

Daniel Saba: Crossroads to Freedom. Thank you for participating in this interview; and to get started, just what's your name?

Cleophus Dowdy: My name is Cleophus Dowdy.

Daniel Saba: Can you tell a little bit about who you are? Where were you born, born and raised, occupation?

Cleophus Dowdy: _____ My name is Cleophus Dowdy. I was born in Marshall County, Mississippi. I went to school, high school, elementary school here in Memphis. I graduated from high school. I joined the Army. Stayed in the Army four years. I was coming outta the Army. I went to college. I went to junior college. Yeah, I went to a four-year school. I played football, and I came back home. I started working with the city of Memphis Park and Recreation Service. I worked 32 years in the Community Center as a Community Center Director.

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Daniel Saba: When did you move to Memphis?

Cleophus Dowdy: I don't know when I moved. I went to elementary school here, so quite young and very young, at a young age. I know I started elementary school here in Memphis. Finished high school here in Memphis, also. Joined the Army, and –

Daniel Saba: When was this?

Cleophus Dowdy: The dates?

Daniel Saba: About roughly when.

Cleophus Dowdy: About in the '60s.

Daniel Saba: Who are your parents?

Cleophus Dowdy: My parents is Augusta Dowdy and Rufus Dowdy. They're both deceased. I have five brothers. One was killed in Vietnam. One was killed in his house, and he was – and I got two sisters; and there are three brothers still here. So –

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Daniel Saba: What do you remember about the '60s? You said you were in the Army, sorta the late '50s to early '70s. Any sort of –

Cleophus Dowdy: I was in during the '60s. What – I was with the – I was with what you call combat engineers. It was – and we were stationed in Germany. We was the 78th Engineer Group. We came up on the 7th Corps, 7th Army. Later on, we became 7th Corps. Being a combat engineer, you practically do anything and everything. What they – whatever they call you for. I think one of the scary things in my life was we got called up to go to Israel; and we was on the runway; and we _____ go to Israel. We was on one side, and the artillery unit on the other side. So we _____ go.

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Some musta changed right there; and it was so, so bad. I'm still here. So after that, you know, I went through a lotta experience, you know; but you learn a lot; and you can take the bitter, really, with the sweet; and so you just keep rolling. I loved the Army. Fun times. I wish I had stayed on in there, though; but, you know –

Daniel Saba: So you had family back in Memphis, and were you abroad during when MLK came to Memphis and –

Cleophus Dowdy: What you mean? Dr. King?

Daniel Saba: Yes, Dr. King, when he came [Crosstalk] _____

Cleophus Dowdy: Oh, yes, I was overseas then when the assassination?

Daniel Saba: Um-hum.

Cleophus Dowdy: Right, I was overseas.

Daniel Saba: But you had family in – yeah.

Cleophus Dowdy: The family's right here, yes, that's right.

Daniel Saba: So do you have any sort of memory of –

Cleophus Dowdy: Well, only thing I can say is we get what you call a newspaper called *Stars & Stripes*; –

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– and we got this paper; and it was sorta like a riot, guys running down Main Street, broking in stores and with clothes and TVs, running and stuff like that. Then everybody knowing that you from Memphis, man, _____ they'll come up with you and say, "What they doing in Memphis? Burning it down?" You know, so sometime you gotta swallow some stuff; but, to me, it was – I don't know. I don't know what to say. Some, you know, really hard to believe, hard to digest everything. So – that was some of the stuff there.

Daniel Saba: Were there – like did your family tell you any stories about what was happening while you were **away**?

Cleophus Dowdy: Well, they did. They told me they had – they shared – you know, they have a curfew. When you have something like that –

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– back in the day. You two guys weren't even around that time; but they had what you call curfews; and they had the – they didn't have actually tanks. They had personnel carrier. People see a personnel carrier, they think it's a tank. It's not a tank. It is a tank; but it's a personnel carrier soldiers in it; but the thing is they were driving those things around here in Memphis; and _____ my brothers were calling, writing me, telling me about what they had; and they had a curfew on. They even had a curfew on us.

We couldn't go to, you know, you guys have heard it. I don't know have you heard it, but they called it EM Club in the military. We could not go there. They shut it down. They shut it down for maybe about a week, and – just to keep the lid on everything so they didn't have it. It was sort of a bad feeling. It was a bad feeling, but it wasn't nothing you could do about it.

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Quite a ways from home, and if you was here, you couldn't do anything about it either but get off the street at night. Whenever the curfew is, get off the street. So that's _____.

Daniel Saba: So then you came back to the – you left. You came back to the States; and you went to college, you said.

Cleophus Dowdy: Right, I went to a small college in Washington. I had – matter of fact, I had a friend – coworker – he said he had got on the year before I did. He was writing letters for me talking to coaches that

he played football and over in Europe and _____ good for ball players. So I took him up on his words, you know; and we went to Washington State. So –

Daniel Saba: Once again, after school in Washington, you said later Oregon, you came back to Memphis?

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Cleophus Dowdy: Right.

Daniel Saba: To work for the city of Memphis?

