

[no audio] [00:00:00-00:01:15]

Nzia Hall: Alrighty. All right. Can I go ahead and have you state your name?

Dr. Todd-Houston: Gwendolyn Todd-Houston.

Nzia Hall: Okay. Awesome. Can you tell us your place and date of birth?

Dr. Todd-Houston: My what?

Nzia Hall: Your place and date of birth, so where you're from?

Dr. Todd-Houston: Oh, my place? Okay. I was born in Wake County. I'm from Zebulon, North Carolina. I was born 1951. It's a long time ago.

Nzia Hall: Not that long ago, not that long ago.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Oh, yeah it is too! Come on now, if we're gonna be honest with each other.

Nzia Hall: Yeah.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Hey, look. That's what I was gonna ask you. Did you pledge anything?

Nzia Hall: I did not. No, ma'am.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Okay. If you had, what would you have done? What would you have pledged?

Nzia Hall: You know, I'm really not sure. I've never had –

Dr. Todd-Houston: So, you're being careful? You're just being careful.

Nzia Hall: No, no. I'm not being careful. I never had any like mentor or anything that made me lean one way or the other.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah, okay. I pledged AKA.

Nzia Hall: Okay.

Dr. Todd-Houston: I pledged AKA. I mean, I like the AKAs, the things that I saw on campus. I pledged because I was more of an introvert and I felt like when I went to undergrad that I needed to do something different, something that was unlike me to do. There were 21 one of us on my line and it was so nice.

Nzia Hall: Oh, good!

Dr. Todd-Houston: Okay, back to what you're doing. We've been being recorded. So, okay.

Nzia Hall: Alright. So, can you tell me a little bit about what your family was like, what your childhood was like?

Dr. Todd-Houston: Oh, I had a wonderful childhood. My family, my father was a farmer, so I was raised on a farm. I have five siblings, three brothers and two sisters. I'm the most – what is it? I have the most wisdom. I'm the oldest.

Nzia Hall: Ah!

Dr. Todd-Houston: We were taught to work on the farm. My daddy always told us to learn everything that we could learn, even if we didn't have to do the job. At least we knew how to do it if we ever had to. That was something that I always kept in my brain. He also – I used to hear him talking. I didn't hear him and my mom talking about people a lot but sometimes I would hear him say, "You know, he or she is an educated fool." I thought to myself, what is an educated fool? Then I recognized that he was talking about people who had gotten their education but because of that no longer could relate to people, farmers, and people in the community who didn't have an education. You know?

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: So, I finally recognized – I kept that in my brain too. As I started going from one level to the next, to the next, every time I would say, "Lord, please, Lord, just don't let me become an educated fool!" Because my father would be the first one to throw me out of the house. So, I guess the moral of that story is that was the way that I was – because people tell me – especially I have a brother-in-law who says, "Well, you know what? You never changed. Just because you have an MD degree," he said, "you never changed." He said, "And you don't know how much I admire that." That's been really important to me that regardless of where I was in my education, I could still relate to anybody. I'm sure that helped me in my relationship with my parents, with my patients. In an effort to try to make sure that I talked to them on a level that they understood, so that was an effort that I made.

Nzia Hall: Okay.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Okay. The other thing about my family, like I said, working hard. A funny thing is when I first went to undergrad at Central, that day I thought I'm going to school. I'm going to college. Right? I thought I won't have to get up and take tobacco out of the barn today. I mean, I'm going to college! I'm going to North Carolina Central University. My daddy came in the room, and I told my sisters. They got up like there were supposed to. They said, "Gwen, you know Daddy is calling us." I said, "I don't have to go today. I'm going to college." Then he came in that room, and he said, "What is your problem?" So, I had to go! I had to work. I was so angry with him, but I didn't let him know that.

It didn't make any difference to him whether I was going to college or what I was doing. I was going to do what I needed to do there first. That, again, was a lesson. You know?

Nzia Hall: Right!

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah. One of the things that has always been in my mind is that my parents never told me what to do as far as my education was concerned. I knew that they had an expectation that I would do my best regardless, but they never pushed me this way. You know? They had an expectation, and they knew that I could do well in school, and they expected me to do that. If I lose my thought sometimes, it's because after my stroke things sort of went haywire. When I was in – what was I talking about?

Nzia Hall: You were just starting a new thought.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah, but I can't think of what it was right now. Maybe we'll come back to it.

Nzia Hall: Okay. We can.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Oh, I know. I had to go to work before I could go to Central and the fact that my parents never pushed me. I had always planned on going to undergrad and then becoming a lab tech. I had never considered going to medical school, not at all. I did well in school, but I had to study. Back then, we all thought then – our other colleagues would have people you had to be a genius to become an MD. Okay? Well, I'm nowhere near a genius, but what I did know was that I needed to study, and I needed to put the work in. If I did that, my results would indicate what my achievements could be. Yeah.

- Nzia Hall: All right. Awesome. It sounds like you learned a lot of valuable lessons from your father. Who would you say was the most influential in your youth and how, if it wasn't your father?
- Dr. Todd-Houston: In my youth?
- Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm. Who was the most influential to you?
- Dr. Todd-Houston: My mother and my father, both of them.
- Nzia Hall: Can you tell me more about your mother?
- Dr. Todd-Houston: Huh?
- Nzia Hall: Can you tell me a bit more about how your mother was influential?
- Dr. Todd-Houston: Oh, my goodness. Let me tell you this first. She raised six of us. Actually, she had seven. One baby died a crib death. There's another term for that now, actually. She raised six of us and she was – they got married when she was 18. She had me when she was 19. Then she had all of my siblings, because we're about a year or two years apart. She hit it. She hit it. However, after she had us – she didn't finish high school. My daddy had promised my grandmother that she would be able to finish high school and that he would support her in that. In doing so, it turns out that she was out of school for about 18 years. Then she decided to go back to school and do that one year so she could get her high school diploma.
- Nzia Hall: Wow. That's cool.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: And my daddy supported her in that. Interesting thing there was that my father couldn't read that well, but he had an intellect even though he could not read that well. My father was amazing. So, the one thing that I noticed about their relationship, it turns out – let me go back. She finished high school with me. Yes. She was in my graduating class, and I was the class president.
- Nzia Hall: Wow!
- Dr. Todd-Houston: Can you believe it?
- Nzia Hall: That is beautiful! That's crazy!
- Dr. Todd-Houston: But listen, I'm not finished. That was 18 years that she waited to go back to school. I guess that was after we had gotten big enough

that we were in school too. Well, we had to be if I was graduating from high school. Then she waited 18 or 20 more years and she went back to St. Augustine's and got her undergrad degree.

Nzia Hall: Yes, ma'am!

Dr. Todd-Houston: Okay? Now, that's amazing, right? But the amazing thing that I recognized in their relationship is that she never made my father feel inferior to her. He never demonstrated any inferiority with her at all. I mean, and they were like two peas in a pod. I just always appreciated that because she got her degree, and he was a farmer. She could've done that. Honey, when she'd go to different meetings with her job and things, she'd take him with her. At one point, I said, "Momma, I always recognized that whenever you had an opportunity to go to the meetings and your job was paying for hotels and stuff like that, that you would always take Daddy." She said, "Yeah, girl. I wanted them to see my husband." My daddy was an attractive man. She said, "I want them to see my husband."

He didn't feel out of place at all. Wherever she went, he was running his mouth if he was splitting [inaudible] [00:13:49] or whatever. He didn't care. So, they were quite a team. They really were.

Nzia Hall: They sound like it.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah. My daddy left a legacy in Zebulon. My mom has a legacy in Zebulon also because both of them were community activists. I remember how they supported us. If there was a PTA meeting, they were gonna be there. Anything, and he would come to basketball games that I was a basketball player, or my siblings. He'd make the biggest noise of anybody at the basketball game. So, that kind of support, you know? Like I said, they never said, "You need to do what we want you to do." I didn't recognize that I was going to medical school until I was in my freshman year at North Carolina Central. That was because I had a teacher there who saw my potential. We need to talk about that too at some point. You have to remember that now because I'll forget it.

Nzia Hall: I'll remember it.

Dr. Todd-Houston: So, when I told them – when I would come home in the summer, I learned to cook. Because when I came home in the summer, I was the cook and the maid at home.

Nzia Hall: They made you work.

