Oral History Interview: Imam Daayiee Abdullah

Interviewee: Imam Daayiee Abdullah

Interviewer: Monique Moultrie

Date: February 3, 2011

Monique M. All right, today is February 3, 2011, and my name is Monique Moultrie. I'm here with Imam Daayiee Abdullah, and we will be engaging in this oral history project. He will be sharing with me his life narrative. So again, thank you for wanting to participate and being willing to share your story with us. As I mentioned, we're going to start at the beginning and sort of work our way as quickly forward or as slowly forward as you want. I hope to have this interview provide information for others who are coming along who are interested in your life narrative and others like you, so I thank you again. I will begin with asking some just basic geographical information. So where are you currently located?

Daayiee A. I'm currently living in Washington, D.C.

Monique M. And has Washington been your home the entire time?

Daayiee A. No, it has not. I'm originally from Detroit, Michigan. I was born and raised in Detroit. And at the age of **20**, I left Detroit and moved to San Fransissy – or that's my pet name for San Francisco. And it was there that I had an opportunity to move out of the Midwestern framework and to further develop my understanding of myself as being a black male

homosexual. And after five years of living in San Francisco, I moved to Washington, D.C. in 1979 and have lived there on and off since that time.

Monique M. So growing up in Detroit, what type of neighborhood did you live in?

Daayiee A. Oh, I grew up in a working class neighborhood, actually just a couple blocks away from Brewster-Douglass Projects, and I have several brothers. There's eight of us in the family, and I have six brothers and one sister, who was the youngest. Three older brothers and three younger.

Monique M. So you're a middle child.

Daayiee A. I'm the middle – well, I'm the middle of the boys. In terms of living there, my father was a postman, my mother was a housekeeper, and…or house maker, as they use the term, but we also had family cleaners, and so we utilized that as one of the formulations in terms of us developing our understanding in the process. My parents were a bit unique in terms of that.

My mother grew up in a business family and her grandmother was a business owner. She owned the largest laundry in Ford City, or what would be called Ford City today, back at the turn of the century. Then she had the money to send her children – though she was uneducated, she was able to send her children to school. And my grandmother was a beautician. So by the time she finished beautician school, blacks started migrating to Detroit for the auto industry, so my grandmother moved there

and raised her family there. And through the process, so my mother's side of the family, they, because of the beautician shop, my mother, as she was growing up as a teenager, she did hair for the black funeral homes there.

Monique M. Interesting.

Daayiee A. So every weekend my mother would go down, and there used to be two to three heads for her to do. She would get five dollars a head to wash, dry and press the person's hair to prepare them for the funeral, and so that's how, and so she made around 15 – she said an average of around $15 a week doing that. And her sister also would, so they would split up and go to different funeral homes like that. And so they said that during the Depression, my mother said that they had cars, they owned property, and they did well. So my mother's family was able to send her to college, and that's how she grew into the process.

And my father, who was from Mississippi, he was very smart. He graduated number one in his high school class and he went off to college, and then he met my mother after…both of them had graduated from college and they met. They dated for about two years, married, and by the time that they both had died, they had been together about 65 years.

Monique M. Wow! Now, where originally – I missed it in the narrative – where originally were your grandparents migrating from?

Daayiee A. Oh, from Forest – the city was called Forest City, Arkansas.

Monique M. Okay.

Daayiee A. Which has now been absorbed by Little Rock. So it was once a small suburb right outside of Little Rock, but it was absorbed into it.

Monique M. And did your parents stay in Detroit their entire lives?

Daayiee A. Well, the grandparents moved to Detroit, so my grandfather worked in the auto industry. He was a, what do you call it, security guard for one of the factories there. And my grandmother ran the beautician shop. And then after my parents got married, my mother was a schoolteacher for a short time, for a few years. Before my three elder brothers were coming along, she was a teacher. Then there's a six year difference between myself and my brother over me, and it was during that time my mother made the transition, and she said she had her own school at home, so she stopped teaching.

Monique M. [*Laughs.*]

Daayiee A. And became a full-time homemaker, and was doing that process. But I learned a lot about business from my mother's side because she taught us how to make a dollar. And so that was very important in terms of growing up because on Saturdays, I would, you know, starting at five years old, I would go over to the cleaners and I would shine shoes and make deliveries. And every Saturday I would come home with about ten

dollars' worth of change because people, you know, a quarter for delivering their clothes from the cleaners—

Monique M. Yeah.

Daayiee A. --and 25 cents for a pair of shoes to shine and that kind of thing. So the rule was half the money you got went to the bank, the other half was yours to use. And so if I wanted to invite some of my friends to go Sunday afternoon to the movies, the 15 cent movies we had, I could invite them and we could go. So it was one of those kinds of things where, if you earned your keep, then you could do additional things, so it wasn't always asking them for money. Yet we got a weekly allowance, of course. But that was part of the process to initiate us to be more innovative and do things.

But the thing they stressed more than anything else was get your schoolwork done, so that was highly prized. My father provided us – I had a library at home. I mean, the encyclopedia set, the whole – the works. So we had those things at home. We didn't have to go to the library. But we were, the stress of education and whatever was about education, and my father would always make certain that, you know, school trips, if we wanted to go to the library, buy books, those kinds of things, he always made that available 'cause he stressed education. And then the dinner table, most of the nights at the dinner table my father

would come in and he would ask us, "So what did you learn today?" And he would go around the table asking us what did you learn today.

Monique M. So you had to learn something.

Daayiee A. You had to learn something. And so it was the Civil Rights going on as well, he also asked us about what was going on in the world today, read the newspapers, talk about your opinions of these things, so he made certain that we were aware, very consciously aware of what was going on in the world.

Monique M. Did you attend segregated schools when you were growing up?

Daayiee A. Well, I did in the very…well, in elementary school, until I was in the fourth grade, I went to sort of a mixed school for…I was considered bright, an advanced child, 'cause at three years old I was reading and writing. But my mother said it was because of my elder brothers' influence that I stressed in terms of learning. So I was reading and writing at three, and by the time I got to elementary school I had like a fourth grade reading average at that time, and my math was somewhere around the same. So they wanted to advance me. My mother said no, I want…my mother, having been a teacher, she said that a child needs to socially advance, no matter how smart they are, so she said you can go ahead in school as long as you earned your grades. So my father agreed with that. And so every summer I went to summer school, so I graduated

three years early from high school. But it was earned. I was never double promoted in any way.

Monique M. Gotcha.

Daayiee A. So it was a…I've been a fighter all my life in terms of if I want something, I have to work for it, and I know that I have to put – if I want to do it, then I have to think about the time, I have to invest the resources, are they there, and then from there, if I choose to make that choice, then I know that I'm ready to do it, and no matter what the struggles are, I'm going to get there.

Monique M. So your first school was a mixed school. Did all of the successive ones, were they also mixed as well?

Daayiee A. Well, I mean, there were black and white there. But there were some others because I, you know, because the auto industry was there, our neighborhood had a mixture. We had some Latinos as well. There were a couple of Hindu people who lived there. And, you know, so it was just a mixture. And then it was predominantly black. I would say it was probably around 75% black, but we had some whites, some Latinos there. I don't remember any – well, there were some Koreans. There was a couple of black military men who had married Korean women, so there were mixed Korean kids there as well. So that was how the…the neighborhood I grew up in.

Monique M. You mentioned one of the values that you learned was the value of a dollar—

Daayiee A. Yes.

Monique M. --and earning, and keeping up and working hard. What were other values that you earned and learned as a child?

Daayiee A. Well, those values were that you had a responsibility to yourself and your to you community. So the thing was that we would go to the playground and we would play ball, and if the ball went over the fence and broke someone's window, our responsibility was to go to the person, knock on the door and say, "I'm sorry I broke your window. When my dad gets home, we'll go and get you a new window and we'll replace that this evening." And that was the process. So we all looked alike, you know, in the family, in this neighborhood. "Oh, you're one of them [Tarleton] boys, you're one of them Johnson boys," you know, so – [*laughs*] – we couldn't get away with anything.

Monique M. Uh-huh.

Daayiee A. So we had to take the responsibility of doing that. But because we did those things, we had high respect in the neighborhood, and the neighbors looked out for us. I remember when I was about six years old I was out in the playground that was down the street from our house and of course a little kid's going to show off in front of the other boys and everything, so

we would cuss and all that kind of stuff. Well, by the time I got home, my mother said to me, said, "Oh, I heard you were cussing."

Monique M. [*Laughs.*]

Daayiee A. "Well, who told you that?" She says, "That's not the answer. Answer the question." [*Laughs.*] And I knew the gig was up. [*Laughs.*]

Monique M. Yes. [*Laughs.*]

Daayiee A. So you had to answer the question and accept the punishment for it. But I knew then that the neighbors cared for us, and to have that type of care was really [responsive]. I mean, as I grew into my teenage years and things of this nature, I realized I had a very special community in growing up, that people cared for us. And we also, in turn, cared for them. Because my mother would tell us sometimes, coming from school, "Go down to Miss Jones's house 'cause she needs you to help do so-and-so and so." And you would go down, and you knew you had to go down there and do what your mom – what Mom told you to do.

Monique M. Mm-hmm.

Daayiee A. So these were people who were in our neighborhood, but they also cared for us in a number of different ways. So I felt I had a family…the family and an extended community that cared for us as children. And so as we grew older, we learned a lot.

