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C.M. Loper: On behalf of Crossroads to Freedom, Rhodes College, the Corners of Highland Heights, we want to thank you for taking the time to share your story with us today. I'm **Chiante** Morris Loper.

Dorian Canalez: I'm **Dorian Canalez**.

C.M. Loper: Today is July 2nd, 2014 at Highland Heights Methodist, and I'm honored to meet you and learn from your inspirational story. Today's interview will be archived online at the Crossroads to Freedom website. Let's start with some basic biographical questions to get your memory going. What is your name?

Marco Baker: **Marco** Baker.

C.M. Loper: When were you born?

Marco Baker: August 24th, 1980.

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C.M. Loper: Where were you born and raised?

Marco Baker: I was born in Memphis, Tennessee. I grew up in a neighborhood called **Klendike**, and I was born at the _____. They had – after we left Klendike, we moved to a place called **Hershey Village**, which is now owned by Saint Julius ____ the apartments _____ now. And then after I left Hershey Village, I came to the Heights.

Dorian Canalez: Can you tell us about your transition from that place to the Heights?

Marco Baker: It was really different. Growing up in Hershey Village, it was really – a really big struggle. You see a lot of fighting. There's a lot of gangs over there. I fought a lot. I had three younger sisters, so it was to be expected. When I transitioned from Hershey Village to the Heights, _____ say it was a little bit more peaceful than what I was accustomed to when I finally moved over there.

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And when I went to Treadwell in the sixth grade, I linked up with a bunch guys who I'm still friends with today.

Dorian Canalez: So you would say you liked the Heights better than the other neighborhood you were living in?

Marco Baker: Oh, a lot better.

C.M. Loper: What is your occupation?

Marco Baker: I'm a supervisor down at the FedEx Forum and Autozone Park.

C.M. Loper: What is it like to be a supervisor?

Marco Baker: I was prepared for it. During my time at Treadwell, I was an honor ROTC as well; I did that for four years. Then I went to the University of Memphis and took an honor ROTC as well. So with that experience plus being on various teams – basketball, football – it prepared me for my job already.

C.M. Loper: Who are your parents?

Marco Baker: I was raised by my grandma and my mom, Jana May Williams and Charlotte Baker. They both passed away four years ago.

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My grandma died August 1st, and then my mama died 30 days later. So those are the two people who raised me.

C.M. Loper: What are their occupations? Describe what they are like.

Marco Baker: My grandmother [*laughter*], she worked three and four jobs when I – even before I was born, and that's kinda how she passed. She kinda worked her way into her early grave, really. And whatever it took, legally, that's what she did, no _____ if it waiting tables – diner. She was also involved in the Civil Rights movement as well. She, I mean, been through it all: water hose, attack dogs, everything, and my mom was pretty much the same way. She worked in an office building downtown. She graduated. She had me when she was 19 years old, and I was a – she took care of us.

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It was four of us that was – she brought up, and I have two older brothers that's outside of the house.

Dorian Canalez: You mentioned your grandma was involved in the Civil Rights movement. Can you elaborate on that?

Marco Baker: Yeah. She was very adamant about us knowing our past. She was adamant of letting us know where we come from. On her father's side, my family comes from South Africa; and on her mother's side, we have a – part of her family comes from a little small town _____. And my grandma moved to Arkansas around – I think about 1972 when she moved to Arkansas. And before then, my family lived in Michigan, and Mississippi – all over the south. We're kinda spread out even to this day.

Dorian Canalez: Was she involved in the Civil Rights movement?

Marco Baker: Yeah, she – again, she marched, she'd sit at counters, and she took her lick.

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She got beat up, too, and like I said, _____ the owner and she _____ to her front yard, and the whole nine yards.

Dorian Canalez: Has she ever talked to you about how things got done and how – what happened in the Civil Rights movement?

Marco Baker: Yeah. One of the biggest things compared then to now is how tight nit everybody was. Like the old saying says, "It takes a village to raise a baby," everybody did their part to look out for the kids. If my mama's friend sent me down the street doing _____ door, she would whoop me, and when I get home, my mama would whoop me because my neighbor had to whoop me. So it was kind of **doing the** same thing. Everybody was more close knit together; it was more – I mean, they didn't have that much, but they took what they had and stretched it.