Cleophus Dowdy: City of Memphis, right.

Daniel Saba: And how'd you get started at the Community Center, Hollywood
[Crosstalk] _____

Cleophus Dowdy: Well, after – no, I didn't get started actually at Hollywood. I got started at **Katy Saxon**, and it's over in Klondike.

Daniel Saba: Oh, okay.

Cleophus Dowdy: And I left Katy Saxon, and I became the director of the Ed Rice Community Center. It's located in Frasier; and after the Ed Rice, I went to Hollywood as director – not Hollywood, excuse me, Big Foot Community Center, and left Big Foot; and I came to Hollywood. That's where I'm at – that's where I retired from, Hollywood Community Center.

Daniel Saba: What were you doing as **far as** the beginning of this?

Cleophus Dowdy: What you mean? Were we doing this –

Andy Mrkva: What kind of activities were involved in –

Cleophus Dowdy: You have soccer. You have softball, baseball. You have flag football, basketball.

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You have trampoline, tumbling. You have ceramics class for the seniors. You have a room – actually, you have a little room set aside where they could actually come and eat that's conjunction with a private organization come in, feed the seniors and stuff like that; but they have to be X amount of seniors coming in for the

food. They deliver the meal. You don't – food didn't come out. Basketball and baseball, you know, there's someone like a – at that time, _____ situation. Basketball, right now, it's still No. 1, top on the list. So, you know, baseball is sorta like a declining. You know, especially over here in Hollywood and certain areas of the town, declining, you know; but we're trying to get it rolled back to –

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– where it could be better than what it is now.

Daniel Saba: What were the youths like that you worked with?

Cleophus Dowdy: Yeah, well, you're gonna run into all kind. I tell you, you're gonna run into different kind, all kind. At Katy Saxon, it was – you know who you're dealing with; because it's more like home; and if somebody come in and give you any problem, you know who they are. You know where they stay. You know the parents get to – and most of the time, they'll support you. When I went to Ed Rice, I didn't have any problem at all. If you come and they're doing something that you weren't supposed to do, you know the next day _____. I went to Big Foot. It was totally different. It was like you really have to stand up at Big Foot. You know, you gotta let 'em know who run the show.

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And at Hollywood, basically the same way. Hollywood, you know, I stayed down here – in this area down here. It's – look, guy, I'm just gonna be actually truthful to you. You know, I worked in – right by – you haven't been in Hollywood, right?

Daniel Saba: Um-um.

Cleophus Dowdy: Okay. It was tough over there. It's tough. Some guy came in and put – the guy that bought that place, he put that fence in there right before I retired; and that fence actually helped us out a lot 'cause of the fact that we got Hyde Park and people that stay _____. That's a war zone right there. It had come real close. They never come in the center, but it's a war zone right there. They'll cross our parking lot going the other way, going to the Villa. He'd come out onto Hyde Park. It was sorta like a war zone. It was too close to us. So once the guy put that fence there, it sorta like helped us out. In other words, –

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– you have to go all the way around. We don't wanna see that, you know; but it was – Hollywood was sorta tough; but we had a – I had a staff. I had a staff, were a no-nonsense staff. Whatever I tell 'em to do, whatever they suggested that I do, we did it. We worked real – very well together. So I didn't have a problem with that, you know; but we know who the troublemaker, who started it, who bringing the problem, who are the problem. We know that, you know; and so he just sit there; and you'll wait; but in any situation like that, you know who's doing what; but as far as a basketball team and baseball team and tumbling and flipping, you know, you see some of the kids. Sometimes they do some stuff. We had this – I had this one kid that – well, I had –

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– several – it happened at several times, baseball and basketball. You train 'em, and you work 'em out every day; but during game situation, they'll do something that's what you call incredible. We – **I'm training** to do that at all; but he could do it. We can't understand. So some of 'em make you real proud. Some of 'em make you – you know, it's bad. You know, I'm telling – we had some kids. There's a guy who came up there. Matter of fact, these guys stay right up in the community. Well, this guy was All-American. This guy was a All-American. He what you call a blue chip. He went to **King Berry**, and everybody wanted him. I'm talking about Michigan, Michigan State, Ohio. This kid **was best of** good. He was good; but, you know, –

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– somehow it got to him a little bit. He getting all these letters and grants and stuff. It got to him a little bit, you know; and he was just coming out of – he was just going into his senior year; and you guys – the type guys that's on the street that if they see you play football, like they're halfway scared of you. They saw this kid play. This particular guy saw him. This guy shot him. Well, he – the guy actually about to die; 'cause he shot him blank, just like me standing here _____ just shot him. We don't know how he lived; and, somehow, it just messed him up. I always wonder about that kid, 'cause the fact that _____ my potential would never match his potential at being an All-American. This just got total blue chip.