There was a gentleman, and I believe his name was Jenkins, and he had gone to Morehouse. He was a mathematician. But he had a drinking problem. But I learned a lot of math from this man. And I knew that when he was in his drinking mode, leave Mr. Jenkins alone, but when he was sober, I could always talk to him. And he taught me so much about math and how to understand things and stuff like that.

So our neighborhood, though we had some people in it who were not pristine, if you would want to use it, but there were people who were not stupid. They were people who had – I mean, there were a few families where the father had a third grade education and that kind of thing, but most of the people tended to have a little bit of education, and therefore what they talked about and things that they did…

And my father and mother were community activists as well. For the early years they were Scout leaders, you know, my mother was a Cub Scout leader, den mother. My father was in the Scouts over at the Brewster-Douglass Projects and then at our church we belonged to the Scouts. When I came along, the scouting group was over at our church.

And one of the things that Reverend Johnson had gotten his – he was one of the first black reverends in Detroit to get his PhD, and he had it in economics. So when he took over leadership of the church, we built a new center, a new church, but also connected to the church was a senior citizen home, and they eventually bought property and built apartment buildings

so members of the church grew, so they had over like a thousand members. But they provided for them, too. So eventually, if you go into Detroit now, there are some homes over there that belong to the Friendship Baptist Church, and it still exists today.

So it was a very unique circumstance that was very different than most people I've talked to about their growing up. So I think possibly because it was Detroit and the circumstances there – the auto industry bringing people from all over the world, certain opportunities were there that were different than if I was in…I don't want to be derogatory, but if I was in some southern town in a very different life.

Monique M. One of the things you just mentioned was one of my next questions for you. Where were your sense of religious values?

Daayiee A. Okay.

Monique M. You mentioned I guess what we stereotypically call more secular values that came through, and you just mentioned being involved in the church as a Cub Scout, and you mentioned your pastor and the work there. So what religious values were you given? And talk to me a little bit about your religious upbringing.

Daayiee A. Okay. Well, I was raised as a Southern Baptist, and at the age of eight I…was it seven or eight? I'm trying to remember which. I think I was seven years old when I told my parents I wanted to get baptized, so I went

through the training part. And I think by that time I was eight or about to turn eight and I was baptized. And it seemed that during that year, a lot of the stuff just didn't make sense that they were talking about. So I talked to my parents, because we had a rule in the house, the secular values was that tell them first and they will work with you if something's gone wrong. But if you lie about it, you will be treated just like a criminal. [*Laughs.*]

Monique M. [*Laughs.*]

Daayiee A. So work with them or either you face the judgment on your own. So I told them I didn't find myself it was good for me. And my parents said, well, we can't tell you what faith you should follow, but you should have one, because as a human being there are times in your life when you're going to have to call on something greater than who you are as a person. So therefore, you should know something.

So with that, my parents allowed me to start going to other faiths and seeing what those churches and things – because I had neighbors or people that they knew, and I would, you know, say, "Well, do you mind if I go with you to synagogue, you know, Mr. [Lobans]," you know, that kind of thing. And they'd say sure, and they would take me to the synagogue, and I would see what they did there. And I'd be like, "Can you explain to me some of these rituals and things like that?" So I had exposure to a number of different faiths – many Christian faiths, from Pentecostal to

Episcopalian, you know, that type of thing. And I didn't find them to be satisfying in the long run.

So I think by the time I was around ten or so, I felt that I was really, you know, I thought about agnostic to atheist, in that sense. And then by the time I was around 15 or so, that's when I got introduced to metaphysics through Science of Mind. And it was at that time that I started reinvesting my time and energy into religion and learning about it. And because it said we had a creator and that the power of mind was not dependent upon, you know, Jesus, if you will, but dependent upon putting faith in yourself connected to the creator. And so that's how I got associated with that. Then I went off to school for a year, and while I was at school I was doing very well academically, but socially I was not doing well, because at this time – we're talking now the very early '70s.

Monique M. This is college or this is boarding school?

Daayiee A. College, college. And it was very…and so here I am reading comic books and stuff, doing well in school. However, the other side of it is that the other kids were there, you know, these are adults 18 and above, and they're drinking, doing drugs, all that kind of stuff, and I just didn't feel comfortable in that atmosphere. And so I came home after my first year away at college and decided I would, now that I was 16, I could get a job, legally get a job. And then I said, well, this will give me an opportunity to work and go to school part-time in the evening, and that's what I did.

And that exposed me to a total new world because as a…when I was in high school I did take college prep and a business education program, and I knew I was going to college, so I took typing and shorthand for note taking. Well, when I came back to get a job, those were skills that got me, because of affirmative action, got me into corporate headquarters, and so I was working for the VP of so-and so. And so I got additional management training through that process, like I learned to speed read because my boss sent me to speed reading school. You know, some issues in terms of management, those types of things, so I learned a lot of things because of my skill sets that I had that allowed me to go there.

So I'd wind up at these meetings where I'd be the only black face there, but these were lawyers and business professionals who were there, and I was interacting with them. And since I was bright, articulate, knew how to dress, all of those kinds of things, it helped promote me further in terms of doing those things.

Monique M. Now, when you went to school at night, what were your interests?

Daayiee A. Well, I got my – first I went and got a degree in business education. And so when I wound up, after a period of time I wound up doing education in terms of teaching an**d** personnel. I would go out and I would teach people within the corporation how to be better secretaries and office managers and things like that. And so that was my first sort of, I would say, professional level in terms of me after college. Then from there I

decided…that's when I was thinking about going to California. I did move out to California. I started studying—

Monique M. What year was that when you moved?

Daayiee A. That would have been in '75. Well, I went out there in '74 for a visit, came back, and about two months later I moved out there, so it was like February of '75 I moved out there.

Monique M. So how old were you then?

Daayiee A. I was just 20. And so I moved out to California, and that's when I met my first partner as an adult. Well, I should talk a little – well, I think you have some other questions. We can go back to that. But that was when I met my first partner there. And I also went to court reporting school while I was out there, so I became a court stenographer. And then I was working for the IRS. When I left San Francisco and came to D.C. I was working for the IRS as a court stenographer and was traveling around, and did that for a couple of years. And then something was not satisfying me. I just couldn't get…you know how you…you have the money, you have the credit cards, you travel, you do the various things, but then, at the end of the day, you're just not satisfied?

Monique M. Mm-hmm.

Daayiee A. And so at that point I said, well, I've got to do something. So I had come back to Washington, D.C., my partner and I had broken up, and so I

moved back to Washington, D.C. and worked for a few more years. And then, when I was done with that, I was in Chicago, based in Chicago, because the company based in Washington, D.C., but they had several of us located in Chicago and—

Monique M. Is this still the IRS?

Daayiee A. This is the IRS type thing. And so we were based in Chicago and I traveled. But I was not satisfied. So something told me quit this job and move back to Washington. So I gave them my notice. I had a lease on my apartment. I paid it off, gave away all my furniture and stuff, packed my bags, jumped on a plane and went back to D.C. and slept on the floor at some friends' house in order for me to be back in D.C., because something was saying "be in D.C." So while there, I spent about two weeks in meditation.

And during that first week of meditation, because of my sense of metaphysics and this nature, I was meditating, and the first vision came to me. I was back in San Francisco and I was at Mount Tam, which is an observation place in Marin County, and used to go there with another friend from Detroit because we both were into astronomy, and we would go there and do sky watching from time to time. So here I am outside of the observatory and it's storming outside and everything, and all of a sudden the storm sort of settles, and I'm looking out to sea, and the rain stops, the clouds dissipate, the sun comes back out and everything, and the

inner voice said to me, "If you truly believe, step out on the…on faith." And I was standing there at the edge, and I stepped out there and I started floating. So that's the end of the first vision.

So I woke, up and I'm like, wow, this is real trippy, you know. Is this really just a dream or what's happening? But I said, but something was more to come, I just knew it, so I kept meditating. And about a week later, the second part of the dream came, and it started off saying that everything's going to be okay since you've committed yourself. And it was just a repeat of the same thing over again, and then the inner voice said, "Study Chinese." Study Chinese? [*Laughs.*]

Monique M. Interesting.

Daayiee A. You know? But I said, okay, if that's what you want, God, I'm going to study Chinese. Because part of my wish was that give me something, God, that would help me work with people for the rest of my life. That was my wish. Well, I got up and started calling around, and I called the University of Maryland. They had a program at George Washington University in Georgetown. Went out to the University of Maryland and talked to the director there, and they had a part-time program, and I wanted something full-time. So then I go over to George Washington and literally, they looked at me when I went in to talk to them, and they didn't say it in the exact words, but they looked at me and said, "Nigger, why do you want to study Chinese?"

Monique M. [*Laughs.*]

Daayiee A. Literally. [*Laughs.*] And so I said, "Well, this is not the place for me." So then I had an appointment about three weeks later, and they were having an open house at Georgetown. So I went over there and went to the open house and stopped into the Chinese Department and spoke to Dr. Lee. He's deceased now, but Dr. Lee was [there], so I sat down and talked with him and told him what my interests were, and he says, "You seem to be an interesting young man." He wrote a note, put it an envelope and told me to go over to the Center of Minority Student Affairs and give this to the lady who was the assistant director of the thing, and I says okay. And he said, "I'm going to call her now and you just go on over there and I'll call her."

So when I got over there, I said, "Well, my name is So-and-so," and it wasn't my Muslim name at the time, it's So-and-so, and they said, "Oh, I'm waiting for you." So I went in and sat down with her and everything, gave her the letter, and she says, "Well, you know we have a program here at Georgetown. It's called Community Scholars. And these are for people who have already had a career who wish to come back to school to do something different. So since you've had an interesting career and done very well at it," she said, "You've been out of school now for ten years, so you need to take an SAT again because we don't take scores that's older than ten years, so you'll have to take that again, but we'd like to offer you

an opportunity to come in to be a freshman again at the school." So I said okay, well, let's see what happens.