Dorian Canalez: Were there some differences between that time period and now?

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Marco Baker: Yeah, there's a really big difference now, because of – now it's more **in-fighting**. They look at each other as the enemy now, just because – __ certain _____ – just because you got from a certain neighborhood, it's time to fight. And back in those days, it didn't matter, because you all had one purpose and one goal, and you was more educated back then, meaning that now you have babies raising babies, versus – when I came up, my grandmamma was full-grown; my mother was not 16, 14, 15 when she had me, and

my grandmother wasn't 24, compared to the way – back – compared to the way it is now.
Dorian Canalez: You mentioned people had goals and stuff like that. Can you tell us what kind of goals they had?

Marco Baker: Basically to – basically better themselves and basically get equal rights, basically to have good jobs and actually provide for their families, take a responsibility for their kids, and take a responsibility for their neighborhoods, and just wanna be treated as equal.

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C.M. Loper: Describe any brothers and sisters you have. Who were they? What did they do?

Marco Baker: I have three sisters and two brothers. My three sisters grew up in the house with me every since we was born. My sister number one, she's a general manager for Kroger out in Germantown. Sister number two, she works at daycare and she does – she's got – do hair as well – cosmetology. And my youngest sister, she's the supervisor for the Salvation Army; she's in college as well. My two brothers are – it's more of an interesting story. We call each other brothers, 'cause we grew up in the same house, basically. We don't share the same DNA, but we do share a spiritual father together, and we grew up in the same house.

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So whenever we talk – introduce one another to anybody else, we always say it's brother, because that's the way we were brought up; we are brothers, regardless of blood ties or not. And one of them grew up and he became a minister, and he moved to Seattle, Washington. He's married now and have a kid. My other brother lives here in Memphis. He's married now and he own his own business; he's a technician. My first sister, she has two kids; the next one has one; the last one has three.

Dorian Canalez: Now let's talk about your experiences growing up. Can you tell me about the neighborhood you grew up in?

Marco Baker: Well, the Heights – when I moved to the Heights, like I said, it was kinda different, meaning that it really wasn't a fight everyday or a struggle to get back and forth to school, versus – when I first came there, I was bussed to another neighborhood to go to school.

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So when I got to the Heights, like I said, I met these guys when I was in the sixth grade, and they all brought me in and basically we hooked. We was friends since then. You'd be amazed at some of the things – how some of us were and where we grew up. Most all the guys became ministers and deacons when we actually grew up. You probably wouldn't have ever known when you seen us in the sixth grade or junior high, but a lot of those men grew up to become men.

They all ministers and working in the **neighborhood** in some kind of way. We all get together and we go door to door and share our faith. We knock on the door and tell people about Jesus Christ and his resurrection. So that's basically – it was all in God's plan for us to meet at that point in time, 'cause you don't see many people who have been friends since sixth grade and still get along now. Some people become friends freshman year in college and then it ends in sophomore year. So I think that **attestment** alone of us being friends from the sixth grade all the way up to now – we've known each other for most – almost most of our lives.

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We met maybe – some of us was 11, some of us was 12, some of us were 13, so we pretty much stayed together since then.

C.M. Loper:

You mentioned that there was ministers a while ago. Do you participate in any of their churches?

Marco Baker:

Yeah. I work with a lot of groups. When I first grew up in – coming up in Treadwell, I've _____, _____, _____, which operate out of Covenant Community Church, which is right across the street. And we used to things like Soul Factory, Bible studies, and we have fun nights and things like that. Then once I graduated, I became a mentor. I tutored kids up out of Treadwell. And now, like I said, we go door to door. We're involved with Chief Cornerstone Church _____ different _____ at different other churches. Bellevue Baptist – I worked with a lot of different churches and organizations during my time in the neighborhood, even to this day.

Dorian Canalez:

What motivated your friends to become ministers?

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Marco Baker:

How many of them became ministers?

Dorian Canalez: What motivated them?

Marco Baker: Oh, what motivated them? That's the thing just about being a minister: some people go and do it because they feel as though – that they can. But what I like to call a true ministers are people who God asked to do so, and they are purposed and designed to be ministers. Nobody ever run to become a minister or a pastor, because if you have an understanding of their responsibilities and have an understanding of what God had for you to do, then you wouldn't run to it anyway. But a lot of them, it was a tug on their heart. It took a while for God to really push them. A lot of them didn't think they were good enough to be ministers, but God had to show them was that, "Regardless of your falls, I'm strong in those areas. And regard" – even if you're a good public speaker, the butterflies will still be there.