Dr. Todd-Houston: My mother was working so I said, boy, I'm not gonna get out there in that hot sun. I'm gonna be the cook, the maid, anything that my mother needed me to do. Right? Taking care of my two youngest sisters, anything other than having to go out into the fields again. I was about to say, they never said you need to do this, but when I told them that Dr. Clark had suggested that I go to med school, they said, "Well, if that's what you think you wanna do, do it." You know? They never said you need to do this, or you need to do that. They were just supportive of what our decisions were. But once we made those decisions, they expected us to do the work to become the best that we could do in whatever that was. That's my childhood.

Nzia Hall: Okay, okay. Can we go back to the story about you mentioned a teacher at Central that kind of put the idea for medical school in your head?

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yes. Oh, my goodness. His name was Dr. Vernon Clark, and he had a relationship with UNC. That's how I got to go to UNC. I always considered him – I always said if I got a B in Dr. Clark's class, I knew it would be an A anywhere else in the world. Because that was his expectation. He would lecture with no notes. He was just so impressive. I was in his class. I was a biology major planning to work in a lab. One day, he talked to me. He said, "What are you gonna do, Gwen?" I told him just what I told you. He said, "Have you ever thought about med school?"

Excuse me for a minute, baby. Yes, mother!

Nzia Hall: One second. Okay. There we go.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Okay. So, he said, "Well, I think you could go to medical school." I thought to myself he's crazy. As I was walking across campus leaving the biology department that day, I was thinking about what he said. He said, "Give it some thought, Gwen. Give it some thought." I was walking across the campus and again I was thinking he is crazy. I can't be no doctor! You know? Nzia, as I walked across the campus, the Lord said to me, "If he thinks that you can become a physician, you need to at least try it." Clear as a bell. I have said before how important the Lord is in my life, has always been, will always be. Because he confirmed it. You know? I mean, clear as a bell. "If Dr. Clark thinks you can go to med school, you need to think about it." I said to myself, "What?" You know?

It turns out that UNC was having the premed program. They call it the MED program.

Nzia Hall: Yeah. I did the MED program.

Dr. Todd-Houston: You went to it? You were in it?

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Oh, my goodness! So, he said, “UNC has a summer program for students who are interested in going to med school.” He said, “I want you to consider going to that program in the summer and seeing how you do.” He said, “I expect that you’re gonna do very well.” I thought, again, he is crazy as – but I went to that program, and I was just shocked. It wasn’t easy, because like I said I’ve always had to study. It didn’t just happen. You know? But I did well in the program. I got good recommendations. I think that might’ve been my junior year. My senior year, I was back at Central. I think I went a second year to the MED program, and I did better, and again got good recommendations. My first year when I applied to med school, I didn’t get accepted any place. So, I decided to go back. Dr. Clark recommended that I stay at Central and get myself in a master’s program so that I could still show when I applied again that I was working towards whatever it was that I needed.

Sure enough, the next year I got in and Dr. Clark had a lot to do with that because UNC then was looking to get their numbers up for minority students. Dr. Clark was sort of a feeder to UNC. He had the respect of UNC folks of the caliber of students that he would recommend. So, looking at our performance on paper and all of those things, and then knowing him was another way that they got minority students. They had a good relationship. He knew the folks who were in charge of the program. He could get feedback on the folks that he had sent. He must have sent, I don’t know. I can remember off the top of my head maybe three folks that he sent that graduated from UNC, some of them before me. So, he was responsible for a lot of students getting over at UNC. So, I have Dr. Clark to thank that he saw my potential.

What’s so important to me is that just the fact that he saw my potential. He encouraged me based on what he saw. As a physician who is Black – at some point I want you to ask me what’s the distinction between a Black physician versus a physician who is Black.

Nzia Hall: Okay.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Okay? Because, again, I'm gonna forget some of this stuff but it's a good point that I wanna make to you. Okay? I think I've sort of forgot my train of thought. What was I talking about?

Nzia Hall: You were talking about how Dr. Clark saw the potential in you.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yes, yes. As a pediatrician, the kids would come in. We would always do the medical stuff, but I would always talk to them about what they wanted to become. I always talked to them about how they were doing in school just to be encouraging because I recognized how Dr. Clark recognized my potential. I also had a great biology teacher in high school. He was the one that was the reason that I wanted to be the lab technician, because I did great in his biology class. Excuse me. That was Dr. Robinson. He was my first person who encouraged me to work hard and perform. He saw that I could do well academically. So, being that I was a pediatrician who was Black, I tried to do more than just the medicine. You know?

When my kids would come in, sometimes I would say, "Mom, what can he or she do that's so well?" Sometimes, she would say, "Oh, she speaks well. She can say speeches. Or he can play a musical instrument, or she can sing." You know? Stuff like that. Oftentimes, if I found out they could sing or if they could play a musical instrument, I'd say, "Okay. The next time he or she comes in, I want him to sing. I want her to sing for me. Or bring the instrument because we want to hear her play. Or bring a speech or make her memorize." During the time, we had children's day at church, and they had to memorize speeches at Easter and stuff like that. I would say, "Schedule that appointment before they have to speak, and I want to hear it." After I finished seeing them, all my staff would come in the hall at the office, and they would have to perform.

If somebody could sing, they would sing. Whatever they could, and we just clapped. Parents in the other rooms, we would ask them to come out to the hall because we said we have a performer today or we have a speaker today. You know? I would just cold chills because I knew, and I'm about to cry right now. I knew that we were – I always told my staff, we are making kings and queens. We are making – it's a little thing that we can say or do that goes towards encouraging them to become the kings and queens that they are.

The other thing in my office was that everybody got a hug.
Because I –

Nzia Hall: I want you to be my pediatrician!

Dr. Todd-Houston: Well, yeah. Because I could talk to the parent. I could take care of the ear infection, but I really didn't know all of what was going on at home. You know? I didn't know if it might be a child sometime who had never had a hug. That happens! We just don't know. So, I thought, when they come through me as their pediatrician, one thing that they will remember if they had never had a hug, they got a hug. If when I would finish doing what I was doing, their exam and talking with the mom, and I was getting ready to go out the door, some of the kids would say, "Dr. Todd-Jones, what about my hug?" I'd say, "Oh! Now, don't you know you're right? Come here!" It was more than – my practice was more than taking care of the physical ailments.

We worked on the mind. We worked on the self-esteem, not only with the kids but with the parents too. Because as a physician, I wanted my parents – I tried to teach my parents because if they ever left me, especially if they had a child with a problem, let's say a child who has sickle cell. If they ever left me and didn't have me as their pediatrician, I wanted them to know what to expect from their next doctor. Because most of my patients were African American, on Medicaid. I had some private pay, but I had a lot of them that were on Medicaid. I wanted my parents to be able to demand a level of care that we gave them. If they didn't get that, I always said, "If you don't get it, you can go somewhere else!"

I always wanted them to know that. I always wanted them to have that expectation of better. Regardless of what their situation was now, an expectation of better for themselves, my parents. If my parents had it, then my patients would have it, right? Because my patients would see it being demonstrated, that expectation being demonstrated in their parents.

Nzia Hall: Right.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Okay? So, essentially, that was the kind of practice that I had. Since I've been gone, folks have – when I finally started looking at Facebook, people have gotten in contact with me, and they have remembered things that we talked about. The teenagers, if I see some of them now, especially the boys, we talk about contraceptives, if they were going to college. We don't need any children now. Contraceptives, the young girls – we don't need any

babies yet, contraceptives. You know? We talk about it. In my practice, I had another pediatrician who I brought home to Charleston to work, and I had a PA. We all had the same mindset of doing and having an impact on our parents and our patients so that they had an expectation of us and that they recognized we had an expectation for them.

Nzia Hall: That's beautiful. I love the way you ran your practice.

Dr. Todd-Houston: You about made me cry! I mean, I am just talking about it. You know what? That was the Lord's expectation of me because I wouldn't have gotten through medical school without him. You know? So, you have to pay back. I had to pay back.

Nzia Hall: Absolutely!

Dr. Todd-Houston: I think we had maybe about five medical students from my practice who have become physicians now. We have dentists. We have accountants. We have some of everything. That is what was important to me because that was fulfilling their ability to become the kings and queens that they needed to become. Not just because – I don't mean just that they all had to be professionals like we are, but other professions that they chose to go in so long that if they chose to do it, they did their best in it.

Nzia Hall: Absolutely.

Dr. Todd-Houston: I'm just proud of all of them when I see them. Some of them, when I go back to Charleston now, if I run into any, they'll say, "Dr. Houston, do you remember when you always gave us a hug?" There's a saying that people see not just what you say but they can appreciate what you do, your actions. That just – the other thing I always said to myself was, "You know what, Lord, you've given me this opportunity. If I can just change the life of one child being that child's pediatrician, if I can change one child, I'll be so thankful."