Well, I went and took the SAT, application and everything was there, and she said, "Well, you'll hear back from us in April." Well, on April 2nd I received a letter from Georgetown saying I had received a full fellowship from them to study Chinese. And so that following summer I entered the Chinese program, and nine months later I was at Beijing University.

Monique M. Wow, full immersion.

Daayiee A. Full immersion. And so it was a year at Beijing, and then I continued for two years at Taiwan National University. And it was through this process that when I was at Beijing, some of my classmates were Uighurs, or the Chinese Muslims from the western part of China. And so the conversation, on one of the occasions, was…our language of communication was Chinese, of course, and so they were saying, "Well, do you know anything about Islam?" And I'm like, "Well, the Nation of Islam, I heard about that," because one of my older brothers had been a member of that back in the '60s. And so he says, "No, no, no, the real Islam." I said, "Oh, the real Islam." He says, "Yeah." I said, "Well, I know a little bit about the Wahhabis." And he says, "Oh, no, it's not about the Wahhabis, it's about the real Islam." So I said, "Okay, explain this to me."

And so they started – they had been Muslims for over 1,100 – well, about 1,200 years at that time his family had been Muslim. So he says, "I'd like to invite you over to the Mosque," which is called Cow Street Mosque there in Beijing. And I said sure. He said, "We'll go over on Friday after class. That's when we can go for the thing." I said fine. So I went to them there and he showed me how to do the ritual wudu, the washing and everything and preparing, and I went in. And then the sermon, or the khutbah, was done both in Arabic and Mandarin. And when I heard the Chinese, it made perfect sense. So I was really fascinated with it.

And afterwards I continued to go from time to time while I was there at school. And something about Islam, I was being attracted to it. I didn't convert immediately. I went on to Taiwan, and that's when I ran into the Saudi version, the Wahhabi version of Islam in Taiwan, because they have a center there, and so I started going there. And then I saw the difference between how the people in mainland China and these people were practicing Islam and the Wahhabis were practicing it. And I realized then that there was a significant difference, and that Wahhabism was not really the way to go.

But I did feel that Islam was the faith that I should utilize, and it was because of the prayer process. As a Christian, whenever I would pray, I felt that I was supplicating all the time. "Oh, God, help me do this, God, help me do that, bla-bla-bla." But in Islam, whenever I would do the sujud, which is the part where you place your forehead onto the floor, it's

the full sense of surrender. And as I read materials and talked to people, that's whenever you have a question for God, you release it, you surrender it over to God, and I would turn it over. And one of two things would happen. Either God would, by the end of the prayer, provide me with information in terms of inspiration or whatever, in terms of responding to my question, or I'd be left with such inner peace I could wait for the answer. Because I knew, after a while, that sometimes you're not ready for the answer, so sometimes you have to just remain peaceful, or the term they use, or the term they use sabr, to have patience until the right answer comes.

Monique M. I want to stop and backtrack us. A theme that I'm picking up on is that you were very independent and innovative about what it was you wanted to do and how to accomplish your goals. So as a child, I wonder how that meshed with…you said your parents supported your faith journey and you deciding. How did that mesh with your peers as you were being independent and advancing educationally and career-wise, etc.? How did you feel your socialization process was going, based on the formation of yourself at that point?

Daayiee A. Well, two things happened. One is that because of urban renewal in Detroit, the neighborhood I was in was Brewster-Douglass Projects, and then we lived on the other side of the Chrysler Freeway, so that part between the Eastern Market and Chrysler Freeway, all of that was totally, in the late '60s, all of that was urban renewal, and then they tore it down

and everything, so we moved from there to another part of town, over there when one of the cleaners that we had, over in that neighborhood. So that's when I went to MLK High School, Martin Luther King High School. It was Eastern High School, and then it changed to Martin Luther King after his assassination in 1968, and so that's the high school I graduated from.

But I think that in terms of my peers, a number of the peers I grew up with in the early years, many of us dissipated and then we just lost contact with each other. But from high school, I still kept in touch with several people, and through the process of elimination – not elimination, but process of attrition, basically, some of the people I knew in high school became drug addicts and died. Other people got married, had children, that kind of thing, so their aspirations somewhat became depleted and they just took on being a family, you know, being Mama and Daddy type of thing. But because I didn't desire to have children, I kept pushing and things of this nature, and so that was part of the problem.

One of the reasons why I left Detroit, as I said earlier, is because I felt that Detroit was in its demise, and so I didn't want to remain there, because I felt the more I aspired for things, the less likely I found people who had similar aspirations, so I knew that it was time for me to leave the area and go somewhere else where I felt people were much more interested. So I wanted to find a better location that had better opportunities in terms of

education, people who were coming there from various. And I liked San Francisco because it had an international flavor to it.

Monique M. Now, you mentioned one person who served sort of as a mentor, a math mentor for you, and you just mentioned wanting to be around people who were aspiring to do the things, or had already done the things that you were interested in doing as a kid and as a growing young adult. Where did you find those mentors? Were they from your religious communities, from your explorations, from your high school, from Cub Scouts?

Daayiee A. Well, from a variety of them. Because there were seven boys, my father was extremely generous and everything, but some of his good friends, like members of a male choir at church and things like that also helped mentor us as well. So B.L. Jackson, who was my Scout leader, but also B.L. was the man who taught me some other things beyond the skills my father taught me. He taught me some skills of how to interact with people in a different way. He helped me become a better listener, to listen to people better. He helped me understand that through the process, to know that what you may do or what people do one way, things may change to acquire the same way.

I remember one time me and my father were having some difficulties, and B.L. stood up for me with my dad. He came and he says…and he told me, B.L. said, "You know, I talked with your dad and explained to him that, you know, when we were kids, John" – my father's name was John – B.L.

said, "When we were kids, how did we get to school? Well, we walked or we rode in a buggy," he says, "But today, how do you get to work? You drive a car." He says, "So the issue is not getting somewhere, but the method of getting there is different, so what Sidney wants" – my name is Sidney – "What Sidney wants is he wants something different. He's using a different path of getting there. It's not that his goals are different, it's just a different way of getting to the same thing." And because he had done that, it helped my relationship with my father sort of heal at that time. And you know, when you're a 13-year-old and your father loves you—

Monique M. I have one in the house right now.

Daayiee A. You do?

Monique M. Yes.

Daayiee A. Okay. And so you want to aspire to the best that you can do. And my parents always said that if you…they wanted us to always try. They said you may not be successful in everything you do, but if you give it your best, you'll never feel guilty or bad that if I had – maybe if – you don't have that problem. And so it would do that. When I was in high school I thought about possibly becoming a doctor, but chemistry just didn't work for me. I did well in biology, things like that, but chemistry didn't work.

And the teacher said, you know, some of the stuff you…you get the formulas right, but oxygen burns off, so the oxygen shouldn't be there, you know – [*laughs*] – that kind of thing, and it was like, okay, well, I'm sorry. But I tried chemistry the second time and still didn't get it right. I got improved grades, but just didn't get it right, so I said, well, maybe this is not the way I should be going. [*Laughs.*] And I'm glad I didn't, you know, in terms of that. But anyway, the…maybe your question again, because I think I've gone off.

Monique M. Well, I was asking about your mentors and where they came from, you started with the…

Daayiee A. Okay. So I would say that I had several mentors. When I was a court stenographer, there was a gentleman I met. His name was Albert [Hurt]. He was 92 years old. I met him here in Minneapolis back in 1981, I think it was. And there was a group…the D.C. Coalition had several chapters around the country, and the Minneapolis chapter, the youngest member of it was 40 years old and the eldest was Albert, at 92, so I had a chance to meet with them. And that's why Albert and I, how we became friends and kept in touch with each other.

But he taught me so much. He said, you know, there's some scruples you have to maintain, there are things you should do as a person. Don't mutilate your body, be proud of who you are, maintain some moral standards. If people, you know, are talking to you about sexuality, things

like, you know, want to be sexual with you, always scrutinize that, that kind of thing. And so it kept me out of a whole lot of stuff as a young black male, learning and growing in life.

Monique M. Now, as a child who was educationally advanced, were you also aware, at an early age, of your own sexuality?

Daayiee A. Yes, I was. Literally around the age of five I knew that something was different about me. I just knew it. And the other boys, of course, like in church and my older brothers and their friends and things like that, they would be talking about girls. But I was like, but what's the big deal about girls? I like boys, you know. And so it was something that just basically I knew that I liked boys. And so I was very aware of that, but then when I started talking about it, people would say nasty things, you know, "Oh, you're a sissy," and that kind of stuff. So I knew very early that something was wrong about this.

So of course being a reader, I went into the library and picked up books and I would read books on it. Everything I read said that homosexuality was sick and all of that. And I'm like, but I don't have all those feelings. I don't want to be a woman, I don't want – you know, I don't feel I'm a girl and that kind of thing, so something's wrong with even this concept they're talking about as being a sickness; I'm not sick. So I just became silent and didn't talk about it with people, because I knew the reactions

they would have. But that didn't stop me, because I continued to hang out with some of the teenage boys.