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Even now today – I've been going door to door for 12, 13 years and I still get nervous when I talk to people. But that just gives God a way to come in and use me, because, if one **planteth** and one man **watereth**, it's God who gives the increase.

Dorian Canalez: How is your home life like?

Marco Baker: Home life is good. I have my sisters – well, I have one of my sisters that lives with me right now, and everything's – like I said, everything's pretty good and happy.

Dorian Canalez: What middle school you went to?

Marco Baker: Middle school? I went to Treadwell Middle School.

Dorian Canalez: And how was that like?

Marco Baker: Treadwell was good. You had a lot of school spirit at Treadwell. One of my favorite parts about being – about going to Treadwell is how diverse it was. I mean, almost any race you could think of, they went to Treadwell.

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We're black, white, Hispanic, Cambodian, Vietnamese – I mean, we had all type of races that went to our school, so the diversity was the best part about that school.

Dorian Canalez: How did diversity impact school life and also the community?

Marco Baker: School life, just because my friend – a friend of mine, he tried to teach me Vietnamese. I caught onto some of it, but some of it I couldn't. You really had to learn some Spanish going to that school. I didn't catch ____ too much of that, either, but I tried. And – just being able to experience the different cultures in that school. You go over somebody's house – I went over to a friend of mine's house, and before I went into the house, I had to take my shoes off and then go into the house; so that was pretty different there. And then also there was another friend of mine, I went to his house – he kinda warned me before I went there.

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He's like, "When the person brings you your food, if you eat all of it, it's kind of a sign of disrespect, because it means that I didn't give you enough," whereas some cultures where it's like, if you don't eat all of it, then it's another sign of disrespect that means you didn't like my food. So it was kinda different dealing with the different cultures.

C.M. Loper: Did you ever get used to it?

Marco Baker: Yeah, I got used to it. Like I said, I was – even in junior high, I was involved in the neighborhood ____ ____, so I think it was very important for me to be a part of it and know about the people that I'm living around. Like I said, I was in ROTC. In ROTC, it was mandatory that you did volunteer work, just like – which could turn out to be good, because it was mandatory to do volunteer work at the time to get into college.

C.M. Loper: Did it inspire you to try different foods?

Marco Baker: Yeah. I tried sushi. I'm not a fan of it, but I tried it anyway. I tried something called – I can't remember what it was.

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It's a Spanish dish where it has pig jaws in it and corn. I can't remember what it was named, but it was weird tasting. It was kinda funny having some pig jaws in my mouth, but I tried it anyway.

Dorian Canalez: Can you share some of the memories from your childhood that influenced you later in life?

Marco Baker: I remember even when I was – even before I got into elementary, my grandmother used to have all of us on Friday night sit around the bed and pray. The whole family was – it was pretty much mandatory. You didn't have no choice in it nor no say so in it. You had to show up. And she also brought us up in a church as well, and I can remember on those hot Sundays with those suits on going into the church. And the pastor there, he was kinda funny to me now that I look back. He was one of the old school pastors. He had a *[laughter]* Jheri curl and a gold tooth –

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[Laughter]

– so he was – well, he was still old school. He was real old school with, hey, man, woman – you go to church, you pay your ties, and he – like I said, he was real old school, but at the same time he was open to talk to you as well. But those things are still ripples in my life now, and I know for a fact the reason why I'm sitting here today is because my grandmother prayed for me. She knew the dangers that was out there. She knew the things that I had to face, so I know that she prayed over and covered me from childhood all the way to the day she passed. Again, I think that's another big difference as well, understanding that knowledge is not being passed on from grandmother, to mother, to child, because – that experience is not there, because the child hasn't grown up yet, but yet still having – still responsible for another being. So I had a benefit of having, like I said, a real grandmother and a real mom.

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Dorian Canalez: Is there any other things that you learned from your grandmother and your mother that you take now?

Marco Baker: Yeah. My grandma always told me that God is not gonna issue you a wife. You're not gonna be married all your life, so there's gonna be certain things you have to learn how to do on your own. My grandma taught me how to hunt, how to plant, she taught me – she put the first hunting rifle in my hand. She taught me all – she basically taught me about basic understanding of weapons, period. She also taught me how to sew, how to cook.