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So you sit there, and you wonder, you know, "Hey, that guy is awesome." But as far as me trying to reach him, I couldn't reach him. I'd tell him – I'd go and tell my supervisor, "Hey, look, sometime I'm spinning my wheels." My supervisor told me, "You're not spinning your wheel." He said – he told me that, "If you just get one, one outta all them kids come in here, and that summer, you just get one, you will have – you can – you just get one, you did your job." I said, "One?" I said, "That's a low percentage." He just said, "One." So what I did was – some of the stuff I did was trying to make total contact, total commitment with the kids; and some kids played on my basketball team. I'm like this, you know, I tell him in a minute I said, "Hey, basketball ain't your game."

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"You ain't going no farther. You need to find you another job. You find you a job. You just ain't gonna play no basketball. No farther than the Community Center." And some kid come to, they'll play a lot. Do this, laugh and joke, have a good time; and I say, "Yeah, okay, all right, all right. Now, at graduation time comes, you gonna graduate?" "Yeah, I'm gonna graduate." I said, "Well, the best thing for you to do is go and join the Army." And believe it or not, three of 'em did it; but **X many** – so three of 'em did it. You know, you kinda get kinda halfway scared; 'cause that ain't no play toy. Playing days is over. You don't play no more when you do it. You know, you go – the training is real. You can get hurt in training, and these guys _____ one joined the Navy.

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Two joined the Army; and one I heard that he done did a whole tour in Iraq; and he's coming back; and then he going back again. One – might have four of 'em. Yes, right, four. One guy went to Afghanistan. He brought me pictures back of Russian tanks being blown up; and, you know, he took pictures of – yeah, he messing around with this stuff. You have to talk to 'em and tell 'em. I said, "That's stuff, you don't mess with that stuff. Even though them tanks blowed up, they may have something in there go off. Now, don't be climbing around on this stuff." He said he took picture from the outside; but, you know, you kinda wonder sometimes. You know, say, "Oh, wow," Was that good advice from me to tell them to go and join the Army; and they go and join

the Army; and, like I said, one that did one tour. Now he say he's back doing another tour.

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You kinda shake your head, "Wonder did I tell him wrong? Did I do something wrong?" And even when I get him, when I see him here, I pop him up side the head. "Man, I didn't tell you go there do no two tours over in Iraq. That's nothing to play with, you know." So _____. I have my good days and my bad days. You know, we – **gay** guys, you know, you're in a community; and you get Hyde Park, Hollywood, and they call it – down in this neighborhood, right down here they call it Tupelo. Okay, you got three different groups meeting. When they crash, they wanna crash at my place. No, that ain't gonna happen. I can't do this alone. You know, I have to have the help from the Memphis Police Department. We is a partnership, you know. Matter of fact, my thing was to get in contact with the police officer. You get his cell number.

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I ain't calling no precinct, you know; 'cause precinct, they put you down. You be out there for – they'll come tomorrow. I don't need that. I need to come today. Plus the fact we told the lieutenant that he was _____. "Man, we ain't gonna call you for a fight. We'll call you if they have a pistol or they have gun on the property." They have gun on property, we call him. We don't have that. We don't have that; and we can't deal with that; and so it was – we had our ups and down. We have ups and down. Like in a Community Center, you can't run a Community Center by itself. You have to have a support group. Of course, you know, **Rose Collage** was a support group for me; and they helped me out. The made by program beautiful. I had to only sit back and call the shots. Somebody go there and crazy, I'm gonna call somebody move 'em off the property. I ask 'em to leave, they'll leave.

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If they don't, I'm gonna get somebody that would take 'em away; but I had support from Rose. I had support from the church groups, school, different organizations up in Hollywood, Hyde Park would come out and help me as far as making a program; but you just can't do stuff on and by yourself; and, to me, it real easy; and you'd be surprised some of the parents come out and support you. Some of the parents go and pick their kids up, bring 'em to

practice, take their kids back home; but we had all this at the Center; and –

Andy Mrkva: What's an example of a program that – like Rose or the churches _____ to make happen? Like what's the – can you give me like an example?

Cleophus Dowdy: What you mean? What?

Andy Mrkva: Like a program that [*Crosstalk*] _____

Daniel Saba: You mentioned like partnerships. Like Rose and church and –

Cleophus Dowdy: Well, you know, like, –

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– well, they would come out like support you. Okay. The park, our budget, we had nothing in – our budget don't have – we don't have enough to get what we need to run a Easter egg hunt or a Halloween or either Thanksgiving basket or either Christmas. Man, we don't have the – so we go to our partnership. That's when we go to our churches. We go to different organization. "Can we get this from you? Can we get this?"

I remember one year, we had a Christmas giveaway. What we'd do, we'd go to a family; and we get maybe two or three – how many kids – all depends on how many kids in that family. If it's three kids, we gonna get all three kids something. We get 'em a footlocker full of everything: shoes, shirts, _____. Everything they needed, put their name on it, sorta like a footlocker.