And my first boyfriend was Otis. Otis is deceased. His name was Otis Gale. And Otis and I were together in teenage years. And then…Otis was a couple years older than me, and in my senior year of high school, Otis committed suicide, so I was 14 going on 15 when he committed suicide. His mother had died several months beforehand, and I think he possibly was depressed, but I don't know for certain. But my mother, knowing this, she was trying to be a good mother, you know. "If you ever have problems, you need things, you know, you can always talk to me," that kind of thing. And my father was [torn], you know, but you still have a father—

Monique M. Was there understanding that this was like your best friend?

Daayiee A. Yeah, it's my best friend.

Monique M. Okay.

Daayiee A. So they were trying to be supportive people in terms of someone that was a friend of one of their children, because this was part of the process. My elder brothers, they had friends and all of this, and this showed up in the death of my father and my mother at their funerals. You could just see generations of people who they had been mentors to throughout the years. And I mean from my oldest brother all the way down to my sister that's

the youngest. So these people showed up. So they had been consistent for all these years, and people always knew, you know, that that was there.

So, you know, that was part of the process. But because my parents, realizing that your friend has now committed suicide, they let me stay home from school because I wasn't so hot for a couple of days, you know, so they said, well, you know, you just lost a friend. Death is one of those things, it's inevitable, 'cause my parents used to tell us, when we were younger, that death is inevitable, and one day even we will be dead, you know, we will die, so understand. And my mother used to always teach us, from the time we were little, she says, "Give people their flowers while they're alive. They'll appreciate them better." So I've always kept that, that if you like somebody, tell them. If you believe in someone and you want to give them a gift or whatever, give it to them, they'll appreciate it better, and exchange, so you really develop close relationships that way.

Monique M. Right.

Daayiee A. So anyway, so after that, I think I stayed home maybe two days from school, and then I said, well, I've got to get back to school, got papers and stuff to get done, that kind of thing, so I went back to school. And I think by having work to do in school, it kept my mind off of the situation, you know. And I was in orchestra, in the band. I had all types of activities, so I kept myself busy and things like that, so as time passed, the heartache, you know—

Monique M. Was anyone aware that you all were more than friends?

Daayiee A. I don't think so. I don't think so. No one ever spoke – I never spoke about it in terms of that. But later on, as I became an adult and started talking to my parents a little bit more about that, then they started putting two and two together, you know. [*Laughs.*] But at that time it was…it was a well kept secret, basically.

Monique M. Now, was it a secret solely because of what you were reading and the slurs that you were hearing, that you assumed that your family and friends would have those same opinions?

Daayiee A. Yes. I thought that would be the case, because none of them knew anything about the issue, and so… I never heard my parents speak in derogatory terms of people, but… There was a guy that lived in the block away from us, and he was what we would probably refer to as a drag queen today, or maybe even a transgender at the time. But no one talked derogatory about them, but my parents were like, well, you know, this person is not a good influence. So that's how they sort of spoke about it rather – but you didn't hear them speaking of them in derogatory terms and things like that.

Monique M. Gotcha.

Daayiee A. Okay. So that was the thing. So I just knew it was best to just keep quiet about it and move on about my life, you know, in terms of that.

Monique M. Now, at 20, when you decided to move to San Francisco, was that an indicator for them?

Daayiee A. No, it wasn't an indicator for them. They just knew that I was adventurous, I loved to travel. When I was growing up, I was a paperboy, and I was very good at being a paperboy. I won several trips, like the World Fair in '67 in Montreal. I won a trip to go there with—

Monique M. Wow.

Daayiee A. I had the most…well, I came in number two in the city in terms of new subscribers, but I was in a black neighborhood and had 88 new subscribers. There was this white boy out in the suburbs in Southfield who got, like, 92 subscribers in a brand new complex. So who was the better salesperson, okay? And my neighbors got my other people because I…that was when Saran Wrap had first come out, and if they didn't have a screen door, I would wrap their paper in Saran Wrap so they always got a dry paper. And so I invested a little bit of the money to give better service, and that increased my route in terms of number of clients that I had.

And so it got to a point, in my second year, I had to hire my younger brothers to go out with me, and I would do the certain way and they would do the other way to deliver papers, and I would pay them. So by the time I left my…when I first started off, I had a route that went about 12 blocks – well, maybe about nine blocks across, and I had something like 50 some

customers, but by the time I finished, and by the time I was leaving high school, I had the whole section of the city. That whole little chunk was mine, and I had about 500 customers, and so I was bringing home almost as much money as my daddy was bringing home a week.

Monique M. Wow, that's a lot of papers.

Daayiee A. That was a lot of papers. And…

Monique M. So with the money you took trips and…?

Daayiee A. And all that type of stuff, so… Even we were going to a family reunion in St. Louis, and I had the paper route to deliver, so I told my family I would. So I left and took a plane for that weekend, you know, and then flew back. But it was my money, though I had to put it out, so that's what I did. And that's how it sort of worked in terms of that. And then after high – well, of course the thing about moving to San Francisco and all of that. But in terms of relationships, that was my first relationship as a teenager, and then when I was in San Francisco I had my first relationship as an adult. His name was Paul. And Paul and I were together about four and a half years.

I was in San Francisco about three months or so before I met Paul, and we hit it off, through a lesbian friend of mine who introduced me to Paul, and Paul and I hit it off. Now, Paul had been married. He had two children. But he had moved to San Francisco from Texas, and we developed a

relationship and we were together. We wound up going into business together. He was a chef at one of the major hotels there, and we pooled our money together and we opened up a… He was doing the deli part and I had a floral business on the side. And it got so good that I had to quit working full-time in order to do the floral business. For about a year and a half, almost two years, I ran the floral business.

I had taken some courses in ikebana, Japanese floral design, and so I started doing three dimensional floral work. And so through that process, it became somewhat popular. And also one of my things I did as a florist that every holiday I would dress up in a costume. But in a black neighborhood in San Francisco, I stood out like a, you know, a neon light, basically. But the thing is that the kids had never seen a black Santa Claus, you know. They had never seen a black, you know, Easter bunny. Cupid came along, and I'd wear a bodysuit and like that. So people would stop because I had a character going on, so they would buy, you know, Valentine's Day they would buy up stuff – [*laughs*] – you know. So business was doing very, very well.

And I'm thankful to a lady – her name was Grand Mary Pugh, P-U-G-H – and we called her Grand Mary. Her name was Mary Pugh, but in terms of – they called her Grand Mary. Rather than Grandmother, they called her Grand Mary. And Mother Pugh, I met her, she was a little old black lady maybe about your height, but she was in her 70s when I met her. And she came by the shop one day and she says, "How are you doing young man?"

I said, "I'm doing well," you know, and I introduced myself to her and everything. And she talked. She said, "Well, you know I used to be a florist down in Las Angeles many years ago, bla-bla-bla." And so we had talked about floral work, and she was very helpful in terms of that. And she said, "Well, you need to work on your floral designs, 'cause some of the stuff in the back, you've got to learn how to cover stuff and do things like…"

So she was very helpful in terms of that. She was walking with her dog, you know, and that kind of thing and stop by. And then one day I was working on some work and she came by. I said, "Well, Mother, take a look at this," and she said, "You got it. You got it now." And that's when my business took off like crazy.

Monique M. Nice.

Daayiee A. And so it was really good. She mentored me in such a way. And that Mother's Day, I sold out of every flower in my business that day. I had done this loving cup, this Mother's Day cup. It was like a silver cup and it had roses in it and things like that, and had put together this arrangement, and I sold them out. I mean, literally—

Monique M. Good stuff.

Daayiee A. --it just worked out extremely well. Then I started doing the 3D funeral work, because this was the time when Jim Jones in Guyana, the people

died who were from the San Francisco area there. Well, so a number of their relatives lived in – I lived in that same neighborhood, okay, and had the shop there, so there were people who came to me, 'cause they had brought the bodies back and they were having funerals and things like that. And so I said it was an opportunity for me to start showing my work in funeral design. And business got even better because I was doing 3D floral work. Now, when I say 3D, you've seen bleeding hearts before.

Monique M. Mm-hmm.

Daayiee A. You know, the arrangement of the hearts. Well, mine would be similarly, but then out of the heart I would have, wired together, like lemon leaves and baby pink roses, so they would gush out of the heart and sail down onto the floor so it was three dimensional. And people never saw that before – [*laughs*] – so they would come to me for these specialty things.

Monique M. Right.

Daayiee A. And so I made good money. So it was something I made – I did another business thing where business offices that were in the neighborhood, like doctors and lawyers offices that were there, and then when I worked downtown as well, I went down and I would give people, like three month arrangement. You pay for ten weeks of floral arrangements, you get two weeks free, and then each week you would get certain things. So one week you would get carnations in a special arrangement, and then the next week you would get this, and I would increase the value of the flowers

each week. But they would pay me for this three month period. So a doctor said, yeah, I'd like to have flowers here, bla-bla-bla, paid me the money. Then I could buy flowers at…the more flowers you buy, the cheaper they are, so I kept making more money, although the prices would be…I was not competing with some of the other businesses in the same way. My prices were not as expensive as theirs. But because I had the volume, I made more money.

Monique M. I want to backtrack and ask a question. You mentioned that you met Paul through a lesbian friend of yours.

Daayiee A. Yes, B.J.

Monique M. How did you connect with lesbians and gays in the San Francisco area when you first got there?