She also taught me what plants to eat, what plants not to eat, how to fix up a tent, how to purify water, so those are the basic things

my grandma taught me. My mom also – my mom taught me mainly how to interact with different people. They both pretty much had the same knowledge and understanding, but they done things in different ways also. So those are the things that they taught me.

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Before, it was like – my grandmother used to always have a saying, is that a – there may come a time when you can't go to the grocery store, so what – how're you gonna feed your family? So that's the reason why she taught me the things she taught me.

Dorian Canalez: You said doing things in different ways: in what ways did they do things –

Marco Baker: I think my grandma was more firm. She was more – for lack of a better word, she was more military-minded versus – my mom did a lot of things out of love. Not that grandma didn't love you, but grandma was – she used to have a saying, "I'm not raising any punks in my house." So she was more of the backbone of the family, 'cause my grandfather, he passed away early on, so she took on the ranks when he passed away.

Dorian Canalez: You're really involved in the church. Are there any other ways you're involved in the community and stuff?

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Marco Baker: I used to work with the food pantry with **Beverly** Baptist at – out on **Tumney** Street. We used to hand out groceries every week. Also, I work with a black group where they go out and cut the grass for the elderly or grass for people – the city was supposed to do but haven't got around to doing so. And also, again, with my job as well, we go out and volunteer as well.

C.M. Loper: I'm transitioning from your school life to religion. What role did religion play in your life growing up?

Marco Baker: It was the atlas of my being. I always say I had an advantage growing up, because I accepted Christ when I was 12. Even though I'd been growing up in that church the whole time, there's still gonna come a point in time where you have to make a decision.

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So I accepted Christ when I was 12. I started to get some understanding when I was 15, and by the time my senior year rolled around, I kinda pretty much knew exactly what I got myself into. By the time I was 21, that's when I was kinda going door to door and sharing yeah faith, or I could be standing in line in Wal-Mart. Once you've been doing it for a while, it's kinda easy to move into it. You could be sitting there talking about football, and you can transition right into, "Hey, let me ask you two questions."

Dorian Canalez: You say it's like an atlas: what do you mean by that?

Marco Baker: It's the center of everything. My whole life revolves around it. I recognize that the reason why I'm able to get up in the morning; that's the reason why I have a job. I recognize that I don't go to my job just because I get a paycheck: I'm going there because, at that point in time, God wants me on that job for whatever reason.

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Even if it's just for me to come across one person maybe three or four years down the line, I'm there because somebody on that job needs to know what I've been through.

Dorian Canalez: Can you tell us what high school you went to?

Marco Baker: I went to Treadwell High School.

Dorian Canalez: Can you elaborate on that?

Marco Baker: Treadwell was really unique, because Treadwell had Kindergarten all the way through the 12th grade, so you really didn't have to jump from school to school once you graduated from to the other. Again, many cultures – and I played football for the team. I played a little basketball. I played baseball for a different organization outside the school. I even played hockey; I played there for a year. And the hockey thing was pretty fun and interesting, because I wanted to – I hadn't skated since I was probably in elementary, but it was still fun. It was kinda – I looked at it as football on ice, really.

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So it was pretty cool, but I also did ROTC as well. I was – I went to the army camps **at night** – I mean, during the summertime. So my summers – I always had something to do in the summertime,

'cause as soon as school was over with, I _____ it was time to go to Fort Knox, Kentucky. And then by the time I came back from Fort Knox, Kentucky, I had a breather, then it was time to go to football for two-a-days. So – and then after those two-a-days, I was able to go to the church and do the Bible study and stuff like that, but it was fun times.

C.M. Loper: Did you belong to a church growing up?

Marco Baker: Yes. I grew up – growing up, I was a part of three churches. Star of the Greater Corinthian was my grandmother's church; then I went to Covenant Community Church, which is right across the street; and then I went to Chief Cornerstone Church.

C.M. Loper: And I know you mentioned you got – accepted Christ to your heart at 12 years old. Where did you get baptized in?

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Marco Baker: I got – actually, I got baptized in a tub. And it was a science project, I call it, because they put too much water in, and then I got – when I went up under water, the water ran up to – when I came up – I came up, so that's the most important thing. I came up. So that's what I got baptized in.