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Nothing like a footlocker, but we will get them everything they need; and we had a adult volleyball team would volley – would help out _____ stuff like that. We had quite a – you know, the biggest thing that when you have something like this going, once you get that support, once you get the community involved, coming out and helping you, everything goes rolling for you. So we had quite a support, and you two guys weren't around. Of course, y'all wasn't around. Rose put up a haunted house in the gym, and it was so – it was like off – it was really, you can say, off the chains. We normally have to get – we get MPD to come by there and check at a certain time; and –

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– we had it. Everything was smooth. It was absolutely great. You know, supervisor couldn't even believe that, and the director couldn't believe it either. You know, just the idea that all this support was in here; and how the guy set the haunted house up in the gym. By setting it up in the gym, you set up haunted house in the gym, that's large. You don't know where you're going; but we had kids at a certain age group; and they did an outstanding job. They did a wonderful job for us. So, you know –

Daniel Saba: How do you think the other event – like how is that event _____? Say how do you think that the youths felt about _____?

Cleophus Dowdy: About the Halloween? They feel great. They feel great. They feel great; and believe it or not, it put a –

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– _____. I go around. I set up in the boss' office saying, "You know, I'm the best you got over here. Who gonna top that? What other Center gonna top that?" I said, "I want you to get another Center to top that." He just sat there. He won't no comment, no nothing. He asked me did I got something to do. "Yeah, I got something to do." But you know you got – he saw it himself. So you feel good. Like I say, it's the same way about basketball. We have a – the one in Spring, we have a men's summer league; and we had a ladies' summer league, also; but that was the end. Now, we don't even have a men's. I don't even think there's a men's summer league; but during that time, we did have men's summer league; and it was –

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– we was in the old Hollywood right down on Chelsea. It was – we didn't have no air. It was white wall to wall _____. They wanted to see something like that. They have a good time; but it's like talking about stuff. **See, this is passing.** We had a good time doing it.

Daniel Saba: And you mentioned that it was pretty _____. Was that different compared to like other Community Centers?

Cleophus Dowdy: No, it wasn't – it shouldn't. No, it's not – it's basically the same thing.; but some – like I've been saying, I was fortunate. I was very fortunate to get you guys involved in coming over. Not you guys exactly, but some more guys in front of you that came over there helping out, not only helping out with Halloween, but –

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– tutoring and the guy that actually came over, started a chess class; and I had a young lady, she actually came – started working with the young ladies over there at the Center; and, you know, she was a no-nonsense. She gonna take nothing off, you know; and if somebody come in there talking – being disrespectful, she gonna push 'em up outta there. She gonna tell me that this person not coming back; and I – hey, you don't come back; but she had a beautiful program. She was – she would actually take the girls over to Rose College. She would – they would go swimming at Rose. They would go, basically, everything Rose, you know; and it was showing – she actually was showing two different sides to everything. So they definitely enjoyed that; and then they had – something what you guys was talking about.

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They had a ball night with all the girls dressed up in a gown, and they looked real good. Something like that, you know. You can't beat that. You can't top that, you know; and like I said, they – the tutoring program, they had that in there; and you see – we have folks **imitation**. They come up here and say, "Well, we'll start something here." But you never see 'em. You never hear from 'em anymore. Rose College were always there. So we went from there. It was pretty good. It was pretty good. It was easy on me. Now I shouldn't have really retired, 'cause it was going so good. You stay there sorta long period of time, and you really seems like it – but I think I did the right thing, though.

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Daniel Saba: How long were you at specifically the Hollywood Community Center?

Cleophus Dowdy: I'm trying to think. It has to be about 20 years, 19 or 20 years Hollywood.

Daniel Saba: And throughout that time period, did you notice any sort of changes in the community, how it affected the Center?

Cleophus Dowdy: Well, everything – it really is – well, when I was working at – _____ when I'm working at Hollywood on Chelsea, you know, we had what you call fights. You know, a fight break out, it just be plain fight. To me, when time changes, the young jokers go home, get their guns, come back. Time is changing; and so we moved to Hollywood up there on Hollywood. Time has definitely changed. So you have to be aware that –

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– you run into a different – you know, you stay there so long, you run into – these kid get grown. They grow up and going out. They have kids and family and stuff, move on. Then you got some just stay there. They ain't going nowhere. If they ain't there, they're up on the corner somewhere. But old Hollywood was sorta like old Hollywood, you know. You have different branches. You have different groups that -- I don't think Tupelo guys _____ come down to – of course, when I was there, they nearly come. They very seldom come down to Hollywood on Hollywood; but when it was on Chelsea, they were there; but they were figuring out their range. Then you have kids from Hyde Park come over from – when we was on Hollywood. So, basic –

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– no, there's nothing changes. Basically, everything's the same; but _____ don't change. To me, you got kinda – we moved, like I say, you know, like the kid got angry or rebel – a lotta rebel in 'em, lotta revolt. When they, you know, like I said, when I had a young lady from Rose College, she talked to the girls and build up the esteem better. Build their character up, you know, showing that they could do this; and you can be this. You ain't got to be that. So it's – she helped out a lot. She helped out a lot. Of course, we had some little girls around there, they – wow, you know, hey, you stop 'em at the door to be on the safe side. Just stop 'em at the door. Don't come in here.