Daayiee A. Well, I met B.J. because I was…good question. [*Laughs.*] When I first went there to visit San Francisco, I met a gentleman. His name was Monty Cardwell, M-O-N-T-Y Cardwell, C-A-R-D-W-E-L-L. And he was the first black person to run the San Francisco – director of the San Francisco Museum of Art. And Monty was originally from New York. He…outstanding sculptor. I mean, *outstanding* sculptor. Some of his work I wish I could have gotten, okay? But Monty was…I met him at MCC. I had gone there to the MCC church while I was out there and met him. And he told me, he says, "Hey, look, you don't need to stay in the hotel. You can come and stay at my place." And he had a house, and he

said, “You can have the room upstairs. Just stay while you’re here, and if you decide to move back, you can stay here until you, you know, get your job and get acclimated.”

So Monty was a very smart – very, very smart man, and he also helped introduce me to the black gay community in San Francisco, so I was never involved in the white gay community there. And these were men who were, you know, religious ministers, musicians, other black professionals who were gay from the area. So it kept me outside of that. So it was through these people that I got introduced to various people. And when I was looking for an apartment, B.J. had a room for rent, so I went to check it out to see if I could rent a room, and that’s how we became friends. So when I didn’t take the room, I found another place, an apartment that I could afford, so I took the apartment.

Well, Paul had just moved to San Francisco from Texas, and he took the room at B.J.’s place. So B.J. says – and for a couple of months B.J. said, ‘You’ve got to meet Paul. You’ve got to meet Paul. I think you and Paul are going to get along really well.” And I said, “Okay, okay, okay.” But I went by B.J.’s place a couple of times and Paul was not there. He worked afternoon shift. He wasn’t there. But one day I happened to go by and he was there, and we got a chance to meet, and the sparks flew, and we fell in love, and that’s the way it went.

Monique M. Now, when you went to MCC, was that still part of your religiously eclectic searching for a religious something that held or—

Daayiee A. Yes, well, because it was a—

Monique M. --were you told that MCC was a good home?

Daayiee A. Well, MCC, because I had known some people. Rene McCoy, who was the minister in Detroit for the MCC church in Detroit – I think it was MCC. Was she in Detroit at the time? I think she was, yeah. So through that process I knew the MCC was a church for gays. And so when I went to San Francisco, well, why not go to the MCC as a place to center myself, basically. And that's when I met Monty. Monty was actually one of the organists there. He was one of several who would come in and just have…

And that Sunday that I went for services, he was playing the organ there, so we talked and things of this nature. And it was never a sexual thing between us, it was he became more like my mentor, another mentor. And so it was through him that I learned a lot. And Monty was just so – he was like the big brother, the understanding big brother that I didn't have. And so he really taught me about things that you need to know as a man in the gay life and those types of things. And so it was very…he played a very important role. He died in 2002. But he was a good friend the whole time I knew him, and very wonder—and I kept in touch with him, you know.

Even when I went overseas, I would always write, that kind of thing. And he was always, you know, he was always encouraging.

And several people were very encouraging for me in terms of that. And even had a lesbian friend. Her name was Shakita. She also was encouraging when Georgetown had offered me to go, I said, "Well, what am I going to do?" You know, I said, "Should I go to school or shouldn't I go to school?" And she looked at me dead in the face. She says, "Okay, let me ask you a question. Five years from now, what do you plan on doing?" I said, "I don't know." She says, "Well, then so your choice is either you're going to be doing what you're doing now in five years, still doing the same thing, or you're going to take the opportunity and go and do this." You know, 'cause it was a big step.

Monique M. Right.

Daayiee A. Really a big step. And then it was that conversation that I decided, well, you know, I'm going to school. [*Laughs.*] Going back to school. It was not that…it wasn't a big, you know, thing, so…

Monique M. Now, you said that you were with Paul for several years.

Daayiee A. Yes.

Monique M. So during that several year time frame, since he was a long-term relationship, did you introduce him to your family?

Daayiee A. Yes, I did. One year we flew back to Detroit, 'cause he had never been to the East Coast. And since we were in Detroit, I said, well, we can fly to Detroit, meet my family, and then we can go to Chicago and we can also go up to Montreal, because it was, you know, across the Detroit River and just take the freeway up and go through Toronto and into Montreal. So he was like…he wanted to go to Montreal. He had always wanted to. So we wound up going there. And it was like putting everything to the basket. We did all those different things.

And when we broke up, I told my mom that Paul and I had broken up, and that's when my parents really knew that I was gay. They knew that was…it was my admission to them that I'm gay. And so I was coming home that following summer, so they said, well, we'll have a conversation with you about that then. And I said, okay, fine, we'll talk about it and go from there. But they were… And that conversation I had with both my mom and dad. It was never a bad situation. My parents said to me you've always upheld the standards that we've wanted for all of our children. We don't see anything wrong with you at all, therefore we're concerned about your happiness, but are you happy? And I said, yes, I'm happy. And they say, well, then this is the thing for you. And that was really the end of the conversation.

I learned much later, after their deaths, that many of my nieces and nephews would say, well, you know, you didn't know that Grandma used to always use you as the model and said, "You need to be like Uncle

Sydney, the one who does so-and-so." So I didn't even know I was a role model for them that they pushed forward.

Monique M. Now, did your brothers and sisters get on board? Were they also supportive and understanding?

Daayiee A. Yeah. No one was negative in any way. Well, my eldest brother was negative. He had the desire to be a minister, but he never went to school to do so. And so the process is that we used to get into spats from time to time. And he would say something says, you know…

Monique M. Bible thumper?

Daayiee A. Yeah, he was a Bible thumper. And I would tell him, I says, what you're talking about doesn't make any sense. You don't even under—and he says, "What do you mean?" I says, "Well, now, first of all," I said, "Revolutions don't happen just because people, you know, something miraculously happened and all the people just fall on their knees and they…" I said, "No. Revolutions of this nature take time, and issues have to be there." I says, "There's economic issues, there are political issues. It may be because of war and all these things," I said. "So until you can talk about the history, anthropology, religious understandings of what was going on and why this particular Christianity was the better choice and bla-bla-bla," I said, "You don't know what you're talking about."

So I basically told him, I said, "Until you're a reverend doctor, I don't want to hear that mess." [*Laughs.*] 'Cause I had taken some courses in theology and things like that, so I'm like, you know, you ain't talking real stuff. And that was the case. So that was it. But outside of that, and even years later he has accepted the fact that that's the situation.

And our relationship did improve, to a certain extent, so now we communicate with each other and talk and things like that from time to time. But at one time we were very distant. And I told him, I said, you know, one day I told him, I says, "If we never talk again, it's okay. I'm not mad at you." 'Cause it was him who didn't want to talk. It was not me that wanted to talk with him. And even my mother says, "Don't worry about it, it's not your issue," you know. So when my mom said it's not your issue, it's his issue, I was done, you know.

It's like I used to send all my brothers, my siblings, birthday cards, and I would do it every year, send it to them, but rarely did I get a birthday card from any of them, so I stopped doing it. And then they asked me, well, why did you stop sending birthday cards? "Well, it seems to me that if I send you a birthday card, it was like you should pick up and send me one, don't you think?" [*Laughs.*]

Monique M. True.

Daayiee A. You know? So that's the thing.

Monique M. Well, to move us back forward to where I took us off track from, so going back to China and being there and being exposed to Muslims and finding something that clicked for you, were you out then as well? And would the faith choice click for you as an out gay black man following traditional Islam?

Daayiee A. I knew then that I could not because what I had learned is that they felt that homosexuality was wrong within the Islamic belief system. But that just didn't seem to be correct to me, because from what I had heard, while talking to my Uighur classmates, I did ask one of them one day, I said, "Well, isn't the issue of homosexuality a problem within Islam?" And he says, "No, it's not." I said, "Well, please explain." He said, "Well, in China we've had a number of emperors who were gay and even had a term called 'cut sleeve,' you know, and so…" and goes on with the story about it. And so he says, "No, it's not an issue."

And since they had been Muslims for these twelve hundred years, it seemed to me that they had the real information more than what we were getting out of Saudi Arabia. Because I knew Wahhabism was something that had been only like the last 250 years had been part of it. So the Islam of ancient times was different than the Islam that we were getting in the modern age. So I said, well, I have to find the way, the information that says it's okay in that process.

And so when I came back from China, I started the second part of my bachelor's degree, which was Arabic. So while I was in Taiwan, I started – there were some Arabs there, some friends I had there from Libya, a couple from Morocco, a couple from Saudi Arabia. A few of them were from Jordan and one fellow was from Syria. And since our languages were similar, they taught me the Arabic alphabet and the numbers and things, so when I started school, I was a little ahead of the process.

So that first year, when I went off to the Middle East, because I did the same thing, nine months of study, then off to the Middle East, and I was in Egypt for a year, then Jordan for a year, then Damascus for a year, okay? So in that summer between Jordan and Syria, I went back to China, 'cause I said, well, I haven't spoken Chinese consistently for a while. I was going to spend the summer in Taiwan again. Well, actually I was going back to mainland China, but that's when Tiananmen broke out, the Tiananmen massacre. So because I spoke Chinese, they wouldn't give me a visa, so I went on to Taiwan again.

And that's when I ran into my friends. And then that was when I knew that my language abilities had really solidified, because there were Chinese whose mother – well, this is the way it worked. My mother tongue is English, but I spoke Mandarin and Arabic. The Arabs, their mother tongue was Arabic, but they spoke English and Chinese. The Chinese, their mother tongue is Chinese, but they spoke English and Arabic.

So we would get together at restaurants and hang out and things like that, and we would all be like, for example, we would be talking in Arabic, and then when the waitress came, we would all switch to Chinese, and then we'd go back into Arabic. Or if there was something that was involving some issue or whatever, we may talk in English, so we were always switching back and forth between the various languages. And so it was a wonderful time for me in terms of interacting with people, and it was a total different world in terms of this. I felt that I was…whatever I wanted, I could do in terms of that.