C.M. Loper: Which one – which church did you belong to?

Marco Baker: At the time I got baptized? I was with Covenant at the time I got baptized.

C.M. Loper: How was it like to be in a church?

Marco Baker: Well, I think I can do that better by comparing two churches. One church was more so – how can I say – it was more – people went – everybody went on a first-name basis, from the pastor, the deacons, the people in the membership –

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– versus another church where you didn't call your pastor by his first name: you called him Pastor or Mr. Such-and-such. So it – that was kinda different between those two there.

Dorian Canalez: When you say that – being involved in sports and also church, would that remove you from being in the streets, and joining gangs, and doing all those bad things?

Marco Baker: Yeah. Well, first of all, I made a choice not to do it in the first place. That was my choice. Just like I made a choice not to smoke cigarettes or drink, it was my choice to do so. But it also helped me having those activities there, because I didn't have no time to do those things, because I had something to do. Even though I had friends that did do all those things – I had friends that – I mean, smoking weed was like smoking a cigarette. It was just something that happened to me every day, but they were just choices I made – I choose not to do, and I got involved in different things.

C.M. Loper: Who were your role models?

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Marco Baker: God is my role model. He teaches us not to have any other idols or role models. He said he's a jealous God, so he's the only person I would look to. And _____ compare myself to him, and I can always see how short – my shortcomings. And that also helps me stay humble, and that also help you from – keeping from judging other people, because when you compare yourself to him, then you realize your shortcomings. You realize that you're not perfect. You realize you don't have it all together. But he also put people in my life, like my Army instructor. He's my football coach, Mr. Little, who was very instrumental in my spiritual growth, and – so that's who it is.

C.M. Loper: How does he role model you from any other person who could be a better role model?

Marco Baker: Well, I think the reason why there can't be no better role model than God is because he is wisdom, he is love, he is understanding.

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I grew up – like I said, I grew up in a church, but at the same time, I don't have a full understanding of exactly what it is I got into, but God showed me. God was the one who taught me how to drive, 'cause there was nobody there to teach me how to drive. God basically showed me how to become a man; he taught me how to be a man, basically. And all wisdom, all understanding, no matter who it's from, be it from your pastor, from your dad, whoever it is, all knowledge comes from God. So that's what made him the perfect teacher: no matter what question I had for him, he had an answer.

Dorian Canalez: _____ to agree with you. In what way – when was the time that you hit a turning point where you turned to God?

Marco Baker: I had this thing when I was younger growing up. One of the things I thought I had is – it was just be good, basically.

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And summers in Memphis is already hot enough, so I was like, “You know what? I don’t wanna spend the rest of my eternity in Hell.” So Hell was a big selling point for me as far as accepting Christ – not the main reason, but as a child, that’s what I thought until I got a better understanding when I got older. When I accepted Christ, I was – actually, my mom asked me to go to the store – at the time, it was Kroger – over there on **Tumnis**. And I was living in Hershey Village at the time when she asked me to go to the store. And so I walked to the store, and there were some guys walking in the neighborhood. One guy stopped and talked to me, and that’s when I accepted Christ.

Dorian Canalez: How was that like?

Marco Baker: It was a pretty different experience. Like I say, at that time I didn’t really understand what I got myself into – fully understand the relationship that I stepped into.

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Because one of the things – misconceptions is that Christianity is not a religion; it’s a relationship. It is not a religion at all: it’s a relationship between you and God. It’s a personal relationship between you and God. And Paul explains it as well. And it’s just like God tells us, “Let every man work at his own salvation.”

C.M. Loper: Could you tell me a little bit about your family at this point in your life.

Marco Baker: At that point during the time when I accepted Christ, I had – I pretty much had my full family at the time. Every Sunday, we met over at my grandma’s house and we ate dinner every Sunday. Thanksgiving, Christmas, Mother’s Day, we all met at grandma’s house. And she would start – sometimes she would start cooking the night before, and then right after church it was like a race to her house. And one time my aunt was pregnant and my mom made two giant pans of cornbread before we got there.

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She ate up both pans of cornbread. My grandma was mad, but she didn't do anything, 'cause she was pregnant. She kinda understood what – that's what it was like growing up then. Everybody grew up – everybody came together on Sundays. If you didn't come together any other time, you all – everybody was sure to come together on Sunday during that time.

