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Dream Video Transcript
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Cambridge, Maryland, is on the Eastern shore of Maryland. So, I went to an all-white high school for the first time in my life, Cambridge High School in Cambridge, Maryland, then.

And my aunt was fairly progressive. In those days, if you got "The Washington Post" on Eastern Shore, you were considered liberal. And she did, and she was rather progressive. But I decided to sneak out one night to go to the mass meeting in a rally and take two other people with me. And this was the first time I was in an all-black church in Cambridge, Maryland.

And I was not 12 years old then, I was 14 years old. But at that point, I understood what that movement was about, and you would hear those songs coming out of people who've been working all day long coming out to try to get liberty, and justice, and freedom, and segregation. I'm going to have to destroy this phone.

But I will say that my passion was so real. My passion was so strong at that point that I knew that this was going to be something I wanted to do that I wanted to get freedom and justice for all. I wanted to see the voting rights and the civil rights bills passed that happened not too long after 1963 when I actually got involved in the movement.

I wanted to see, particularly after hearing Dr. King Mickey's remarkable speech in March in Washington in 1963, after he saw kids in Birmingham being murdered at a church, firebombed, having demonstrators of kids being water-hosed and fire-hosed down in Birmingham.

I knew that that was going to be my passion. I knew that's what I was going to do. I knew that that's what I wanted to do. And so, my aunt wound up moving to Jacksonville, Florida, to be closer to her daughter, whose husband had passed. He was a jet pilot and went down. And so, we lived in Jacksonville. So, we moved to Jacksonville, Florida.

And that's when I really started to getting involved in the movement, so to speak. My high school was named after the founder of the Ku Klux Klan, Nathan Bedford Forrest, Forrest High School. And that certainly gave me a...And the school was totally white. So, I became an organizer for an all-white high school in Jacksonville, Florida, and probably involved over 100 students in that high school to get involved in changing the name of that high school.

They marched ahead across that bridge, and it was broadcast on television. Television did so much for the civil rights movement, whether it was for young kids with the American bandstand, believe it or not, where they played the first real black music on TV, where you saw black and white kids dancing together in the late '50s and early '60s. Or being able to watch the evening news and see what was happening in Virginia, or Maryland, or South Carolina, or Louisiana, or Alabama, or Mississippi.

It came into your living room, and when it came into your living room, whether it was with the first 15-minute news or the half-hour news, it began changing people's thoughts. And what happened that night in Selma changed a lot of thoughts across this country. A man from Texas who was then president of the United States who had passed one of the greatest civil rights bills of all time, Lyndon Baines Johnson.

I know so much of you don't want us to look right at him and look at Vietnam. But Lyndon Johnson

And, of course, Daddy King then got his wish that Martin became his junior pastor, and he was very happy to hear that. But that's how Martin really got involved in the movement was by accident that he

I mean, it was incredible. Big long tail...By the way, the Kings had a cook and a housekeeper. Her name was Mrs. Lockhart, and she sat at the table with us. So, she might have cooked the meal, and Coretta might have helped her cook the meal.

And she will try to get the kids to do some stuff in those days, but there was no first name stuff with Mrs. King and Dr. King's housekeeper. So, at any rate, we finished lunch. I'm still stunned by the fact that here I am sitting at the table of Martin Luther King Jr. in his house in Atlanta. And Martin said that he had some work to do back in the office, and Mrs.

King said that she had heard that I was from Boston originally and wanted to talk to me about Boston and the kids wanted me to play football with him. So, he said he'll come back to get me or somebody from the Freedom House to come pick me up. Well, about two hours later, after a conversation with Mrs. King, she asked me if I had my driver's license, and I couldn't figure out why she asked me if I have my driver's license.

I said, "Yeah, I have my driver's license." He said, "Well, I've had trouble with my driver. Do you think that you could take the kids to school tomorrow?" Of course, I don't know anything about Atlanta. I mean, I'm not really knowing Atlanta at all. This is in 1966. I was working in Alabama. I've been in Atlanta a couple of times, but I didn't know how to get around, and we didn't have GPSs in those days.

I mean, you know, you got to get a map out here like this and take a look and go through the map and go to different quadrants of where you want to go. There was no internet to try to find out where you were going. There was no smartphone that would let you get your directions right there, you know. It was all what you had to do in this map. All right.