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But if you worked there long enough, you know who your troublemakers are. You know who's doing this. You gotta get up, if the person actually comes in the building, you know that's your troublemaker. So it was something else, it was; but, like I say, in a way, you – I'm sorta like blessed being here; 'cause I would – at the Hollywood down on Chelsea, the guys came at me. I didn't have

no – they didn't have – I didn't have no weapon. They had two shotgun, and I called this – I called two police – both of 'em showed up right on time. They went out there and got the gun from the guys, you know; and so, yeah, you look at that; and you say you're grateful. You're thanking. Everybody say, "Well, the police department ain't doing nothing. They ain't doing this. They ain't –" Hum-um. I can tell you for a fact –

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– they showed up when I needed 'em. If they hadn't shown up at that particular time, you know, _____ real distinctive. One guy had a 12-gauge shotgun, and one had a 210. Actually, they were reading 'em to me. You know, when the guy was – the police officer pulling out, he was reading 'em off. They were writing it down. _____ and these guys, they were young guys. They were real young guys; and when you're real young, I don't think they lock you up in jail. They have a halfway house, something they put you in. I think they stay in the halfway house and be out in two weeks. Then they got out, and all of 'em came back up to the Center together. I was just sitting there watching it. It wasn't no – didn't nothing happen. So it's certain things you go through. So you get threatened a lot. Yeah.

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Then, of course, you know, they knocked the windshield out your car. They **bang** your tire. All this stuff _____ one a coworker. He worked there at the Community Center; and every time he – he put – he put at least five windshields in his car; and he had proof that he did it. I think the city may have reimbursed him, but I don't know. I'm not for sure, but they'd take out your windshield. They took out my windshield. They flatten my tires; and, like I say, then I had a little – when I was working at the Center, you buy – you put your – you go and buy a tire; and you get insurance on your tire; and they had a little deal where you get insurance on your tire. If something happen to your tire, you get a puncture –

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– a flat, you take that tire back. You get a brand new one. So I had that. I had that in my favor.

Daniel Saba:

Was this just vandalism or –

Cleophus Dowdy: No, it ain't vandalism. They doing this 'cause you may have told 'em to watch your mouth or you need to sit down somewhere; or you need to get out, stuff like this. Not vandalism. _____ when you come inside, you don't leave nothing in your vehicle. So it was a _____. It was – you know, they would do everything in the world to sorta like irritate you to make you do something; but you really _____ hold your cool _____. If they knocked the windshield out, you gonna get that replaced. Tires, everything gonna be replaced. So you need –

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– insurance on everything. _____ insurance on your tires and windshields. So –

Daniel Saba: Well, one thing that I wanted to ask you about – it's kind of a different topic – about the closing of West Drive. How it affected the community.

Cleophus Dowdy: The closing of what?

Daniel Saba: West Drive.

Cleophus Dowdy: West Drive? What is that?

Daniel Saba: Well, like Dorothy kinda told me about that you know a little bit about the closing of West Drive _____.

Cleophus Dowdy: No, I don't understand. Which street is this?

Daniel Saba: It's the –

Female: It separated Hyde Park from _____ Park.

Cleophus Dowdy: I don't know that. I'm not familiar with that.

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Daniel Saba: And, also, talking about police relationships, it sounds like you have a very positive relationship with the police.

Cleophus Dowdy: Well, if you want to survive, you will have a good relationship. We – not only that, I think we had a director whose name was **Renfree**; and he – we went to actually – we actually went to some classes every Thursday night; and we actually sit in there; and we

found what we – after we went through the class, we found out what police officers do, what their duties, and so on, so on; and we found out that – like I told you, this is how we found out the police officer that are in our area – that I found the officer that was in our area from 2:00 to 10:00 – that's when we open, at that time. We found out who was working on that shift; and after the class was over with, –

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– we graduated. We had a opportunity to ride with the police in a car. Believe me, I'll tell you, you hear everything on the radio. You know, robbing going on, raping going on, shooting going on. You sit there and listen to the guy. You hope he don't answer none of 'em calls, you know. Yeah, but we went on there. You could hear everything going on. You can hear – actually, you can hear everything going on in North Memphis. Yeah, and everything in North Memphis. We had – I think they had it divided off. They had north. They had south and west and all that. So east, you know, so we sat there and listened to everything going; and we talked; and, you know, he took me to some hot spots, you know; and things they could do. Things they couldn't do; and, like I said, once we got that –

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– the relationship down as far as who in our area, we got their cell number. "Hey, you working this shift? Good." So it's like a open line of communication. Believe me, calling the precinct ain't gonna get it. No, it's not gonna get it. We wanna know who's working at night, what night, so on. But all in all, we learned that, you know. We learned that; and we had some guys – we had some police officers we could depend on; and they were there.

Daniel Saba:

Well, one thing that came up with _____, I think it's called the _____ Street **Scene**? That – do you remember it about _____?

Cleophus Dowdy:

No, the only thing I remember – I wasn't even working. I wasn't working at that time. Yes, I was. I was at Ed Rice. I was at Ed Rice. I don't know too much about it.

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Let's see. No, I know – I've known a dead police officer, the one that got killed. Now, he'd attended – he'd been up to my place up

at Ed Rice. He came through there, to me, just like a regular police officer.