C.M. Loper: It was a – traditional to your family?

Marco Baker: Yeah. When I was growing up, we all had to be at the house at a certain time, because we all had to sit at the same table and eat when I was growing up. We didn't have many traditions or many things, but it was just certain things that it was understood that we had to do. And mama, grandmamma, granddad, they all asked questions about your day. What happened? How'd you do on your test? How's school going? How's work going?

C.M. Loper: Are you married?

[0:30:01]

Marco Baker: No.

C.M. Loper: What was your –

Dorian Canalez: You mentioned Mr. Little.

Marco Baker: Yes.

Dorian Canalez: Who is that? Can you elaborate on who is that?

Marco Baker: Mr. Little was _____ that was working out at Covenant Community Church at the time while I was at Treadwell. He worked closely with Treadwell High School and _____ schools as well. He was also the overseer of the Bible Study and the Monday night things we used to do on Monday nights. And also when we used to go to summer camp, Kids Across America, he was also involved in that. Along with **streets** and other different ministries, there was _____ in the city. So basically what he did was he came into the school, and whatever the school needed, he _____. And along with that, he shared Christ and taught a lot of us how to study the Bible at the same time.

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So that – he was very – like I said, very instrumental with my growing up. He’s one of my mentors, one of the people I give credit to, the reason why I’m the person I am today.

Dorian Canalez: Why do you think that community is such more different than when you were growing up?

Marco Baker: When I was growing up – again, I’ll give you another example. It was like – we didn’t allow any gangs to take over our school. So when they showed up or when somebody came up to the school and _____ they would wanna jump somebody, we all got together and walked that person home, and made sure the person got home, ‘cause it wasn’t – none of that was going on when I was coming up. When I was coming up, the seniors were leaders in the school, so that’s a big different example with that.

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And another thing is that we didn’t hang out on corners at 11:00, 12:00, 1:00 at night; we didn’t do that either. So I think that’s a big difference between the neighborhood then and now.

Dorian Canalez: In what other ways were you all leaders?

Marco Baker: I remember during the ice storm one year, we went around and we knew – we checked on the elderly people in our neighborhood, and we shoveled ice out of their driveways, and we picked up trees and stuff for them as well. So we gave our time and effort towards that. I mean, it wasn’t a paying thing: it was just something that we just decided to do.

Dorian Canalez: Do you have any advice how to create unity within the community?

Marco Baker: That’s actually something that we’re working on now. We’re trying to do that. Even though – say, for example, you have a meeting, and you have 400 or 500 people that show up to the meeting. That doesn’t do anybody any good if there’s only one type – one section of people or one race of people that show up.

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This neighborhood is made up of many people of all different ethnicities and different backgrounds. So unless you can reach everybody and get everybody to agree – ‘cause the thing is about it is that not everybody’s gonna have the same faith, so you can’t

attack it from just one point of view. You have to respect everybody's beliefs.

And whether you agree with them or disagree with them, you have to respect their beliefs and get them to realize that we are human, we all live in the same neighborhood, so we all need to come together and take pride and take responsibility of our neighborhood. We don't want somebody to take over it. We don't want drug deals on the corner. We don't want these corner stores selling drugs out of it, so let's take responsibility for it. The house next-door is run down. Let's keep the grass cut and let's board it up so it won't turn into a drug house or somewhere for somebody to lay in and go to sleep at night – stuff like that.

Dorian Canalez: You say you're working on that: how are you working to bring a unity in the community?

[0:34:02]

Marco Baker: [Clears throat] Excuse me. Again, I'm working with a different – a group of individuals who's trying to help other groups come together and work together in the neighborhoods. Again, it **cuts** in with the churches. A lot of churches don't have the understanding that – what the first problem is, a lot of times everybody who goes to a certain church in a neighborhood don't live in that neighborhood, so they feel as though that a lot of the stuff that's going on is not their problem, which – it is your problem. When you got a **track** in front of your church, there's a problem.

Whenever something's going wrong with your neighborhood, there is a problem, because you are there in the neighborhood for a reason, not just there to be – worship and have your doors closed up. You're supposed to have them open. You're supposed to go out into the streets. You're supposed to go next door. You're supposed to see what's going in the apartments right next to you. You're supposed to see what's going on with the lady down the street to you. You have a responsibility to the neighborhood.