So, I said I would knock on and say no to Mrs. King. And I said, "Yes, I'll take the kids to school." And then I went to find some maps because the kids went to two different schools. And she said, "Why don't you take one of our cars? You'll be staying at the SCLC Freedom House. And Dr.

King came back, and he said that Coretta tells me that you're going to be driving the kids to school. And I said, "Yes, I am." And he said, "Well, you going to answer mail too, right?" And I said, "Yeah, I'm going to answer mail. I'll do that." So, I took their car back, and everybody in our...All the staff at SCLC could not believe, could not believe that I had gone to Dr. King's house for lunch, number one.

And number two, I mean, they couldn't believe that I was going to drive the kids to school. I mean, it was just like mind-boggling. I was one of those, you know, accidental drivers if you will. So, I went and picked the kids up and then over the next two or three weeks, I really got into knowing everybody that the Kings were involved in in Atlanta, from their travel agent, to their doctor, to their dentist to, you know, a lot of their friends because I'd be picking things up and so forth.

Then Dr. King asked Bernard Lee, who was Dr. King's personal assistant then...Bernard Lee, by the way, was with Dr. King most of the time that he was in the movement from '63 to '68. Not many people don't know that name, but he was very, very important to Martin as his personal assistant.

I did get a couple of tickets, and he fixed them. Daddy King did. But we got along after that but daddy King was very, very suspicious, but he also paid or signed for my first car. Daddy King was a very generous man to me, and so was the King family. But I wanted to go back to organize. It was great working with the King family.

I got to know everybody in Atlanta, but I only wanted to go back to organize, and we were doing open housing demonstrations in the summer of '66, and I wanted to be in Chicago. I wanted to do some of the anti-war stuff that Dr. King was getting very much involved in 1967. And I really, really didn't want to just drive, I wanted to go out there in the field and organize demonstrations, organize rallies, organize masses.

I can see this room is full of organizers. But, you know, it was one of those things that I really want it to do. So, after about nine months, I went back out to the staff at SCLC, and I went to Chicago.

And in Chicago, we did open housing demonstrations. And I want to tell you something, some of the most vicious attacks on us, those of us who were trying to get open housing in Chicago by the white people that were throwing rocks and bricks and firebombs and so were almost as bad, if not worse than Mississippi.

And many of those neighborhoods today in Chicago, which were Irish, Italian, and Polish are now almost all black and in Southside of Chicago and the West side of Chicago. So, things really changed. I mean, we got some integration in there, but now it's all black. And also become very violent neighborhoods.

That gun violence is very, very heavy in that part of Chicago. So, I went to Chicago, and I spent six months there then, and then we came back to Atlanta and inside of SCLC, we organized what we called the peace department, P-E-A-C-E, and that was around Dr. King's coming out against the war in Vietnam in 1967.

And that's also when hell hath no fury of Lyndon Johnson coming down on King around the war because really Martin Luther King was one of the key figures in ending that war in Vietnam. God, that's a long time ago, you know, when you think about it.

And we organized a mobilization on Washington, and I helped him with his first major address at Riverside Church in New York in 1967. King was committed to ending the war because he had spoken out before that how could you be a pastor of non-violence and leading a mass movement in this country and around the world and not be opposed to the viole

Campaign. And by the way, there was... Probably there was a nurse nursing staff in Washington at Resurrection City. And they were wonderful, if I might say so myself. And Dr. King actually had several

How much? How much? Say. None? None at all. But these issues are going to be at the forefront of the next decade. And millennials, you know, are not going to be sitting around saying, "Well, I'm not going to wait until I'm 65 for my Medicare."

But then we have to take a look, what do we do with private insurance? Do we get rid of private insurance? I mean, that's a question, do we get rid of private insurance? Now, one of those folks that was the advocate to getting rid private insurance, Bernie Sanders, I understand, and had to have a stent put in his heart, and he's out of business for a few days, but he has Medicare.

That's why he says going to be doing so well. But, I mean, that's where the future is in terms of talking about what happened in the '60s or what we're going to go as we move into 2020. How are we going to change the system and society we live in? Are we going to be able to do it?

Are we going to be able to, you know, lower drugs per scummy? Everybody in this room knows what the costs of drugs are. I mean, really, I have a blood pressure medicine that costs me 90 bucks, and I've got one of those gap policies, you know, and I have, you know, a gap policy beyond Medicare. So, these are going to be challenges for your profession.