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: In my practice, I have changed the life of more than that. I don't know how many until I go back to Charleston and run into parents or run into my patients who are adults now and they tell me. I get that feedback that I did make that difference for my patients. Okay. All right. What's next?

Nzia Hall: All right. Before we delve deeper into your experiences in your

practice, I do want to go back to your early years. I know you talked about after high school wanting to work in a lab. Was that the only option you considered? What options did you consider after high school? Was it always straight to college or did you consider other things?

Dr. Todd-Houston: No, it was – I didn't really plan on what I was going to do but I always knew that my parents had an expectation that I would go to undergrad.

Nzia Hall: Okay. Tell me about your college experience, why you chose Central, how your experiences socially and academically were at Central.

Dr. Todd-Houston: I chose Central because I bypassed Shaw. I bypassed St. Aug, and ANT was down the road. I wanted to be away from home because St. Aug and Shaw would have been too close in Raleigh. I'm only 21 miles from Raleigh. Out of state would've been too far from home. But there's Chapel Hill. I mean, really. Come on now. Not Chapel Hill, North Carolina Central. Okay. So, they would be close to home but not too close.

Nzia Hall: I can understand that. Yes, ma'am. What year did you graduate from Central?

Dr. Todd-Houston: 73, I think. I went there in 69 so that would be 73 but I graduated undergrad and then that year, remember, I didn't get accepted the first year in medical school. In 74 is when I got accepted in medical school. I was there in the master's program at Central.

Nzia Hall: What did you get your Master's in?

Dr. Todd-Houston: I was gonna be in biology.

Nzia Hall: How did you finance your college education, undergrad and Master's?

Dr. Todd-Houston: God is good. I'm telling you, when I say he's good. Because my parents, I have five more siblings that they had to put through school. They didn't have that kind of money. Right? They had already put me – I had already gone to Central. There was a program, I can't think of the name of it now, but it was for people in medicine. The government would pay for your medical school training. They would pay the whole thing, but you had to work in an underserved area. I thought, hey, I don't see a problem with that and then I don't have to pay back that money. When I start

working, that's gonna be my money. I've just gotta go to this place and work in an underserved area. I got my money. My scholarship was for three years. I don't know how I made it through that first year, but for three years I got that scholarship.

I had to pay back three years after I finished my residency. I had to work in an underserved area. That's how I went to Charleston because Charleston was underserved, and they had community health centers that had physicians. My thought was to work in Charleston for three years and then I had planned to go back to Atlanta because I trained at Emory. My residency was at Emory and Grading in Atlanta. I'd planned on going back to Atlanta, but I tell people I guess when I got to Charleston I ate too much of the seafood and I enjoyed the people. I enjoyed what I was doing. I enjoyed teaching. I was where I was supposed to be. I was where the Lord wanted me to be. I knew that because I was enjoying it so much. Yeah.

Nzia Hall: Okay, awesome! Just to confirm, your parents helped you with undergrad and your master's and then you got the scholarship.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah. I didn't finish the master's program see because I was only in that master's that one year. Then I reapplied for med school and then I got in the second year, so I didn't finish the master's program. Really, Dr. Clark told me. He said, "You need to keep yourself in a position where in when you reapply they can see that you're still trying to make yourself better." You know? So, he said, "Consider going into the master's program." So, they can see I'm still doing biology stuff. I'm still doing chemistry stuff. I'm still doing biochemistry stuff. Then I'll have that on my – what's that thing that your grades are on?

Nzia Hall: Your transcript?

Dr. Todd-Houston: The transcript. That's the word. They would see all of that and that would make me even look stronger as an applicant. Yeah.

Nzia Hall: Can you tell me more about your med school application process. So, why specifically you chose UNC? Why you chose to apply there and end up going there for medical school?

Dr. Todd-Houston: Well, I remember – why did I end up going to UNC? I had those recommendations from the MED program, so it was almost like an expectation that that's where I would be going. They saw my performance and they knew who I was. They knew Dr. Clark. They had experienced students who had come from Dr. Clark

before. They had done well. Those are the things that they wanted to happen. So, essentially, I was where the Lord wanted me to be at the right time with the right people, and that's it. It wasn't me. It wasn't. I was just doing what I knew I needed to do to keep myself improved academically.

Nzia Hall: Okay, okay. What was UNC's School of Medicine's reputation amongst the people that matter to you? So, your friends –

Dr. Todd-Houston: What was what?

Nzia Hall: UNC's reputation, the School of Medicine's reputation at the time.

Dr. Todd-Houston: I just knew that it was a good school in the South. It was right here with Duke. I knew – I mean, I didn't know that Duke was so much above us because the reputation of Duke, but I knew that UNC also had a good reputation. The other thing is having Dr. Clark. His recommendation fell heavy on me because I felt like he knew what UNC was looking for in a student's performance. He knew – he had other students who had gone through their program and had gone through their program successfully. Being at UNC, I could have him to talk to. I maintained a relationship with him until he passed. It wasn't just a student/teacher. It was sort of like he was my mentor also. It was an in-state school, so I didn't have to pay for being out of state. That was another reason to go to Central.

My daddy said, "You can go wherever you want to, but I'm only going to pay for an in-state school." What kind of option was that? So, I said to myself, "Well, I guess you know."

Nzia Hall: In state it is!

Dr. Todd-Houston: Right. So, that was another reason. Like I said, the distance as far as from home – now, I could get home in a matter of – Durham is about an hour if I needed to get home or if they needed to come for something that I was in at Central. That – excuse me. Excuse me.

Nzia Hall: Okay. All right. So, did you have the option of attending any other medical school?

Dr. Todd-Houston: No. I didn't get accepted anywhere else. I got accepted at Chapel Hill and that's where I went.

Nzia Hall: That's where you were supposed to be.

Dr. Todd-Houston: That's where I was supposed to be.

Nzia Hall: Yes, ma'am.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah.

Nzia Hall: Can you tell me about your time at UNC School of Medicine overall?

Dr. Todd-Houston: When you sent me these questions, I said, oh, my goodness. I've gotta go back 40 some years and my brain had a clot!

Nzia Hall: You've been doing so good!

Dr. Todd-Houston: Huh?

Nzia Hall: I said you've been doing so good.

Dr. Todd-Houston: My spinal cord had an injury. Then going back to this stuff – she wants me to remember all of that? Now, what were we talking about?

Nzia Hall: How was your time at UNC?

Dr. Todd-Houston: Huh? Oh, at UNC.

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: So, being that we did the MED program, we were already familiar with UNC. It wasn't like I was going somewhere new. I'm trying to think. Many of the students in our class were in the MED program also. At that time, I think that we had the largest number of minority students in the first-year class. It seems like it was 27 of us. I'm not sure. You could probably look at that data. But we had the support of each other because we already had established a relationship with each other in the MED program. So, we had that support.

One of the things that I was disappointed about is that we really didn't have that much of a relationship with the White students. We did whatever we had to do in labs and things that we needed to do together. We did that but being supportive from a friend standpoint, we didn't have that. We had that with each other, and we had one of two classes above us presented themselves as mentors to us. So, that helped. They just sort of told us what their expectation was for us and what things to look out for. So, that was really important in that experience.

I really didn't have any negative. Like when I try to think about it, I don't remember experiencing any real negative things. I do remember a funny thing one time. We were in pathology and Dr – what's his name? I can't think of the name right. Dr. **Daldoff** was a pathologist when I was there. He was talking about wounds and wound care. That sometimes the wounds would get maggots and they were there to eat the dead skin and all that kind of stuff. When we he was talking about, I raised my hand and said, "Well, after they ate the dead skin and all of that, what happened to them?" He said, "They grew up and flew away."

Nzia Hall: All right?

Dr. Todd-Houston: So, what do magots become?

Nzia Hall: I think they become flies.

Dr. Todd-Houston: They become something like that, right? Everybody in the class just fell out. I just remember thinking, "Oh, my goodness. No, he didn't!" I did enjoy pathology. I enjoyed surgery when I did my third-year rotations. I enjoyed surgery and I enjoyed pathology. Those were the two, other than pediatrics. In fact, no. To tell you the truth, I hadn't planned on a becoming a pediatrician. I planned on becoming an adult medicine person. However, during my third and my fourth-year rotations in the hospital, I recognized when I did my pediatric rotation – no. Let's go back to the adult people. They would come in sick. They might have diabetes, hypertension, you know all those different things. Okay? I recognized that if you got the diabetes under control then the blood pressure would be a problem. If you did get that under control, they'd have a stroke. It wasn't like they came in, got better, and went home.