Daniel Saba: But you met him personally?

Cleophus Dowdy: Yeah, the one that got killed. You know, he'd come up to the Center. He'd come to Ed Rice, not _____. He just seemed like a regular police officer. So, you know, you'd be surprised at what certain _____ peoples are doing, how they're doing, how they – you gotta be careful. I'm not saying you have to be careful; but if a person –

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– religious is this and you believe in doing this; and believe in doing this, good. You believe in doing it, then do it to yourself. Don't do it to nobody else. So you run into that a lot in the Community Center. You can't – you got some people don't believe in Jesus and don't believe in this, don't believe in that. They believe in their own thing. No problem. We don't have any problem with it at all. That's why we here. At least we got freedom of speech, freedom of religion, as long as you don't tamper with nobody else. So we don't have any problem with that. But, yes, I was at Ed Rice. It was something crazy at the time this incident happened. Of course, Hollywood wasn't there. It was down on Chelsea. Um-hum. Yeah.

[00:40:00]

Daniel Saba: Earlier you mentioned getting help with your budget from places like Rose and churches. Could you – were there any funding issues with your Community Centers?

Cleophus Dowdy: No, it was no funding issue. This is what you call – this is – see, we don't have a budget for – we have a budget; but it's not for to get candy or get toys or to get clothes and baskets, Easter basket, Easter basket or Thanksgiving basket. That's not allocation in our budget from city hall. That's not in there. So that's where your churches and your private groups come in and Rose College come in and different organization around the city come in there helping you out. That's when you go in _____. You always have what you call a –

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– we call it a booster **leagues**. You got all your boosters down there; and when you want something, you need something, you go to your booster; and you tell ‘em – you explain to ‘em that we need you to get so and so. We need you to buy this for us. We need you to purchase this for us. We need you to purchase this for us. We need you to purchase some extra baseball, 'cause we don't have enough baseball and so on like that. We need you to purchase some candy for Halloween, candy for Easter. This is some stuff that we do.

Daniel Saba: Well, was there a difference between what was available for _____ compared to like what _____?

Cleophus Dowdy: No, I don't think it was – it's different. It's – they have – the things that what you want to do is you want to – if they got boosters, then we get booster, too.

[00:42:00]

If they got folks helping them out, we can get folks helping us out. You know, it's just – it's bottom line. Whatever – this is in the guidelines part of manual. You can get a booster. These are our boosters. They actually help us out as far as doing Halloween, doing Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving; and those are the folks that actually help. So you have a list of your booster; and so it's not – I don't think it's different. No, it's no big problem.

Daniel Saba: Do you have any more questions?

Andy Mrkva: I guess I had – Dorothy had told me how they – I guess maybe you were talking with her; and she was talking about how there's a difference before _____ some of these _____.

[00:43:00]

Do you wanna talk about –

Cleophus Dowdy: Well, if you guys probably – you know, **hearing** Dr. **Harrison** talk. He's – whether you say he's arrogant or he's – I don't know; but Dr. Harrison, when he first got into **office** – I'm gonna tell you the truth. When you guys – you're not from the south, right?

Andy Mrkva: I'm not.

Daniel Saba: I've lived here in Memphis for 13 years.

Cleophus Dowdy: For 13 years? All right, when I first started working Park Services, we weren't allowed to drive park _____ vehicles; and we had to transport our kids from the Community Center to Community Center to play basketball, baseball in a car or either a truck. _____ my town took four cars. When you put ten kids in one car, you know, –

[00:44:00]

– the car's gonna get outta shape. Full car, they done tore up four cars; but when Harrison got into office, he said that we didn't have to do that anymore. Matter of fact, he said it was illegal in the first place. You hauling children in the car, and you don't have insurance. Then you're overloaded. You don't have insurance, and he gave us an opportunity to drive a van. Only thing you had to do was go up and pass a license. You had to get a license to drive a 15-passenger van; and, plus, you gotta put it on record in the office that you are definite – you definitely can drive 15-passenger van; but he did two or three other things for the Center. Actually, we – after – actually, before he had got there, I thought we was gonna be shut down; but when he got there, he – Community Center stayed open.

[00:45:00]

So you look at _____ everything, you come from part of the town where – I don't even wanna – I don't even go there now. Yeah, if I'm driving, I'm gonna drive fast through there. I did have a honchee that stayed there, deceased; but I had to go there every now and visit her. Didn't much care for it; but, you know, show you the spot where they really call hot spot. I don't like to mess around over there; but there's a place – that was a tough part of town. That was about the toughest part of town in Memphis. You had South Memphis. Then you had North Memphis. And then, basically, the south and north, that was the majority of your blacks staying in the north or either south. So you wanna stay away from over there; and being that he became mayor –

[00:46:00]

– of Memphis – a lotta folks don't like him. A lotta folk just don't like him. You know that. You know, we sit there; and he'll say some; and we go – well, we'll laugh; but he says something. You know, "You guys, I honestly don't think that's funny." We laughing when it's funny. Say, "Oh, _____ we ain't worried

about that." When a person says worry or something, we just go ahead on. We don't pay attention. So I mean there's certain things he has done to make us better as far as Community Center directors and working for the Park Service. He opened some doors up for us; and I don't mean – I don't care what anybody say about the guy. He one of the kinda guys you wanna work with him, he work with you.