Monique M. Now, what did you see your end goal? You were doing the program, you were learning the languages, you were traveling. What did you think—

Daayiee A. Well, ultimately my goal—

Monique M. --you know, the five year later question?

Daayiee A. Okay. My goal was actually to – well, now we're talking about nearly eight years later. My goal was to go to law school and become a lawyer. And while I was a court stenographer, one of the judges there had said to me, said, "You know, you're a bright guy. And I had been a court stenographer some years beforehand, but I went back to school, became a lawyer and practiced tax law for several years, and then eventually became a tax judge." So he says, "You're a bright guy. I think that you could do well as an attorney. Have you ever thought about it?" And we talked, and we kept running into each other several times during that year. And so I

told him, I said, "I think I'm going to quit and go back to school, you know."

And that was part of me meditating on what should I do in terms of school. And then so the question was, be a lawyer, but what kind of lawyer? And so that was the thing. And that's why, through the meditation, the languages was the process to get me into a different arena as a lawyer.

Monique M. So you were thinking more international law?

Daayiee A. Right, more international law. I thought possibly government, the State Department, that kind of thing, or either getting into international law. That was sort of the end goal over there. But I found that in talking with some of the students from the School of Foreign Service and things like that, I didn't think I wanted to be in the government – [*laughs*] – you know, and so maybe the private sector would be okay. So anyway, I came back from school, started law school, then—

Monique M. How old were you when you came back from school?

Daayiee A. Well, let's see now. I was 37 when I finished undergrad. I think I was 37. And started law school.

Monique M. Where did you start?

Daayiee A. I started at D.C. School of Law, which is a public interest law school. It's the old Antioch School of Law. I did my first year. Michigan offered me a fellowship. What happened was when I was in my senior year I applied to several schools that had both a master's program…law school and a master's program, okay, in Middle Eastern and Far Eastern studies. And I would get into the…either into the studies program, but not the law school, or to the law school and not the studies program. So D.C. School of Law gave me a fellowship to go to law school, so I said, well, I'm going to take that. It's in D.C., I like D.C., so I'll just go to school here.

And during that first year of law school, Michigan re-offered me a fellowship to come there for my master's. So I talked to my dean, and the dean said they're giving you a master's, go. And so I wrote back to the school and told them unless I can continue law school, the secondary studies with my master's, I'm not coming. Well, there were only two black males that year who were going into Middle Eastern studies for a master's, so they agreed. So I went there and I took nine credits in my program and nine credits in the law school, and did very well in both of them.

But when I tried to transfer into the law school, they told me no, they wouldn't do so. So I told the admissions director, I said, well, it's not a problem. It's not the issue of will I become a lawyer, the issue is what law school I graduated from. That's it. And I knew then that being in class, I got better grades than a lot of the students who were there anyway, so I

said so now I know I have an edge up. They may have the name, but I know I'm smarter than they are. And so that was part of the process. So I went back to my law school, graduated that year, and I had to, like, do a full 12—

Monique M. Back to D.C. Law?

Daayiee A. Back to D.C. Law. Graduated and then that's when I started realizing that part of the process, took the bar, practiced for a couple years, but then I realized then that working in corporate America was not the way. It just wasn't going to work for me 'cause I couldn't lie and do all that madness. I just had scruples. And they took a chance on me anyway, 'cause I was an older student, and generally they like you real young so they can train you the way they want. But because I had certain skills, they took a chance. But because I had scruples, it turned out I said no more. And then practiced public interest for a little bit. And then I ran into the problem of people who consistently stayed in trouble. So I'm like why am I busting my behind to get these people off and then they wind up, you know, six months later—

Monique M. Yeah, you see them again. [*Laughs.*]

Daayiee A. --they got arrested again, you know? So I'm like, okay, that's enough of that. So then I said let me go and do some studying. So I had asked, I had prayed that I'd get a chance to go to Saudi Arabia since I had, while I was in school, had said – this is when I'm…I had become Muslim, and I said

when I'm done with school, I'd like to go for Hajj. And there was an opportunity to work in Saudi Arabia for the Royal Saudi Air Force as a teacher, and since I spoke Arabic and that nature, they hired me. And I went there for three years and worked in Saudi Arabia for three years. And that allowed me the opportunity to get to sources of information at the university that were not available to me here in the U.S.

Monique M. When did you take Shahada? You skipped to when you went to hajj.

Daayiee A. That would have been…I took the Shahada…let's see now. That would have been in '86? Okay, so it would have been in '85. I took Shahada in '85.

Monique M. And you left to do your Hajj when?

Daayiee A. That was '85. Then I went to the Middle East and did that for several years, and went to school. So I went to…that was in '96, '97 I went to Saudi Arabia, and I was there for three years. Ninety-seven, 'cause I finished…my three year contract ended in December of 1999, and they asked me to stay over a couple more weeks. So I had just gotten back to the States right before New Year's in 2000. They were doing the 20K or what was it, you know?

Monique M. Yeah.

Daayiee A. And so the fears and all that stuff, so I got back right before that. And I had developed a relationship with…my friend at that time was Tony, and

we had been together… Well, I met him in ninety…let's see now. Law school, I was done with that, practicing, so I met Tony in January of '95, yeah, January of '95. So we had been together about two years, and I told him I was going to go there so I could make some extra money to help pay off some of my student loans. Every three months I had two weeks' vacation, basically, so it worked out that about every 12 weeks, 13 weeks I was back for a couple of weeks, so that's how we kept our relationship going.

Monique M. He was here in the States?

Daayiee A. Here in the States, right?

Monique M. In D.C.?

Daayiee A. In D.C. And he had two children, too, so he was raising them, so that sort of worked out really well. We were together until 2007, so we were together almost 12 years. And so that worked out fairly well. Then I came back in 2000 and continued as…I knew I didn't want to go back into law, so I decided to do some other things in terms of working, and did that. But that's when I also, while I was in Saudi Arabia, I was able to do the research, and I did my first paper on the homosexual positive interpretation of the Koran.

And what that was is that I compared interpreters of the Koran from various English, Chinese and Arabic to Arabic interpretations, and I

started seeing these variances in how people were interpreting things – the Arab speakers, English speakers who were translating, then the Arab speakers translating to English. I noticed the differences in the way they would translate things. I said so that means it's interpretations based on the individual.

[*Part 2*.]

Monique M. Yeah, I'll have to merge two tracks.

Daayiee A. So where did I leave off?

Monique M. You were saying that you had just done a paper on positive homosexual interpretations of the Koran.

Daayiee A. Right. And I found that the way in which the people were interpreting the thing did not follow the Arabic properly in terms of the grammar of the Arabic and things. So what they were doing, for instance, the issue of Lot, the Lot story, what they were doing is they were translating specific information and generalizing. For example, the actual way in which the reference goes is, "Why do you, *the* men who turn away from *the* women," so it had to be specific, the men of Sodom who turn away from their wives of the men of Sodom, why do you do this and turn and to attack the angels, basically, or the men who were the angels, where they generalize and say that why do you attack – why do you men attack, you know, reject women and attack.

So by them generalizing, what they did is that they made it a general rule that all men who turn away from women then therefore are like the people of Lot, when in actuality, it was specific to the people and who they were and what they did. So through that process of using this interpretation, I said, well, then that means homosexuality is not the issue here, the issue is rape.

Monique M. Mm-hmm.

Daayiee A. So that process. And that started the process. So then, in 1998, Al-Fatiha, Faisal Alam, who is actually here at the conference, Faisal Alam started a group called Al-Fatiha. And I heard about it through a friend of mine in Washington, D.C. He said, "Did you know there was a gay organization going on?" I says, "Really?" He says, "Yeah," he said, "And this is the information." I sent Faisal an email and we talked by phone, and I sent him a copy of my piece I had just done. And he was just fascinated. He was like, wow, this is great and everything, so I told him, well, I'll be back at the end of my contract, but let's keep in touch. And so that's what happened. And when I got back I started working with Al-Fatiha.

Monique M. Now, were you working as a volunteer or that was paid employment?

Daayiee A. No, volunteer. And eventually I took on the role…I was on the board and I eventually took on the role as religious advisor, because in 2000, when I got back that September, I entered the Graduate School of Islamic Social Sciences, which was in northern Virginia. And this was the same school

that had done the training for the imams for the U.S. military and the hospitals, and so it was the same school. And that's when I studied there for two and a half years. And that's when I got my master's in Shariah Sciences. It was never awarded because I was kicked out of the school in my final semester because they found out I was gay. But – [*laughs*] – needless to say, I got the union card. I knew how to do the work, okay?

Monique M. Yeah.

Daayiee A. The school isn't in existence anymore. It closed down after the…a couple of years after the 9/11 incident, a number of the people, the professors and stuff, left and went back to the Middle East to teach and things like that. The school eventually closed. But it was there Dr. [Taha] was my mentor, and so he taught me a lot. And since he had several degrees himself, several PhD degrees, he used to always tell me, he says, "Daayiee, don't think about being an imam, you're a sheikh. You're an educated person, so you should be part of academia." And I said okay. And that's what I aspired to. But when they found out that I was gay, basically they tried to…some of the people in the school sort of disowned my name and spread around Washington, D.C. that I was this gay guy, and bla-bla-bla, so I became persona non grata.

Monique M. Was that not clear from your work with Al-Fatiha, or that wasn't known?

Daayiee A. That wasn't known.

Monique M. Gotcha.