It really didn't bother me until I did a rotation in pediatrics. Those little jokers would come in sick; temperature is 104, 105, having febrile seizures and all of this stuff. But if you did the right thing, and I'm exaggerating a little bit but it's true, if you did the right thing, in 24 to 48 hours you'd go in there and they'd be trying to climb out of the bed. I would say to myself – I really decided then that pediatrics was what I needed because I needed immediate gratification is what I call it. I don't know if that's what it is or not, but I enjoyed the fact that what we did made them better then and they went home. Versus older people who've got this problem, then they go to this problem, and they might not go home. You know?

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: I thought about that, and I said, “This is what I need.” I had done the internal medicine rotation before I did pediatrics. After I did pediatrics, I recognized it is pediatrics for me. I had never contemplated pediatrics. I mean, I took care of my younger siblings, but it wasn’t anything that I thought was so much fun. You know? You have to fight with them. When I did the rotation, when they came in they couldn’t tell you what’s wrong. You had to figure out what was wrong based on what the parents were telling you. Then you didn’t only have to deal with the patient, you had to deal with the parent. Okay? I just recognized that. Then, when you do the right thing and you come back – the parents would be so upset about how sick they were and all of that stuff. But when you did the right thing and you came back and they saw what you did made a difference in that child’s life, oh man! They were in love forever! That really was a good experience for me at Chapel Hill.

The other thing was that I really appreciated the folks in the class ahead of us because they were like our mentors. Some of them checked on us. “How are you doing in this?” So, we weren’t there by ourselves. They had a participatory part in what we were doing. So, not only did we have to make sure we were doing well for our own benefit, we strived to do well because they had an expectation of us to do well. Oftentimes, they could recommend things that we might need to do if we were having problems in some areas. We could talk to them. They could make recommendations. It’s almost like we had somebody ahead of us who already experienced some of the negative things, but they also pointed out the positive things. That was really important to us. We maintained relationships with some, especially the women, the women and men.

There was one, Dr. **Cirrel** Allan. He was like a mentor for all of us. He was probably three or four years ahead of us, but he was like a mentor for my class, for the African American students in my class. That was so, so helpful to know that we had somebody who cared about us like that.

Nzia Hall: Absolutely! Coming from an environment like Central, that’s an HBCU, what was it like to be one of few Black people at UNC?

Dr. Todd-Houston: I think because we had each other and all of us had an expectation of ourselves, it was great. I really didn’t see the difference that it made that I came from an HBCU. For me, I’ve already recognized that I was a not a good test taker, but if I got my foot in the door, I

was in. I was in for the full ride, and I performed. I did that same thing in my residency program, in my internship. There was no inferior concern for me just because I was from an HBCU. The great thing, that MED program, that really was important because what it said to me was you can do this work. Can you take the – put it on –

Nzia Hall: Oh, pause? Okay.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah. So, there were five women in my class. Two of them were twins, identical.

Nzia Hall: No way!

Dr. Todd-Houston: They were from Greensboro, Diane and Deborah Scott. Then Casandra Newcutt, we lived together. There was the two of us and then there was another woman, Dr. Linster. She wasn't as close to the other four of us. She just sort of seemed sort of introverted, maybe. That's what Dr. Newcutt said. We had each other's support throughout all of that. We didn't have any animosity or any jealousy between us. We just liked each other, and we helped each other. Then we had the women and or the men that were ahead of us. If we needed any help, they were there for us also. So, it was sort of like we knew that somebody had us at all times. For me, I knew the Lord had me. That meant a lot.

Nzia Hall: Good! That's good that you all had that support system and that you all had each other.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Nzia Hall: Do you feel like – what faculty administrators were you closest to, because it sounds like those five women were the students you were closest too.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Right.

Nzia Hall: What administrators do you feel you were closest to?

Dr. Todd-Houston: I can't think of who that was.

Nzia Hall: Okay.

Dr. Todd-Houston: I remember Dr. Daldoff. I remember the people in the MED program. There was a woman. I can't think of her name now, and there was another man. I can't think of any names right now of

faculty folks that made a big impression on me.

Nzia Hall: Okay. Do you recall facing any hardships as a medical student?

Dr. Todd-Houston: I don't.

Nzia Hall: That's good!

Dr. Todd-Houston: I really don't. I just know that I had to, like I said, I had to study. I had to put the time and the work in. But as usual, whenever I did that, I achieved, and I became better, and better because of it.

Nzia Hall: Absolutely. What about any hardships during medical school outside, like in your personal life, while you were a medical student?

Dr. Todd-Houston: In my personal life?

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Nuh-huh. I mean, I was blessed. I was blessed. I really was. My roommate, Dr. Cassandra Newcutt, and she was interviewed also, she was from Wilmington, and she went to undergrad at Duke. So, when we first got to Chapel Hill, she and Dr. Linster were roommates. I don't know what happened with them, but they didn't hit off. Right? Of course, I didn't know why. So, when Dr. Newcutt – and I call her Newcutt. She calls me Todd. We've always done that. When she and Dr. Linster decided to not be roommates anymore, Newcutt was looking for a roommate, looking for someone who could be a roommate with her. She asked me and I thought, "Hmm, I don't know. There has to be a reason that they couldn't get along." Of course, I didn't know what that reason was, but I thought, "Hmm. I don't know if I should try this or not."

But we became roommates and we have remained sisters. She had a brother, so she didn't have a sister. She and I remained sisters until this day. She was – and the twins, we were close too. The thing that we recognized about the twins is that they always had each other. They didn't have a real need for anybody else. You know? So, we haven't been able to maintain that relationship with them, but if we saw each other or did decide to do anything with each other, we would be right back where we were. That was in a supportive type of situation. We didn't have any conflicts. It wasn't us against each other. It really wasn't us against. The kind of support system that we had was a support system that lasted and

was the kind that we needed.

We also maintained relationships with the class that was even one year or two years ahead of us, the women in that class. Two of three of them, Dr. Newcutt and myself and them, we became friends and remained friends for life. Yeah. So, that was the way that was.

Nzia Hall: Good. I'm glad to hear there was so much community amongst you all.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah, it was, and we needed that. A lot of times, you don't have it. Dr. Newcutt and I were talking about that. Even when I did my residency, I developed relationships with White students, the female students. But after we finished the residency, we just sort of grew apart, but I recognize that there were two Black women and the relationship that we had, we've maintained it. Even though we haven't been able to see each other, we call each other and see how we're doing and that kind of support system. That means a lot. It doesn't have to be a lot of people, but it needs to be genuine people.

Nzia Hall: Absolutely.

Dr. Todd-Houston: People that you know have got your back. Does that make sense?

Nzia Hall: It does. It does. Can you tell me about a time where you asked for help during med school?

Dr. Todd-Houston: That I asked what?

Nzia Hall: Tell me about a time that you asked for help during med school.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Just when we were studying for tests and things like that, we had each other that we could depend on. If we needed help, we would help each other. We would do study what you call it. Not study halls.

Nzia Hall: Like groups?

Dr. Todd-Houston: Study groups. Mm-hmm. Study groups. That's all I can remember.

Nzia Hall: Okay.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah. We had a support system like that.

- Nzia Hall: Good, good. What kept you steady in pursuit of your medical degree? So, people? Hobbies? Any sources of inspiration that just helped you overcome any doubts that you had or any difficulties?
- Dr. Todd-Houston: In medical school?
- Nzia Hall: Yes, ma'am.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: Or in my residency?
- Nzia Hall: In medical school.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: I just think it as the support system that we had. We knew that we had that support system. We knew that the people who were closest to us were genuine. That may have been folks in our class or folks in the class one to two years ahead of us. We knew that we could go to them if we needed to. That was just a good relationship. It was god-sent, from what I can remember now.
- Nzia Hall: Absolutely. Okay. Now, we're gonna talk about residency. Can you tell me what residency was like and maybe how you could compare it to the rigor of medical school?
- Dr. Todd-Houston: Boy, you're really hurting my brain.
- Nzia Hall: I'm sorry!
- Dr. Todd-Houston: No, you're not. Look at that big smile. You aren't sorry! Ask the question again.
- Nzia Hall: Okay. I'll ask it in two separate ones. First, just tell me what residency was like for you.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: Okay. I've got to think of where I was. When I left medical school, I got accepted at Grady in Atlanta. That was good for me. I don't remember if I got accepted any place else or not. I know I went to several interviews. I might have got accepted at one other place. I don't really remember now. I liked Grady because that was Atlanta. Right? At that time, Atlanta was the place to be.
- Nzia Hall: Still is.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: Huh?
- Nzia Hall: Still is.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Still is. Yeah, yeah. Like I said, I'm a little old girl from Zebulon, farm country. Here I am going to Atlanta.