[00:47:00]

But you gotta know him. You know him, you know, this is the kinda guy he is; but you actually see him on TV, talking on TV, oh, man, he really – who he think he is. He all that? But you actually know him, gets to the truth every time I seen the guy, the mayor of Memphis. I go to city hall and the Pyramid, _____ he'll speak. _____ speak. I mean he's the mayor. He's speaking to me? You know, right? So it's – we had another mayor. He was a county mayor. I can't recall his name. Ooh, I can't recall his name.

Daniel Saba: The current mayor?

Cleophus Dowdy: A. C., no.

Daniel Saba: A. C. Wharton?

Cleophus Dowdy: The guy before A. C.

Daniel Saba: Oh.

Cleophus Dowdy: He's one of them kinda guys that speak to. You know, he'll see you on the street. He'll speak.

[00:48:00]

And I mean I don't know about you guys; but anytime you see a dignitary on the street and they speak to ya, you speak back. That itself make you feel good. This man here is not scared to open his mouth. Not scared to talk to you. You really can't say enough about him; but on the TV, he looked bad. The TV image looked bad. So – and the people have called him names; and I don't know. You ask me about him, and then – reason I don't have no praise for him, though. Other folks may have a different opinion. Other folks haven't worked for him. I mean I worked for two mayors prior to him; and one mayor, Dave Hackett, –

[00:49:00]

– we took some kids to the Pyramid; and Mayor Hackett, he came up to us. We took 125 kids to the exhibit at the Pyramid. He asked us how in the nerve – how'd y'all do that? How y'all having kids so quiet? 125 kids, we started, said, "Mayor, don't you know? _____ used to work for you. But we know _____ nothing. Yeah, we got it under control, Mayor." And, wow, he never paid us any attention. See, one of the things that – our job, you know, _____ think he's doing the job, is he's doing a joke job. There is no joke job. I mean you sending some of the baddest kids in the city down on anywhere you go; and you guys – now, this is what they used to tell me. And **McFarland**, no, was it – what is that – this over here. No, I don't think McFarland. It was –

[00:50:00]

– it was some brothers here in Memphis. I don't think y'all – y'all may know 'em. They called – the last name was **Branley**. Y'all heard the name? Y'all heard that name? Good. I mean _____ tell y'all. These guys were bad. These guys were white guy; and they get – they got motor bikes. They ran their motor bikes all up in the Center. They run it director's home, and they called the police. They said, "Well, we gonna call the park police." "Don't call no park police, call the real police." These guys was bad, you know. They would do everything and – hey, I'm just blessed that we ain't got none that drive motor bikes up in the Center today; but we done came through some changes. I think the family – some of 'em still staying around here; but we don't wanna mention that too loud; 'cause we don't wanna shake –

[00:51:00]

– nobody's feathers. But we have certain things that go on here in the Center, I think, in the park – and when budget time comes, we get to hack. We're the one getting axed. We dealing with – you know, I look at my job almost like being a police officer. We don't have the gun. We don't have the bulletproof vest. We don't have none of that. We are our own. Police officer have – police have the gun, bulletproof vest. Of course, we have respect. If you said something, foul language to a police officer, you going to jail. They said some foul language to us, they're going out the Center. They ain't going to jail; but you say something to police officer, foul language, you disrespect this officer; and I figure you

disrespect me; but you ain't going to jail. So it's a lot, though, that you can do.

[00:52:00]

And, you know, it's something else, the work; but like I said, I figure my job is just better than the police job; but they don't look at it that way. They do not look at that. If I can save a child, you won't have to deal with him.

Daniel Saba:

And I guess I have one last question before we do the wrap-up. Do you remember anything about the Hollywood _____?

Cleophus Dowdy:

Hollywood _____ right down here? Yeah, it was – sort of. It was – they – when they actually cleaned that up. They cleaned that up. You know, there was a – they actually had a waste – they had some chemical wastes over in that area; and they actually cleaned that up.

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They came in there in; and I guess they _____ – you wanna prove that they cleaned it up. They planted grass out there; and all that whole area was just plain green. So I remember that, and we also talk about environment waste. Certain companies around here dumping it, and I know a certain area right now that is still – but you look at like we go to those classes. They'll tell us where certain waste is dumped; and you actually talk to a person that actually work at a chemical company, that stuff's still in the ground. I don't care what you do, what you put on it, it's in the ground; and if you don't take it – you don't get it up, it ain't gonna go. It gonna stay there. It gonna stay in the ground. It ain't going nowhere in certain areas in Memphis.