Daayiee A. Okay? And so…and in January 2003, they – was it 2000? Yeah, 2003 they kicked me out of the school. I only had a couple of papers to turn in and they kicked me out of the school, saying that I was not the quality of student that should be involved in the community. That was their term they used. So I sought to sue them, but because they were in Virginia, and as you well know, Jerry Falwell and all of them with the laws in Virginia, since they didn't receive federal money, I couldn't sue them that way for discrimination, and the state of Virginia had rules that religious institutes could do what they wanted to do, and they could discriminate.

Monique M. I'm a Virginian.

Daayiee A. You are? Oh, so you know what I'm talking about. [*Laughs.*]

Monique M. I am, I am.

Daayiee A. So I couldn't do anything, so I just said, well, look, I have the tools, so let me utilize the tools that I have and do more to help develop the process in terms of gay Muslims. And through Al-Fatiha, that's what I did.

Monique M. So at what point did the progressive organization become a launch off for you, and at what point did you seek to become an imam? I'm trying to plot your journey.

Daayiee A. Okay. Well, it was through Al-Fatiha that the idea of being an imam came about, because as Al-Fatiha started to develop, two things happened. In March of 2000, an organization online community came up called Muslim Gay Men. And the fellow who started that was going back to school. I had joined the group. It started that March. In September – well, in that August he was going back to school, and he asked me if I would take over as a moderator. I told him sure. And I've continued to be moderator up till today in terms of that.

Monique M. So it's an online list serve?

Daayiee A. Yes. And a discussion group. And in the very early time period, boy, there was a lot of major back and forth in terms of major discussions and on the issues. And so groups like [Straightaway] in the U.K. and some other anti or ex-gay type movement thinking was going on, and so I told them that if they really wanted to have discussion about the subject, then let us go back to the ancient. I said you want to depend on ancient studies, then let's go back and do the debates like they did in ancient times, and which they were not prepared for. But it was okay. I gave them a lot of free space. Even helped them several times. [*Laughs.*]

Monique M. [*Laughs.*]

Daayiee A. But in the end, the debates, they would always leave with their tails between their legs because they didn't know what they were talking about or they were depending upon regurgitation of other scholars without

knowing the historical background and information. Many of them didn't understand Arabic well, things of this nature. So it made a good name for MGM, Muslim Gay Men, and so that's how my notoriety started and developed, things of this nature. And then I started doing lectures and things of this nature, and have been doing so – well, Al-Fatiha would have conferences. Every year I would go there and give lectures. Then I started going to schools because my name started to become known and get recommended by various people.

Monique M. Now, was the decision to move from more, I guess, a layperson, which we would use in a Christian community, did that move from being a participant to being in leadership come because of your own aspirations, as you said you were training, in your mind, to fulfill this idea of being a sheikh, or was it sort of that's what you were needed to do and so that's what you did?

Daayiee A. Well, part of it was the need. The gay Muslim community needed someone in the community that could deal with them on the issue of their religious faith and religious beliefs, and so out of necessity I became an imam. And so what happened is I would start getting these emails from distraught teenagers and young adults, males and females, and I could respond to most of their questions rather easily. And so I would write. You know, I had one young lady who was in Philadelphia, a lesbian, and she wrote me one day, and I responded to her. I sent her some materials and talked with her, and I think we communicated – she said I

communicated with her a couple of times. The numbers were so great I just don't remember everybody.

I met her at Nyack, a National Youth Advocacy conference, and she said, "You're Imam Daayiee, aren't you?" And I said, "Yes, I am." She said, "Well, you may not remember me, but I wrote you a couple years ago," and bla-bla-bla-bla, "And you kept me from committing suicide." And it was things like that that I knew I was doing the right thing, because I was helping people better understand themselves and not to do something drastic within their life. And so I knew that I was on the right track in terms of what I was doing was the right thing to do. No matter what anyone else said, this was the right thing to do.

Monique M. Yeah.

Daayiee A. And so it's that process of growth that taking on the role of imam really settled in, and I said let me do that.

Monique M. So how long has you served as an imam, in general, and then in your particular community now?

Daayiee A. Well, I would have to say probably nine years, going on ten years. [*Phone rings.*] Sorry. [*Unrelated conversation.*]

Monique M. So you said for about nine years you served?

Daayiee A. I've served as the imam within the Al-Fatiha. But now even more, because now in Europe, in Norway, since 2007 I've been doing a lot of work in Norway, the Netherlands and the U.K. in terms of working with gay Muslims there.

Monique M. Now, is your community in D.C., that's a new plant, a new group that has formed, or are these the people from online that are now just meeting physically?

Daayiee A. No, these are new people, mainly from Muslims for Progressive Values. And in 2000… Well, Muslims for Progressive Values is the extension. It started off as the Network for Progressive Muslims, I think was the first one, then Muslims Progressive Network, and then Muslims for Progressive Values, so it was like three iterations. And some of us have been members of that. It was an online group and we became members, so it was through this process of MPV, where they supported LGBTQ rights.

The other groups were standoffish, and people said, well, we want women's rights, but we don't like gay folks, you know, that kind of thing. So it was that kind of back and forth issue that went on, and we would just claim, well, if you want us – as I explained to them one time online with the conversation, I told them, I says, well, if you want me to help – you know, talking to a woman in particular – I said, if you want me to help you in terms of changing the tide so that women have better standing within

the Muslim community, but you can't help me? I said, so who is going to be your fool?

Monique M. You've got to have allies, yeah.

Daayiee A. You know? So you've got to work it…if you want to work it, you're going to have to work it both sides of the – [*laughs*] – of the fence, you know.

Monique M. Yeah. So your role with Muslims for Progressive Values, is that also a volunteer project?

Daayiee A. It is volunteer. But that's also…I just…they just asked me to join their advisory board a couple of months ago. But I was just a regular member prior to that. And because of my work in Europe, I was able to, this past year, September and October I went over for a lecture series, but also part of it was to talk about Muslims for Progressive Values with secular Muslims in Europe, and so that was part. So I was sort of like on a diplomatic tour.

Monique M. Neat.

Daayiee A. And that's…so we've made some contact with other Muslim groups in Europe. Because we already have some templates already set up in terms of like the religious services, and we have stuff online such as the Literary Vicar and various other things. There's a school program that Yarick is doing, Sunday School program. So there's various things that we already

have in place, and they have nothing, so we're sort of bridging now with these organizations so they can pick up some of the things. And one of the reasons I did start my masjid in Washington, D.C. is to establish a template so that people in other parts of the world can see it's not that difficult, and you can start your own prayer services that are inclusive for your communities.

Monique M. Now, is your community predominantly black, predominantly gay, predominantly anything?

Daayiee A. It's not predominantly anything. I have straight, male and female, transgender, gay, the whole spectrum of people come for worship services. But because the concept…and we follow…there's a group called El-Tawhid Juma Prayer, which is located in Toronto. And actually, in 2004, I led the first group of mixed prayer like they do in Mecca, and so that started the process. And after several years, they further developed it and set up a system, so I'm following that particular one. And so the system is that it's El-Tawhid and then whatever the name of the masjid follows. So my masjid is El-Tawhid the Invocation, and then it's Masjid El-Nur Al-Isslah, which means the Mosque of Enlightenment and Reform.

Monique M. Spell the last part.

Daayiee A. Okay. Do you know how to spell masjid?

Monique M. Yes. I have El Nur. The last word.

Daayiee A. Okay. And then Isslah is A-L hyphen I-S-S-A-A – I'm sorry – I-S-S-L-A-H.

Monique M. Okay. The transcriber is going to ask me about it, so I thought let me find out now. Okay. And so that community is actually in D.C. proper?

Daayiee A. Yes, it is. We don't have a physical actual mosque space as of yet, but our goal is – first I wanted to see how many people would come on a regular basis, was it time for this kind of mosque in Washington. And so it is the time for it. I have a regular core group of people coming—

Monique M. Nice.

Daayiee A. --and it's growing.

Monique M. So you do juma prayers there?

Daayiee A. Yes, juma prayers on Friday afternoon. And it's really getting some… And, I mean, I have a wide array. There are people who are immigrant and non-immigrant, male and females. So it's open so that – and part of the process is that women participate in the prayer service, so it's not just men leading. The women call Adhan, women lead prayers. When I was at the graduate school, they were doing a thing in terms of teaching females to become imams, or women to become imams, so I grew up in that atmosphere in terms of my learning under Dr. Taha, and so it wasn't absent from me, or strange to me to have – [*laughs*] – that happening.

Monique M. Yeah. And so in the community that you're creating now, do you see this becoming something that you'll plant several across the United States?

Daayiee A. That's the goal.

Monique M. You're creating a model?

Daayiee A. That's the goal. The other centers that are in, like, New York City, Los Angeles, Ottawa, Canada, and then some affiliates, like in Atlanta, in San Francisco, those affiliates together, they have people who get together and have prayer services, but there's no religious leader leading their prayer service, so it's all community oriented. But this is the first one here that has an imam leading them, and it's an openly gay imam, and following the same process in terms of women leading prayers and things of this nature.

Monique M. Gotcha. Now, I have noticed that one thing we haven't discussed – we've done a great deal about your career, and it would seem as if you have no other life. But I would assume that that is not the case.

Daayiee A. That is not the case.

Monique M. That you have a wide variety of experiences that also include friends and family and godchildren and that kind of thing.

Daayiee A. [*Laughs.*]

Monique M. So talk to me a bit about the other ways that you find fulfillment outside of being a professional religious person.