Nzia Hall: Right.

Dr. Todd-Houston: The same thing for me going to UNC.

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm. Yeah!

Dr. Todd-Houston: Here's little old me from Zebulon farm country, UNC. Not Duke but UNC, reputation. I was good to go. What was my question?

Nzia Hall: Just your experience during residency. What was it like for you?

Dr. Todd-Houston: Being at Grady, that's an interesting thing. Being at Grady, that was like – it was an Emory and Grady program. Okay? Grady had more patients, so you had a different caliber of patients at they call it The Grady. Versus at Emory, you had more the White patients, so that's the difference there. One day I remember at Grady, I remember the nurses at Grady. Boy, they were so proud of us, the Black residents and Black interns. They would help us. Because they've been around years, so they knew what to do. You know?

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Like I said, I've always tried to make sure that I could communicate with and have a relationship with everybody and anymore. So, it didn't matter that I was the doctor at The Grady, and they were the housekeepers. I acknowledged them. I acknowledged them in the cafeteria, the folks who worked in the cafeteria. I've always been – it wasn't anything that we were taught. It was what my parents demonstrated that you're no better than anyone else. You just may have had more opportunity. Okay? So, I just had a real good relationship with the nurses on the floor.

They were proud of us. They had an expectation of what I was doing at The Grady because they could hear everybody talking.

Nzia Hall: Right, mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Attendings, residents, parents, all of that. I made it a point to make sure that they knew that I appreciated them on the floor, the nurses, the clerks, and especially the us folks. But it was everybody, you know. I wanted everybody to know that I appreciated them and that I didn't think that I was any better than anybody else. Now, I did carry myself so that they recognized that I had an expectation

of myself to be respected. Okay?

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: So, I carried myself that way. They could appreciate it. It wasn't so – to be respected, it's important.

Nzia Hall: It is.

Dr. Todd-Houston: You either establish that one way or the other. You're either gonna be respected or you're not gonna be respected. You're either gonna respect other people or you're not gonna respect other people, but they knew that. It was almost like they took care of me. They're on call late at night. The nurses or the housekeepers or whatever would say – I think I was Dr. Todd then. I hadn't gotten married. "You want some food?"

Nzia Hall: You all just took care of each other.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Huh?

Nzia Hall: I said you all just took care of each other. They took care of you.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah, yeah. We took care of each other. There was respect for each other. Some of the nurses, when you were doing different procedures, when I was doing a spinal tap or starting an IV or whatever, I could feel their pride when I got the needle in, when I did the spinal tap one time. Not having to do it over and over, I could feel their pride. They didn't have to say anything. I didn't have to say anything, but they would give you that look.

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm. I know exactly what you mean.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Not just –

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Everybody, because again, the thing is respect regardless. I was gonna say this with you and your neurosurgery. What the guy's name who is the pediatric neurosurgeon?

Nzia Hall: Are you talking about the new guy?

Dr. Todd-Houston: No, he was on – he had dinner at my mother's house. I wasn't here.

- Nzia Hall: Oh, wow!
- Dr. Todd-Houston: He had dinner at my mother's house. I'm just gonna say, I don't know what happened.
- Nzia Hall: I'm not sure either.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: You understand what I'm saying?
- Nzia Hall: Yes, I do.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: Nzia, look!
- Nzia Hall: Exactly.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: That thing about respect, it's because after all of that I had – he was brilliant with what he did! What happened? I don't know, but I'm telling you that's how important respect is. I just couldn't figure out what happened to him, but when you talked about being a neurosurgeon, I'm thinking he was one of the best, well-known neurosurgeons in the land. You could have him as a mentor if you wanna go in that area. Well, not now.
- Nzia Hall: Yeah, no.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: The possibility would've been there. Even now, you can look at what he did because he was a mentor, even though he's not now. That's all I've gotta say about that.
- Nzia Hall; Yes, ma'am. All right. Was there a special moment or event when you felt you came into your own as medical professional?
- Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah, when I was taking call. I need to say too that I did – well, my residency was three years in pediatrics. I did my first two years at Grady Emory and then my third year I got married and I moved to California. I did my third year at Cedar Sinai in California. Now, what was I gonna say?
- Nzia Hall: That moment that you came into your own as a medical professional. What happened? You spent two years at Grady.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: When those kids would come in sick as they could be and I did the right thing, like I said the next day you could see their improvement. The following day, it might've been 24 hours, you could see them trying to climb out of the bed or whatever. You could see the relief of the parents. I could see the encouragement

when I was an intern that my resident gave me. I could see the responsibility that he gave me, and the expectation that he or she had of me. We had a great chief resident.

Nzia Hall: Okay.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Then when I was at Cedar Sinai, that would've been my third year. I had a cardiac patient in the ICU. The cardiologist, I forgot – I think he had surgery. I'm not sure what it was now but the cardiologist told me what he needed me to do. I was on call that night. I was a third-year resident, so I had second years under me and first years under me. You would've thought that the cardiovascular surgeon would've stayed in the hospital to take call for that patient. He left responsibility to me, from Zebulon, North Carolina, farm girl. He told me what to do. He said, "I'll be available if you need me." I hadn't even been there but a year, not even a year yet. He was confident enough to leave that child in my care without being a helicopter attending.

Nzia Hall: Right.

Dr. Todd-Houston: My performance had impressed him enough that he was comfortable doing that. I thought to myself, this means something. It would've been one thing if I had been there and he had seen my performance two years before all the way up to that third year, but I hadn't even been there a year and he left that responsibility on me. With a lot of prayer and whatever I had that told me what I needed to do, and knowing that I had him in my backup for support, that just meant – I mean, me? So, I think that's where I really came into, "Yeah, you're a doc now."

Nzia Hall: Yeah.

Dr. Todd-Houston: He was always so encouraging. He wrote me wonderful recommendations. I can't think of his name. I can't think of his name now, but he was wonderful. He just had an expectation. As I always have done, I just try to work to meet that expectation. The other thing was that during my residency it was important that you know when you need to ask for help. Okay?

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: As an intern, you have a second resident, and then you have the third resident above you. If you need help, you need to ask for help. You're dealing with a life.

Nzia Hall: Right, absolutely!

Dr. Todd-Houston: You shouldn't be so self-centered – I've got this; I can do this – that you don't know how to ask for help. I recognized that that was important also. During the residency, you have help. On the third year, guess who was third year?

Nzia Hall: You.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah! So, I had folks under me asking for help. What do I need to do? Like I said that physician – I cannot think of his name. Like I said, he didn't know. I hadn't been there a year and he left his heart patient with me like you would do with the brain patient. Excuse me. You get my point?

Nzia Hall: That's a big deal! Yeah.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah! I mean, I didn't feel like it was going to my head when it happened, but when I look back over my career, I thought to myself Dr. – I'm sorry I can't remember his name. I said, "He left me with that patient overnight?" Most of all, the patient was there and alive and doing well the next day. Yay!

Nzia Hall: That's amazing! Wow!

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah. Like I said, I was always impressed because I took call at the community health center when I first went to Charleston. Many times, being that I was on call, I would have to go to the emergency room to see patients. One night, I guess this was about 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, I heard one of the nurses say, "I wish I could look like that at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning." I said to myself, "Well, do."

Nzia Hall: Yes, ma'am!

Dr. Todd-Houston: Back then, you had to do all the procedures yourself. I had to do all of my procedures myself. I had to do the spinal tap. I had to start the IV. I had to put in the arterial line, or I had to do a stick for the artery. It was on me. I had to do it. Okay? I did it.

Nzia Hall: Yes, for sure.

Dr. Todd-Houston: I did it and I wasn't the only one who noticed that I did it. You know?

Nzia Hall: Yeah.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Not that it puffed my head, but when I went to the emergency room again, I always maintained and had an expectation of a level of respect from folks in the emergency room, folks in the nurse. Wherever I had to go and perform whatever I needed to do to make sure that my patient was okay, that level of attention that I gave my patient, my expectation of what I needed from the nurses to help me make a decision about what my patient needed, the level of expectation of the radiologist. You know, 2:00 in the morning and you have kind you think might have pneumonia and you've gotta send them to get an x-ray. You have to read it because the radiologist might not be there. If I felt like I'm not sure about this, I didn't have any embarrassment to call somebody and say, "This is what I think I'm seeing." Because my biggest thing was that my patient was gonna be okay and not be worried about what I did or didn't do. At least I gave them the best chance that I could give them with my brain. If I needed somebody else's brain to help me make sure they had that opportunity to be well, then that's I gave them.

