time. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink,--

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Gregory Ross: -- and the one thing that youth has here is the opportunity to get a free education. A good education is what's going to take you. We know that God is first, but you're going to need an education to survive out here in the world.

Interviewer: Would you say that the youth of Lake County is more involved in activities now or back in the day?

Gregory Ross: I believe back in the day. See once again, we didn't spend or waste our time talking about what wasn't here. We just took the resources that we have and made do. Today you get a lot of complaining that doesn't contribute to them being successful. It contributes to them not being successful.

Interviewer 2: Would you say that Lake County has changed over the years?

Gregory Ross: Most definitely.

Interviewer 2: Is there anything in particular that you would like to see changed --

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Interviewer 2: -- in the years to come?

Gregory Ross: I would like to see everybody getting involved, being behind the youth, and pushing them in a positive way instead of a negative way, and one time I felt like, you know now think about this now.

I graduated here in 1985, and like now there wasn't much going on, but once again we didn't complain, and we knew what it was going to take. It takes the same thing today as it did then. You have to have education. It doesn't matter how good you are in sports, if a school comes here, and look at you, you know they want to give you a scholarship, oh your grade on the basketball court, baseball, and down on the football field, but you don't have any academics you're not going anywhere. So I would love to see the community and everybody get behind the youth. Stop talking about the negative thing, --

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Gregory Ross: -- and push in a positive way so we can have more successful young black men and women.

Interviewer 2: As an organization Crossroads to Freedom focuses on assets based community development meaning that we focus on the institutions, ideas, and organizations that bring value to the community. In your community, what are some of the greatest assets in Lake County?

Gregory Ross: By being small, let's take the school system. We have a small school. I think a little over 200 students, maybe 250. Each class is small. You can be as up close and personal with your instructors as you want, but it's all in what you want. I would love to see the young people here, once again, I don't want to sound like a broken record, to stop complaining about what's not here, and take advantage of what is here so they can be successful.

Interviewer: If you could describe Lake County --

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Interviewer: -- in one word what would it be and why?

Gregory Ross: Talented, because there's a lot of talent here not just in sports. You have young people here that can sing. You have young people that are artistic. There's a lot here. We just have to water it, you know? My grandmother told one of my uncles this; he was

upset, because he felt that she was spending more time with one child more than the other, and she just looked at him and told him. She said some flowers need more watering than others. So we just need to water these flowers so the young people will grow and go.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add that we didn't talk about?

Gregory Ross: Not really. I feel like you all hit on most of the points that's important for our youth, because at the end of the day, that's one reason why I came back.

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Gregory Ross: I wanted to be able to give back to a small poor community that gave me a lot.

Interviewer 2: We wanted to thank you for participating in the Crossroads of Freedom project, and we really enjoyed learning about your story today. So once again we thank you.

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