Daayiee A. Okay. [*Laughs.*] Well, one of the things is that I love animation. That's one of my loves I've had forever, particularly claymation. I love it. I have a wide array of friends.

Monique M. You'll love – the Super Bowl has a claymation commercial coming up.

Daayiee A. Oh, they will?

Monique M. Yes, I just saw it on Facebook.

Daayiee A. Okay.

Monique M. It's going to be with Eminem, of all people.

Daayiee A. Really?

Daayiee A. Okay, well, there it is. Yes, and overall it's part of the process in terms that the life that I'm having in terms of…I have friends, those I can call that have been friends for years and years. I don't have a large number of friends in terms of that, but I've had long-term friends, several of them in Washington, several of them still – I still have a friend from high school, you know, she's still around. She married my best friend growing up, and so he died a couple of years ago. He had MS and he passed. So his son is still my godson, and I keep in touch with her and him through the process. So, you know, so I have friends back from Detroit, but then I have more people I've developed friendships with, like Pudding, who is a good friend

of mine, a lesbian friend of mine who I've known since I've been in Washington, D.C. I met her the first week I was in Washington.

Monique M. Wow.

Daayiee A. And so we both are bicyclists, and that's how we became friends. And I've known her for, I mean, 32 years – [*laughs*] – literally. When I look back now it's like, wow, I've known Pudding 32 years. So I do have that. I have hobbies. I like going to the museum. I used to go to music concerts a little more often than I do now. I haven't been to a music concert in well over a year. I mean, if I'm going to, like, at the Duke Ellington School they may have a concert and I may go to that, something like that. But in terms of going to a major mega thing down at MCI or something like that, I don't go to those things anymore. I just don't find the quality of the programming and things of that nature, you know. And way too expensive a lot of times. [*Laughs.*] Buy the CD, you know.

Monique M. And the accompanying DVD. [*Laughs.*]

Daayiee A. Yeah, and the accompanying DVD, right. But generally that's the thing. I still have a number of very close friends. But the thing is that most of my close friends, and males in particular, are heterosexual. And I'm out. It's never been a problem. But these men know that I'm…and since I'm not a fem in any way, that the process is that they know me for who I am and the man that I am. And so, like a good friend of mine, Don, he's been a great guy. I've known him since I've been in D.C.

When I was in school, during one of the summers while I was at law school, I lived at the house. He and his wife got separated, and she had a house, and I rented the upstairs for that year, the first year of law school. So when his second daughter was born I was there. I called the ambulance when she was going into labor, you know, that kind of thing. So we've always been very good friends and family.

His mom was like my mom out of town, you know, my mom in D.C. She's 97 years old now. I saw her a couple of weeks ago. But when I first came to D.C., she said to me, she says, "Well, you know, you're a nice fellow, a nice young man and everything, and if you ever need anything or you want to, you know, holidays or whatever, you're always welcome to my house," you know. And so when Don's father died, I helped him out with some legal stuff, because there were some insurance issues going on, overpayment of insurance premiums. And so there were some issues going on. He had bought three policies, but he had been paying on a fourth one, but the paperwork had never been signed by the insurance company. And therefore had to resolve some of those issues for them.

So that's why I'm saying that my association with a lot of my male friends is that we know each other for other things, and it's not about…there's never been anything about sex or whatever like that. And they've known my partners and things like that. So that's the process.

I tend to still do things in terms – I belong to the community health center. It's called Bread for the City. I'm on their board, community board. And I actually get my medical services through them, too, you know. So it's just part of the process of being within my community. I also talk to the teenage boys and girls there, and I'm involved in my community, just like my parents were. I'm involved in my community.

The senior citizens, I work with them. If they find they have some problems or whatever, I help try to resolve some of those issues for them. So I have a full life, in many ways. But it's not inundated with parties and all that kind of stuff. That's just not…I've never been that kind of person. But I've always felt that in terms that if you help your community, they will support you when you need them, you know.

Monique M. Now, you've mentioned your role as support for others through your religious leadership. Who pours into you? Who provides you solace and where do you find comfort and the ability to take off the imam hat and just be you?

Daayiee A. Okay. Well, there's Bishop Cheeks in Washington, D.C. is one of my good friends. I've known him since I've been in Washington. And he's been sort of like a mentor through my process of going into the religious leadership programming. And he even encouraged me several years ago. He says, you know, if you start this, people will come. And I'm like,

"Well, I'm not ready yet," you know. [*Laughs.*] But then he would say, "Are you ready now?" That kind of thing. [*Laughs.*]

Monique M. [*Laughs.*]

Daayiee A. So Rainey has been a really good friend in that way, but we just started a group a couple of weeks ago where religious leaders can get together and spend time with each other and talk about some of the issues. Because one of the answers to your questions may be right there at this. You know, we go for breakfast once a month, and so we get together for breakfast and we talk and discuss things like that. So that's where I get some solace, from there.

I have friends that I talk. You know, Michael from Detroit. I've known Michael about 18 years now. He moved to D.C. Really good friend. Never been a sexual relationship, but a good guy. He works for the federal government, the GPO, the Government Printing Office. He's an accountant. And he's always been a very good friend in terms of that, always someone I can pick up the phone and call, and say, "Hey, Mike, I've got an issue. I want to ask your opinion about something. So-and-so and I had such a conversation and so-and-so, what's your opinion about it." You know, he seems to be a good judge of character, so he's a person I can talk to about those things.

I have other people that I can call upon as well, like I said, Pudding and other things. So I think these are the people who help me be who I am,

but I'm not one for a lot of parties and things like that. I have a nikah with a partner now. A nikkah is different than a…I mean, not a nikah, but I have a mut'a relationship, which is a sexual enjoyment relationship with someone now. But hopefully it will move into a nikah, a full marriage. So I have my outlet there – [*laughs*] – you know.

And just overall the whole process is that I…I'm good entertainment for myself. I like to read a lot. The "Star Wars" trilogy, the "Clone Wars." That's an animation on the TV. It's one of my favorites. Also I like children's stories that come on early in the morning. There's one called "Mythie" and there's another one called "Piaggio", which are—

Monique M. Those are the Japanese animations that come on?

Daayiee A. No, these aren't. These are sort of claymation type of things. One was made in the Netherlands and I think the other one was made in Norway. But they're early childhood things. And they're so cute. It's interesting, so it's…and when I wake up I watch them, and it sort of sets the tone for the whole day, you know, to always remember the child in me should have ability to express itself, too. So there are times when I may take myself too seriously, and I go, "Time for a child break" in my head, you know. [*Laughs.*] The kid in me needs to come out for a little bit, you know.

Monique M. I realize, before I close, and I want to get this on record for those who will want your story and will be reading, you've changed your name, and we

didn't mention that as significant or insignificant, so I wanted to offer space for you to say whatever you would like about that on record.

Daayiee A. Well, I changed my name because when I went to China, my name that I was given by my teacher, once I got to China and started developing friendships, they said, no, no, no, your name is too foreign, and you really need a Chinese name. So they gave me the name of Tang Da Ee. And Tang is the time period from 654, I think – no, 635 to around…

Monique M. Keep talking.

Daayiee A. Okay. My name is Tang Da Ee, and the Tang Dynasty ran from, like, 650 something to 935, and that was the most peaceful literary period in China, so the name Tang was given. And then Da means big and Ee means virtue. So my name became "the peaceful man of great virtue."

Monique M. Beautiful.

Daayiee A. And so I've had…I mean, when I meet Chinese and they say, well, what's your name? "Tang Da Ee." They sort of look at me and then they go like, "Great name." [*Laughs.*]

Monique M. [*Laughs.*]

Daayiee A. You know, so it's really good. So when I studied Arabic, I was looking for something that was similar to Da Ee. And Daayiee, which means the person who calls back to the faith, or the one who proselytizes. And so it

fit perfectly. So I have a persona in both – when I go to China, there are people who only know me as Tang Da Ee, and when I got to the Middle East, I'm only known as Daayiee Abdullah.

Monique M. Very cool.

Daayiee A. So that's me.

Monique M. Well, I close on…always I want to close on a happy and peaceful note, so I ask, because this is an oral history project that sort of looks at the history of your life, what are you most proud of? What brings you ultimate joy? When you think of this accomplishment or this relationship or whatever "this" is, what's that for you?

Daayiee A. At this point in my life, it has to be that through my process of learning, that Allah loves me, God loves me in the same way that I love God. There's a saying that goes that if you take one step towards God, God takes two steps towards you. And if you take a leap towards God, God leaps towards you. And if you go running into God, God rushes to you. And so through this process, it's the joy that I'm receiving from helping other Muslims find God.

And so I encourage all the LGBTQs, as well as those who are not, that they must look for their iqra moment. And iqra is the Koran, when it says that "you who were born from a clot of blood, recite," and it means to recite from your own understanding who is your creator. And once you

have your connection, once you recite that and know that this is God that's talking to you, you're connected, who can tell you that you're not right? And so it's through that process that I encourage all people, no matter what your faith, to seek that moment with God. Go into that closet, be patient, and when God knocks, answer.

Monique M. Beautiful. Do you have anything else you want to share? If not, I want to thank you for your time on record and open to any other questions you may have.

Daayiee A. Well, Monique, I want to thank you for the opportunity, number one. It's always good to meet other black people, no matter where, who know that they're helping our people move the gauntlet forward, you know.

Monique M. Yes.

Daayiee A. And so in our history of our ancestors, we're going to stand out along the way. So I want to thank you for that.

Monique M. Thank you. I will stop.

[*End of recording.*]