Nzia Hall: Yeah.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Then the nurse, the same thing. Oh, my god! Whew! I tell people when I was Grady I saw the sun come up so many nights, premature babies, you know. Man, you could hold them in your hand and you've gotta put IVs in the veins. Oh, my goodness! Just so many different things that you're making me remember now. I hadn't really thought about these things. I do remember always saying, man, I remember the sun coming up in the nursery. So many nights, so many mornings having had newborns, prematures, that you had to do the right thing with to make sure that they were gonna survive.

Nzia Hall: Absolutely.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Makes sense?

Nzia Hall: I do. It makes a whole lot of sense.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Okay.

Nzia Hall: Who were your most influential career mentors and what did you learn from them?

Dr. Todd-Houston: The cardiologist at Cedar Sinai, Dr. **McCottry** the woman I told you became my Charleston mom, my two chief residents. My chief

resident my first year, his name was Vince. He was so good. We had to present, and he would question. “Did you do this? Did you do that? What were these results?” He pulled it out of you, but he didn’t embarrass you. He had an expectation that you would fall in line and do what you needed to do. His first name was Vincent. I’ve forgotten his last name now. Dr. McCottry in my work life outside of residency. Who else?

Nzia Hall: I don’t think we were recording when we first talked about her, so could you say a little bit about her now that we’re recording?

Dr. Todd-Houston: Dr. McCaughtry?

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: I think the thing that impressed me the most about her is when I got into real life medicine, when I was paying back my three years or was it two years. No, no, it was three years because I went to med school four years. When I went to Charleston, when I became the medical director of the community health center and it was heavy on me trying to deal with physicians who have egos this big, right?

Nzia Hall: Yes, ma’am.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Dealing with the nurses and all of the things that I had to deal with to try to make sure that center ran like it should run and taking care of patients in low-income areas – Dr. McCaughtry, like I told you that time when I thought the weight of the world was on my shoulders and I just needed somebody to vent to and I needed somebody who was gonna feel sorry for me, here comes Dr. McCaughtry. Oh, honey! Like I said, she was stylish. She was confident. She had an expectation of herself. You knew she had an expectation of you. She had a desire to make sure the patients that community health center, she was on the board of directors, that they got what they needed to get. Just because they were low income, that they wouldn’t be treated any kind of way.

Here’s this woman, I’m expecting her to understand the world on my shoulders. I had this opportunity to talk to her. We closed the door. She was going to make rounds, had on her hat, had on her heels, looked good, all of it. She had all of it. Right? So, I’m telling her about the weight of world on me, I think I told you. Here she comes and I could talk to her about all this stuff that’s going on. She sat there and she looked at me and said, “Dr. Todd-Jones, we hired you to do a job and I expect you to do it.” Again, I said to

myself, “That’s all she had to say to me?” She got up, got her purse, and walked out of my office. I said to myself – I just sat there. I wanted to cry anyway because I was having such a hard time, and I just wanted her to sort of say you’ll be all right.

Nzia Hall: Right. She gave you tough love.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Huh?

Nzia Hall: I said she gave you tough love instead.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yes! Guess what, my mom said, “Had she not given you that tough love, you would’ve still been at that facility wanting to put your head on somebody’s shoulder to cry.” She said, “But as it was, you became the medical director that you needed to become. That’s what that was all about.” That was, oh man – I thought, “She did that to me?” Excuse me. That and then in hospital – oh, the other person that was influential in my residency program, Dr. Mamie Phillips. We’ve been talking almost two hours, huh?

Nzia Hall: We have, we have.

Dr. Todd-Houston: You can tell me if you wanna stop. We can do it several days.

Nzia Hall: I don’t have any time limit. The time limit I told you before was more of a courtesy to you and your time. I am here to speak with you as long as you want.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Dr. Phillips was in my internship class. She’s a wonderful person. She’s a Black female and we got along like that. We got along with some of the others. All of us, because we had to work together, so all of us worked together, but Mamie maintained our relationship after residency. What was I gonna say?

Nzia Hall: Maybe how she was influential?

Dr. Todd-Houston: Oh, the other person. I talked about Vince, the chief resident my internship. My second year, Dr – hmm. She was a Black female, and she was the chief resident. First of all, I was in awe that she was the chief resident. I was so proud. She was short and little. I was about 5’10 and a half. I’ve shrunk some now. Mamie was short also. They always called us Mutt and Jeff. Here I was and here she was. Oh, boy. Why am I blocking on the name? It start with an E. She was small but feisty. You could tell when she had an expectation of you, you knew. Eva, she was Eva. Her name was Eva Harris. She had an expectation of herself, first of all, be

somebody, chief resident. You know? Nobody – I mean, you knew she had her stuff together.

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: She expected you to have your stuff together too, and us even more so. Don't embarrass me.

Nzia Hall: Yes.

Dr. Todd-Houston: "I'm here if you need me. Don't embarrass me." She let us know she was there available if we needed her, just don't you do it.

Nzia Hall: Right. Absolutely.

Dr. Todd-Houston: We knew that. We kept that the whole time we were there, Mamie and I. We knew that so I was really impressed with her. We maintain a relationship even now. In fact, they called me during COVID. "Where are you, Gwen? What are you doing?" Because they knew about my accident and all that kind of stuff. We maintained a long-time relationship.

Nzia Hall: That's beautiful. I'm glad you had so many influential people in your life. You can tell they had a strong impact on you just the way you talk about them.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Oh, yeah. The foundation was that I was influenced by my Momma and my Daddy because they had an expectation of themselves. Therefore, we knew they had an expectation of us. That's real important. That's what I also tried – I saw how important that was, so I always tried to impart that on my staff, on my parents, and on my patients. Since I didn't know how many of them, staff, parents, patients, other physicians that I was being the medical director at the center where I worked, I didn't know how I might've been having an impact on them, but I wanted to make sure that impact was a good one.

Nzia Hall: Good. Okay. Now, we're gonna come back to your question from earlier. What the difference between a Black physician and a physician that is Black?

Dr. Todd-Houston: It's just my definition. I don't know. Excuse me. Yeah. People used to say, "She's a Black pediatrician." I always thought, I'm a pediatrician who happens to be Black. To me, to say that I'm a Black pediatrician means that I do something different from what my colleagues when it comes to caring for patients. We are all

trained to do the same thing!

Nzia Hall: We are. Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: We all trained and know how to diagnose an ear infection, pneumonia, anemia, cancer. We were all trained the same way. Right?

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: However, my being able to relate to my patients differently allowed me to be that pediatrician. First, with the training just like any of my colleagues, but because of my experience and my ability to relate to them made me a pediatrician first who is Black. So, being able to relate to that culture, and being able to say to a mom – even though this kid is having a temperature of 105 and is having febrile seizure and everything seems to be going wrong – to be able to put your arm around a parent and from my experience that I have had to say, “He’s gonna be okay.”

Nzia Hall: Yep.

Dr. Todd-Houston: “We just need a little bit of time but he or she is gonna be okay.” Knowing the meaning of that arm around somebody so that they knew – that touch.

Nzia Hall: I know. Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: I don’t care what the words are, but when you add that touch, I care. I can touch you. I can feel you and I want you touch and feel me so that when I tell you he or she is gonna be okay, you can be confident that that’s the case. Hey, but in the background I’m going, “Help me, Lord.”

Nzia Hall: That was funny! I like that. I like that. I’ve never heard anyone say that before either, but I like that. Okay.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah, but you get it?

Nzia Hall: Yeah, I do. I do.

Dr. Todd-Houston: You know, it’s like if I’m a Black pediatrician, am I gonna do something different just because I’m a Black pediatrician when it comes to diagnosing a heart murmur?

Nzia Hall: Right.

Dr. Todd-Houston: When it comes to diagnosing pneumonia, am I gonna do something different? No! All of my colleagues and I were taught the same thing. But the way I address it, the issue, with my patient and with my parents and having an expectation of the folks who are helping me take care of this little life, all the folks on my staff who know that we are grooming kings and queens, that's where my difference was.

Nzia Hall: Absolutely. Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Okay, so you get it.

Nzia Hall: I get it. I get it. I know we already touched on this a bit but if you could go into a little bit more detail.