[0:35:00]

One of the last commandments God gave to us before he went to heaven was that, "Go out and teach all nations." You can't sit there and teach, and you got your doors closed up, and it's – "My group. My people. This is my congregation, and we're not worried about anybody else." No, you can't do it that way. You have to go out and you have to get involved in that neighborhood.

You have a – it is your responsibility as a Christian to get involved in your neighborhood.

C.M. Loper: This is a wrap up question. I know earlier you were talking about the seniors had to walk the person who was in a gang or something home. Did you all ever – did the whole class or the whole building have to walk him home?

Marco Baker: No, it was – not necessarily the person was in a gang. Maybe he stood up to a gang member and they wanted to jump him later on after their school. So to make sure that that didn't happen, we walked the person home. We let it be known that it wasn't gonna be tolerated in this school.

[0:36:00]

It wasn't necessary at the time to get the principal involved, or the police, or anything like that, because hey – most of the time you would find that people that are in gangs are mostly cowards, in a way, and they only get courage when they around other people. They feel as though the numbers are in their favor. So we eradicated all that by simply just walking the person home. They were just like – even an ROTC – again, leadership – our instructors didn't get up in front of the class and call the roll. Our instructors didn't get up and teach the class. Each student had a different day to teach the class. You studied the day before, the week before, and then when it was your day, you got up and you taught the class. And the same thing: if the teacher doesn't show up, it's business as usual. You stand up, you call roll, then you go on with the lesson plan.

Dorian Canalez: What would be any advice you'd give to people nowadays that live in Memphis?

[0:37:00]

Marco Baker: One thing I always say is that Memphis had very poor leadership, especially in their government. We suffer _____ because of the crime, economics – we suffer because of it. And a lot of people see Memphis as a growing city; Memphis is a dying city. ___ keep – Memphis is a dying city. What you see being done to Memphis is cosmetic work. They build up nice pretty buildings, new houses, they take an old building and renovate it, but at the same time, there's no new jobs being created.

A friend of mine who actually used to work for City Hall – the city government was turning away companies who wanted to come here, but yet we need jobs when you were turning away the jobs. So the thing is about it, we – us who live in the city have to hold our leaders more accountable. _____ an example, like the election going on.

[0:37:58]

You don't know who – these people have been sitting in these seats for 10 to 15, 20 years and haven't done nothing. The only time you see them on the street is when they finally put the poster board up to be reelected. That's on us. We're the ones who allow those people to continue sitting in those seats all those years and don't do anything. We have to stand up and say, "Enough is enough," because, like I said, the city itself is dying; it's really dying.

I mean, we probably have the least educated law enforcement in this area. The FBI is always here. There's different organizations that's always here because of it. They don't have an understanding of their job _____ have an understanding of law. I know this 'cause I know some of them personally. I went to school with some of them, so I know this through my dealings with them. Even when you get pulled to the side of the road, you ask them questions, they don't – stuff that you would think a police officer should know, they don't know. And again, that all starts at the top: poor leadership.

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And so we have to stand up and actually say, "Hey." It's just like _____ when you go into a restaurant or go into any type of store, and every time you go there they give you poor customer service. It's crazy for you to continue to go to their store and expect something different if – and come to spend your money there and the service is terrible. Versus you going there and saying, "Hey. I don't appreciate this. I don't appreciate that, and if this doesn't change, then I'm gonna spend my money elsewhere." It's the same way you should be doing – you should do – should be done to your government, is that, "Hey, if you are failing me, then I need to get you out of here and get somebody in this spot that – who has our best interests in mind."

A lot of people get in those spots, and those spots are not meant to be full-time jobs. Those jobs are meant – it's kind of a part-time thing. It's not – it wasn't meant for you to sit there forever, either.

So those – it was meant to be a job for you to do after your main job, ‘cause you’re supposed to be involved in the community and live in the community, so that’s what those jobs for.

[0:40:04]

So basically I guess my advice is that we need to stand up and do what we have to do.

C.M. Loper: I would like to thank you for participating in the Crossroads to Freedom project.

Marco Baker: You’re welcome.

C.M. Loper: Thank you.

[End of Audio]