And so many of you out there are going to have to be the first folks out there to begin to challenge the rest of society to understand what the issues are. And I know you will. But anyway, I'm honored to be here. I'll take any question you want. And I'll continue talking for another hour if you'd like, but thank you very much.

Questions? Thoughts? Let's hear it. - [Phyllis] Phyllis Mitchell from Bernie's state, Vermont.

- Vermont.

- Yes. So, what have you done since? What have you done since?

- Oh, a lot. For 20 years, I was a talk show host. I was a lot of lefty talk show host, which you don't have anymore. We got run over by the Rush Limbaugh, you know, vast right-wing conspiracy. So, from 1980, here in Atlanta, actually a separate organization called the National Association of Talk Show Host, which Limbaugh took a part in and Hannity as well.

But we got rolled to the side. The talk radio in this country became the voice of the right-wing. And now it's really dominated by right-wingers. I like to think that liberals like to read more than listening to BS on the radio. But for 20 years I was a talk show host.

I was political editor for "Atlanta" magazine here. I also wrote a column for a weekly newspaper here and did a TV show for 20 years called "The Georgia Gang." And I took whether progressive position on that. And then I went into the consultancy business, political consultancy business for four or five years, and three years ago, I decided to do what I do so well is give people tours around Atlanta and create a company called Civil Rights Tour Atlanta.

And if you're ever here, I'd love for you to come take the tour. It's Civil Rights Tour Atlanta. We do private tours, and we do a public tour every Saturday. And I've been doing that for almost five years now. Next question. - [Female]

Hi.

- Hi -

- Not much he'd only pushed him to be that leader, but she was really a coequal in so many ways in the family. She went out and raised money for his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. She was a trained opera singer, actually a concert singer. She went to New England School of Conservatory in Boston. That's where Martin and her met in Boston.

And so, she would do freedom concerts for SCLC and go out and raise money for SCLC. By the way,

So, many of the voices, Joe Lowry, he's in his 90s. CT Vivian, who stood up in Selma, Alabama, to Jim Clark, is in his 90s. So, so many people. That's why we need these young voices out there to get out there and help some of these old folks.

I don't think I saw my last day carrying a picket sign. I'll put it here that way. And certainly, I mean, I think we need a massive voter registration. Something you can do, by the way, as nurses in these boards, I mean, you can even find ways to get involved to register people to vote, which is kind of a non-partisan thing. Not really, but it is.

You can say it's non-partisan. You know what I mean, but I can see myself really seriously. I can see myself getting arrested again, particularly with this not in the White House. And yeah, I mean, it's dangerous. Our country has gone [noise], and so yeah, I mean, I don't think that you've heard the last of my voice.

Let's hear other questions. I know we've got some. Or you all just realizing it's almost 5:00, and you're headed to the bar. - [Crystal] Hi, I'm crystal Tillman from the North Carolina board. So, it sounds like you and your father split ways.

Did you ever reconnect? Did he ever say, "I'm so proud of you, son, for what you've done?"

- I didn't get the last part of that.

- Did your father realized and said, "I'm so proud of you, son?"

- Oh, my God. Well, there's been some sadness and some tragedy in my family, unfortunately, but I

- Yeah. I mean, do not leave town early. I mean, it is an exceptional place. And it's a good way to end other than taking my tour. It's a good way to end the conference because you'll get the feel and experience, not just civil rights in the South, but human rights around the world, and the movements that have changed history in this country and in other nations around the world.

And it was a beautiful idea. It was by a former mayor, Shirley Franklin, and by Evelyn Lowry, Joseph Lowry's wife. And they raised about, I think probably half of the money they wanted to raise. They wanted to double the size of the center. But by all means, take a look at the King papers they have. They wrote taped Martin's thinking papers in there and look at his writings.

Go in there, and they have this counter in there where you'll feel what it was like to sit at a lunch counter, you know, in the days of the citizens in early 1960s. So, I should be paid to be a sponsor of the center for civil and human rights. But it's a wonderful place, and it's a place that I think that for those who will be here tomorrow, that you need to spend a couple of hours.

- Well, thank you. Thank you again for everything you've done, and thank you for speaking to us today.