Dr. Todd-Houston: You're doing good! I don't see how you keep knowing how to go back to stuff. I like that! You're bringing me back because I couldn't go back. I'm telling you; my brain won't do it. I think about how I used to be able to get lab results at 2:00 at nighttime when I was on call and be able to recall those lab results when I got to the office the next day. I could retain it. Even in the residency program, you had to give that information to your resident. You know?

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: How I used to do that and now I'm doing well to remember my own cell number!

Nzia Hall: That's what happens. That's what happens.

Dr. Todd-Houston: It's been a long time and that's why I said 40 some years and she thinks I'm gonna remember something!

Nzia Hall: But you do! You remembered a lot, a whole lot.

Dr. Todd-Houston: You pulled it out of me. I'm good. I'm glad. I'm really happy. I see in your smile that you're not just saying it to say it. I see that you're authentic. That's good.

Nzia Hall: Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Okay. Keep going. I'm getting tired of you now.

Nzia Hall: No, don't get tired of me! All right. How does being a Black

physician matter in your workplace, family, and community?

Dr. Todd-Houston: Being a physician who is Black.

Nzia Hall: Yes. I'm sorry. I was reading, but yes, being a physician who is Black.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Being a physician who is Black, okay?

Nzia Hall: Yes. How does that matter to you?

Dr. Todd-Houston: Because I represent what somebody else can be in the community. I represent what not being an educated fool is. I represent having an expectation of my parents. I did. I represented being able to do that. Therefore, if I had an expectation of them, they could learn to have an expectation of themselves. When they left me, especially my patients who might have had sickle cell, when they left me, and they might've had Medicaid. If they had to leave me and go to another physician or they left the town and they'd get another physician, they would have an expectation of those physicians just because of what and how I treated them and the expectation that had of them. So, they can make sure that their child got the kind of care that their child needed, and that was important.

I knew I wasn't going to be their pediatrician all of the time, but if I had trained my parents, especially for sickle cell patient, to know that if they got a fever they needed to be seen. If they went somewhere to an emergency room and they saw a physician there who said, "Oh, it's just a cold. We can put you on this antibiotic and you go home." They can say, "No, sir. My child has sickle cell. He has a fever. He needs more. You need to look harder. There's something going on with my child." They don't have to get into a fight or anything, but I wanted them to know how to demand more for their child in my absence because I wasn't gonna be there to make sure that what I did is what somebody else would do.

Nzia Hall: Exactly.

Dr. Todd-Houston: But I wanted them to know, and I wanted to be comfortable doing that. What's the word? What's the word I'm looking for?

Nzia Hall: You wanted them to feel –

Dr. Todd-Houston: Huh?

- Nzia Hall: You wanted them to feel confident in advocating for their child?
- Dr. Todd-Houston: Being an advocate, that they felt confident being an advocate for their child. Because I never knew how other people would treat them, but I knew if I instilled in my parents that expectation of advocacy for their child, that they could take that and would take that anywhere else. Okay?
- Nzia Hall: That's so important, especially in our healthcare system.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: Yes, exactly. That was very important to me. I even had a patient who – what was that he had? I've forgotten what it was but when he got sick and most of the time she had to go to the emergency room. The mom had to take him to the emergency room. Whatever it was now, it was something that she could do at home to keep from having to go to the emergency room. I taught her how to do it and she did it and she was confident in doing it. It kept her from having to go to the emergency room for everything all of the time. I don't know why I can't think of that child's diagnosis now. But I said to her, "This is something you can do at home."
- Nzia Hall: Yeah.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: I said, "We can teach you to do it." So, sometimes she would call me after hours if the child had a problem. She could say, "Dr. Jones, I've already done A, B, C, and D and he's doing better. I just wanted to let you know what was going on."
- Nzia Hall: Oh, wow.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: What is that? That's almost like that verse in the Bible. What is that thing about fishermen? You can provide a man with fish for their dinner. This is not the exact words, okay?
- Nzia Hall: But if you teach them how to fish –
- Dr. Todd-Houston: You can give that to them, but you teach them how to fish –
- Nzia Hall: You can feed yourself forever.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: Thank you! Okay. So, if I could teach my parents some things that they needed to do because I had confidence that they had the ability to do it, unlike some of my colleagues may not have had. Okay? They could do it! I supported them in doing that. Knowing that many of them would go to different places in the world, I didn't have to worry about whether or not they would be an

advocate for their child. Long enough explanation? I'm getting tired.

Nzia Hall: I'm sorry! We're almost done. I've noticed you've talked about a lot of proud moments throughout your career.

Dr. Todd-Houston: A lot of what?

Nzia Hall: A lot of proud moments throughout your career.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yeah.

Nzia Hall: If you could think over your whole career, what would you say was your proudest moment or one of them?

Dr. Todd-Houston: I guess when they had this program in Charleston and they recognized Black women who were physicians in the community. I had already left Charleston. I had already had my accident and had my physical challenge. I try not to say being disabled.

Nzia Hall: Right.

Dr. Todd-Houston: I was already off the scene in Charleston, but they called me and said, "You've got to come to this program." Because I was the only pediatrician who was Black in Charleston except for the woman who worked for me during the time that I was in Charleston. So, the effort that they made to make sure that I would be there—"What can we do to ensure that you'll be here." I was hardly walking. I can hardly walk now. But the fact that they wanted me to be there that badly and I had been away from Charleston probably two or three years and they wanted me to be there, it meant so much to me. It sort of gave me that feeling that the effort that I made as a pediatrician who was Black was all worth it.

Nzia Hall: Wow.

Dr. Todd-Houston: You know? So, I think that was one of my proudest moments. Another proud moment was I used to do motivational speaking for kids in Charleston. Being that I was in Charleston for so long, I had everybody who became adults. When I would be in the store and run into somebody that I had encountered as a parent, or a patient and they would give me the feedback of how much they appreciated, and they remembered what I did and what I told them. They knew that I meant what I said. They appreciated it. Just that feedback, that appreciation, just almost makes me cry right now

telling you about it. That was my whole effort.

Nzia Hall: Exactly.

Dr. Todd-Houston: To make a difference!

Nzia Hall: And you were so successful in that.

Dr. Todd-Houston: In making a difference, yeah, and I loved it. Since I've been up here, people have said, "Are you going to open a practice up here now?"

Nzia Hall: She said, "I'm good!"

Dr. Todd-Houston: I did it. It's over. I'm done.

Nzia Hall: Yes, ma'am. Now, it's time to rest.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yes. Look, and try to get my – what did I say? I called myself my physical, not disabled, physical challenge and try to keep myself molded and recognizing that I have a physical challenge. It's not who I used to but things that I have dealt with in life before, I can deal with this to the best of my ability. Knowing that the Lord – this is where the Lord plans for me to be now. I don't know if I'm going to get any better. I don't know if I'm going to get any worse. When people say, "How are you doing?" I can say, "I've been worse." You know?

Nzia Hall: Yeah.

Dr. Todd-Houston: So, to recognize the need to be thankful for where you are now.

Nzia Hall: Yes, ma'am.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Appreciate what you went through, what you've done, but that's all over. It's where you are now. Yeah.

Nzia Hall: Very wise words.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Huh?

Nzia Hall: I said very wise words.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Okay.

Nzia Hall: All right. Two more questions and that's it.

- Dr. Todd-Houston: All right, because I'm tired of you.
- Nzia Hall: I'm sorry! Not really, but a little bit. All right. What has your experience taught you about ways to support present day minority students and communities?
- Dr. Todd-Houston: That's why I said to you, look. I want us to do something together. I want to be your mentor. Because a lot of times, you just need somebody else to scream.
- Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: To know that I've been through it too. You've been through it. I needed days that I needed to scream like with Dr. McCottry. But what Dr. McCottry demonstrated to me was that she sat there, and she listened to me the whole time. I'm just almost about to cry and giving her all this information and thinking that she was going to hug me and say, "Baby, it's going to be okay." She gave me tough love and I had to keep tough love. That night I called my mom, and I told her what happened. She said, "That's tough love." She said, "You wanted one thing, but she knew you needed another."
- Nzia Hall: Exactly.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: Look. I said to myself, "I wish somebody would have told me!" What was I talking about? Did I answer your question?
- Nzia Hall: Yeah, ways that you've learned through your experiences to support minority students and communities.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: Right. Yeah, yeah. I thought when you called me, I said oh boy. We'll do this interview. Then I said, well, you know, she's gonna be there another two years. To get away, to come to Zebulon to do nothing. To have me come to Durham so I can get out of Zebulon and do something together, to be there for you. To say, you know what, I'm not gonna tell you what to do but at least I can tell you what my experience was so that you can hear that so that you can learn how to lean on yourself.
- Nzia Hall: Yeah.
- Dr. Todd-Houston: Knowing that you still have someone that you can lean on, a me, a Dr. McCaughtry. She's dead now but you would have loved her.
- Nzia Hall: She sounds amazing.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Oh, honey, she could cuss like a sailor but when she put on her educated self face, you'd never know. That would be I think one thing. Ask me that question one more time. I'm getting lost now.