[00:54:00]

– Well, certain areas in Hollywood. Certain areas there, you know, that they got that stuff dumped. They ain't cleaned it up, and I'm one of the ones that's watching. I know where it's at, but long as I ain't sitting on it – well, you know, ain't no sense in you raising any eyebrows; 'cause, most of the time, they ain't gonna believe you anyhow. They'll come back and say, "Yeah, it's been cleaned up. We cleaned this up." I talked with a lady last summer. I talked with a lady. She said certain areas of this part of town it's still in the ground. She said she don't care how much dirt you put on top of it, it's still there. You gotta get that dirt up and dig it up.

Daniel Saba: Do you know of anyone that might have been affected by it?

Cleophus Dowdy: No, no, I –

[00:55:00]

– I know some schoolteachers – no, no, you know, watching ‘em, what they – you gotta kinda observe certain things. They came down to my Community Center; and all the schoolteachers have a jug, you know, a water jug that they drink water outta, a big, old jug; and I said, "What's with all y'all water jugs?" And I found out that the school was kinda contaminated, and they drink outta jug. What about the kids? So, in my time, you kinda get nosy and curious. So every now and then, they'll leave a – _____ train track back there – they'll leave a – you'll have somebody dump some waste, chemical waste on the train track out here.

[00:56:00]

Yeah, every now and then, they dump something on there. _____ to come up on it. It's – these guys actually come out and hunted for it; and they actually have it on the list; and you **sitting in a meet**; and they'll call where they – somebody dumped some chemical waste over on Hollywood and so and so, so on. Oh, it's _____, you know. But it's one of those things that happen. Been done, you know. They dumped some waste up there in Frasier. On the military base, they always dump in Frasier. Now, those folks have something like a lawsuit; because the kid were – they were born in an area with malfunction; or they'd have this; and they have – they actually – I don't even remember. To me, you see something like that, it hurts you real bad to see a family come in there hurting like that.

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And they just now figured out what the problem. Their child is this way, that away; and so I know they got some – they got some results out of it; but the folks from – this was back in the old days. Y'all may have noticed – I mean Frasier was a little, old hick town; and they would bring stuff all the way to Frasier and dump it; and they built houses on the stuff.

Daniel Saba: About what time period was this? _____

Cleophus Dowdy: It was during – probably during the Second World War. Yeah.

Daniel Saba: Do you know who has been doing the dumping? _____
[Crosstalk] _____

Cleophus Dowdy: No, no, I don't – not by who – they had what you call people there. They called outlaw bandits. They'll dump that stuff, and they'll dump it in lakes and gutters. Some of that stuff –

[00:58:00]

– you dump in the gutter, it eats the concrete up. Ain't no gutter no more. It's just a hole there, but it has been done. Yeah.

Daniel Saba: _____

Andy Mrkva: Yeah, if you're ready to wrap up. Okay. So we just have like some wrap-up questions like one that we have is what is your proudest moment?

Cleophus Dowdy: Where, working for the Center? Working for the Center? It's like I say, you see some kids that excel. We had a kid – this kid played in our program. Now, he went – he was drafted by Jimmy Johnson. Matter of fact, Jimmy Johnson drafted – once you get drafted, it means you get money upfront. You get money before you get there.

[00:59:00]

And this kid was – he's super. He's like a super kid. His mother, single mother, but he always said yes, sir, no, sir. He always had a great amount of respect. I say that's the reason why we probably _____. Mother raised him. Mother did the right thing. He had a great attitude, and he played for us. He played with Miami. He played with Pittsburgh; and then he just quit all of a sudden; and he was playing with _____ football. He's staying in Atlanta now, but just the idea that you touched this kid's life, there are a lotta kids like that. Believe it or not, we have kids – I could actually see a child; and this one particular kid, I wanted to play baseball.

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His folks wanted him to play basketball. Guess what he did. He **asked me what** his folks said; but this kid was so good. He had a arm live – we would call it live arm; and you can't do anything about it. As long as he's doing something. So, like I say, you

know, those kids that – I can't wait till the guys get back; 'cause sometimes it kinda bothers me; did they get – did I tell 'em do the right thing? 'Cause you're always around here, you're gonna get in trouble if you hang around here. Get in trouble. Go to jail, and get into a whole lot of – I don't know.

Andy Mrkva: And our final question, what would be any advice that you would have for young people?

[01:01:00]

Cleophus Dowdy: What was the advice?

Andy Mrkva: Any kind of advice you would have.

Cleophus Dowdy: You know, that's kind of a tough – that's a tough one. It all depend. I'm gonna tell you like **this is ground**. This is basic. If a child don't get the manners, the **hootique** at home, he ain't gonna have an – he ain't gonna have any school, not have any church. Just wherever he go, he ain't _____ he don't have. But if the mother and the father sit down, tell this person what he's supposed to do, how he's supposed to behave, how he act, he'll make it; but you gotta have either a strong mother or a strong father; or you have both mother and father; but you have a mother that just doesn't care, you have a mother that –

[01:02:00]

– let – I ran into mothers, little girl 13 years old, wanted to hit her mother; and in my presence, that don't work. And same way about a little guy. You have to have a strong – you gotta have a strong parent, either one or two or either both. You don't have it, don't expect them to get it around here.

Andy Mrkva: Well, thank you very much for allowing us to interview you.

[End of Audio]