Nzia Hall: How you've learned to support minority students and –

Dr. Todd-Houston: Oh, yeah. Recognizing that I'm back here now. I've been back seven years. I keep saying, "You know what, Lord, there must be something else that you want me to, something else for me to do because I'm physically challenged but I'm not stopped."

Nzia Hall: Right.

Dr. Todd-Houston: I haven't stopped. I can't walk. I can't run but I can still get around. I can still drive if I'm careful. So, I keep saying there's something. What is it that you want me to be for somebody else at this point in my life? I think that's where I am because when I was in Charleston we used to have the medical students. We used to have dinners for them. We used to have women group sessions at our different homes. We wanted them to know that we were there for them. I don't have that community here in farmland Zebulon, but I can come to Durham.

Nzia Hall: Yes.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Some of you all can come this way as a relief, women and men. There are things that I can do just to give you some real good, down-home food!

Nzia Hall: Don't get me excited!

Dr. Todd-Houston: There are things like that. We've established our rapport and it doesn't stop with just this Zoom session. Are there things that we can do, things that I would love to do? Because when I talked to Dr. Newcutt, I thought – well, Newcutt is not here because she lives in Florida. She's a psychiatrist now. Knowing her, if I could tell her in time, she would probably say, "Todd, I can fly up there." Because she loves to travel. "I can fly up there. What do you want to do? We can do this, or we can do that." I don't know whether or not it might get us back in contact with the twins. I know that Dr. Diane Scott is in Durham. She was an anesthesiologist at Duke. Her sister as a pediatrician in Charlotte. I think that she's still in Charlotte. Those are close enough places that we could do things maybe once a year, twice a year, whatever.

Nzia Hall: Absolutely!

Dr. Todd-Houston: Just as girls with wisdom and grey hair versus girls who are young and staring out and needed some of the stuff that we had. Just sharing. You know?

Nzia Hall: Yeah.

Dr. Todd-Houston: About my family, if you notice my name is Gwendolyn Todd-Houston. Okay?

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: I decided when I got into med school – I decided if I got into med school there were going to be others in my family who are going to become physicians. My niece is a family medicine physician, and she is in between Chapel Hill and Greensboro. She just moved back here. She was in Iowa, but she finished the time that she had to finish. She's between Chapel Hill and Greensboro now. So, I maintained my name Todd because I knew that there was going to be another physician somewhere in the family and I wanted name recognition. My niece was working in Columbia, South Carolina. I was in Charleston. One day, they had a conference. The person who was a part of the conference was from Charleston, the physician. So, when she introduced herself he said, "Todd, are you related to Dr. Todd-Jones, the pediatrician in Charleston?" She said, "Yes, that's my aunt."

Nzia Hall: That's wonderful. There's power in a name.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Yes! You know? So, I said name recognition and I tried to encourage her to do the same thing, but she didn't do it, but that's her thing. But I knew that if I could do medical school, that my nieces and nephews with opportunities and things that my siblings and I provided for them, that somebody else would be interested. Plus, like I said, even with my patients, I ask how are you doing in school and try to provide experiences for my nieces and nephews when I was in Charleston. I kept them for a week or two in the summer so that they would have exposure to me so that they would know Aunt Gwen, because I wasn't up here.

Nzia Hall: Right.

Dr. Todd-Houston: As it is, they were able to remember learning how to swim when they were with me. Just doing different things, just creating experiences for them so all of that was important. The same thing

for why I kept my maiden name for that name recognition. I don't know how we got on that. Are we almost finished?

Nzia Hall: We're at the last question, the very, very last question. What advice would you give to current medical students who are Black?

Dr. Todd-Houston: Well – oh, yeah. Okay. Recognize that you haven't gotten into this position by yourself. Okay? That somewhere along the way somebody else had to be inspirational to you. Somebody else had to encourage you. Somebody else had to set an example for you. That it's important for you to do the payback for somebody because it was done for you and to appreciate how meaningful it has been for you to be where you are. That you are that because you stand on my shoulders and maybe somebody else's shoulders. You didn't do it by yourself. To recognize, for me, how important the Lord is in everything that I've done in life and to appreciate the fact that it wasn't me. It wasn't how big I am, but it was what the Lord's expectation was for me and how he provided me the opportunities that he afforded me to do what I've done. Ask the question again because I had another thought.

Nzia Hall: What advice you have for medical students that are Black?

Dr. Todd-Houston: Right. Okay. Have confidence in yourself. You have – if you need help, the medical school has help that you can use. Don't be afraid to use it, because you have the potential. The fact that you're there says that your potential is there, but it doesn't say that it's gonna be easy all of the time, because it's not easy all the time. Okay? Right! Okay? But recognize that those hard times that you have make you better for the next encounters that you have to endure. Does that make sense?

Nzia Hall: It does, it does.

Dr. Todd-Houston: It gives you a baseline. It gives you something to add on to so that you can say, okay. Here we come again, Lord. Here it comes again. I'm ready for it with your help. I'm ready for it because of what I've experienced in the past. Know that you are because there are many folks who would want you to think that you aren't because you are a student who is Black.

Nzia Hall: Yes.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Recognize that you are representing all of us. Okay?

Nzia Hall: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: When you become a physician, you want to be everybody's physician regardless to color because people don't get sick just on their color. If you look past the color, in anatomy we all have the same veins, arteries, heart, lungs. Under that pigmentation, there is no difference except for the struggle that we've had to be able to get to the point to recognize I'm looking at a cadaver. Me? You know?

Nzia Hall: Yeah!

Dr. Todd-Houston: That's where the difference is. The difference is you peel back that skin, a person is a person. When they are sick, I never encountered when I would work in the pediatric emergency room, I never encountered a parent who came in with a sick child who said, "I don't wanna see her. She's Black." All they wanted was for their child to be better. So, if you're going to become a neurosurgeon, all people are gonna want is for their brains to be better.

Nzia Hall: You've got it.

Dr. Todd-Houston: To be all right, okay? Have confidence in yourself. Don't let anybody push you back. Other people have struggles too. They just don't share them.

Nzia Hall: Right. Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Other people have struggles but they don't share them. They would have you to believe that everything is okey-doke.

Nzia Hall: And it's not.

Dr. Todd-Houston: And it's not. Why do we have people with mental health problems? Because they want you to think that everything is okey-doke when it's not. Like I said, as you're becoming a physician, you're becoming a physician for everybody. When you present yourself to your patients, you want them to get the feeling that you are there for them regardless to color, ethnicity, gender, whatever. People just wanna know that somebody cares enough about them to take care of them to make sure that they're gonna be okay.

Nzia Hall: Right.

Dr. Todd-Houston: When you present yourself, you wanna present yourself in that format. People will remember you, even if it's for a brief time. Not remember but they'll be thankful and be thoughtful of you and of

what you do, what your efforts. Sometimes, those efforts may not be as good as you need them to be because we're not perfect. So, sometimes when I'm trying to do a spinal tap, I'm confident that 90 some percent of the time when I hear the first pop as I'm doing their spinal tap that I have it, I'm good. But hey, there's that other percent of the time where, no. I might not be in the right position. My needle may not be going the right way.

Nzia Hall: Right.

Dr. Todd-Houston: I may have to do it again. At least I know that I'm gonna have to do it again. Then there's sometimes when I was starting IVs, we had to say, okay. Two times and then you need to let somebody else do it. Don't keep doing it. Don't have so much pride that you can't say, "Call Dr. So-and-so because this is my second time, and I can't do it." You're being considerate of your patient. It may make you feel that your ability is not where you want it to be, but whoever is observing you is saying, "She recognizes that she needed some help and she asked for it."

Nzia Hall: Right. Mm-hmm.

Dr. Todd-Houston: That makes sense?

Nzia Hall: That makes a whole lot of sense.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Okay. That's all I can think about right now.

Nzia Hall: That was great.

Dr. Todd-Houston: I'm tired of you.

Nzia Hall: We don't have any more questions. Thank you so much for your time, Dr. Houston. I'm gonna stop the recoding right now.

Dr. Todd-Houston: Okay.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 136 minutes