Interviewer: Okay. It looks like we are successfully recording now. So, I'd like to just start this conversation by hearing a little bit about where you come from. So, if you wouldn't mind sharing your — first of all your full name, and then your place and date of birth?

Dr. Ronald Williams: My name is Ronald Lynn Williams. My origin story starts with Brooklyn Jewish Hospital on June 21, 1950, at 2:52 a.m. my mother gave birth to me. We lived in — my first recollection of where we live was Marcy Avenue, which was in Bedford Stuyvesant. I don't remember a whole lot about Bedford Stuyvesant. Since this time, I was — I was a toddler when we moved to Brownsville, Brooklyn, into the Van Dyke Projects. And that's where really most of my early childhood experiences really stem from. It really shaped me, I think, in a way that it hasn't changed. Like I said — well, I was one of five boys and two girls. See, let me look at the questions because —

Interviewer: No. It’s okay. I can prompt you for sure.

Dr. Ronald Williams: Okay.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, let's just talk a little bit more about your family. What was your family like, and what was it like growing up with them?

Dr. Ronald Williams: Okay. I was one of five boys, two girls. Brownsville, Brooklyn was the projects. It was the hood. And just like the hood here, everywhere, there's a pecking order you have to — you have to survive. So, when we first got to the Van Dyke Projects, he tried to bully my family. I remember specifically, one time they were bullying my older brother, and I wasn't gonna stand for it. This other family who had several boys too. So, this is the truth. This is the bad part of things that I don't like. This feeling. I took off my roller skate, which was ball bearings at that time still, and I hit the bully in the head with it. And since then, they didn’t bully us anymore. But I didn’t become a bully. I could have become a bully, but I didn’t. You know? I mean, I was big enough, damn sure crazy enough. They wasn’t going to mess with the Williams. But anyway, that's enough of that. So, far is--on three it says--what was the question on three?

Interviewer: Yeah. So, what about — who was the most influential in your youth and how were they influential? Was it relatives, friends, church, teachers? What — what kind of shaped who you were?

Dr. Ronald Williams: Well, no one person was really most influential. But I do remember a fifth-grade teacher. I can’t remember her name now,

but she said something that was very important at the time that stuck with me somewhat, until now. She said, “what you're becoming, you're becoming now”. And as a young person growing up in Brownsville, I said, “we shouldn't have to live like this”. And I saw things that I thought were just — that could have been different that weren’t, and I wanted that. And so, that stuck with me. And when I could’ve hung out on the corner and drank wine with the guys. But I chose to go to the library. And I’d always joke and say, “that’s where the pretty girls are”.

Interviewer: See. There you go.

Dr. Ronald William: So, you put a positive spin on things. But anyway — it was kind of in a way I hung out, but I never was — had to be in the crowd. So.

Interviewer: That’s great.

Dr. Ronald Williams: I was independent from a young age, you know? My mother worked two jobs. My dad worked all the time. Kind of, at a young age I was very independent. And I was a hustler. I would — instead of jacking and robbing people, I would go to the big grocery store, the big supermarket, and just help people bring their groceries to their car. I wouldn't ask for anything, just whatever they gave me. People liked that you wanted to earn your money not just give me some — something to eat, you know? And I could buy with $25 — could buy me a pair of shoes and have lunch money left over. So, that’s what I did. It’s a young age, but — so, I guess I would have to say my fifth-grade teacher on question three.

Interviewer: Yeah, I love — I love that response. I love that saying that who you’re going to be, you’re becoming now.

Dr. Ronald Williams: You’re responsible for what you are in life. You can't just be a farmer. You got to just do it. Number four.

Interviewer: No. It’s great. Yeah. Did you have a family doctor that — or did you know other doctors?

Dr. Ronald Williams: No. But what I did see, and I didn't really quite understand it at the time. That most of the doctors in my hood from — if they were Black, they were either from Jamaica or Africa.

Interviewer: Okay.

Dr. Ronald Williams: And I’d always say, "hey, they can start training us”, you know? Black Americans, the indigenous Black, but they always want —

for some reason I felt like people of color from other countries were more readily accepted than I was. And I didn't really know why. And now I know.

Interviewer: Right?

Dr. Ronald Williams: I figured it out.

Interviewer: Well, is that is that something that you think motivated you when you decided to become a doctor?

Dr. Ronald Williams: Absolutely. I wanted to break the mold and bust the stereotype. I could. I went to Davidson.

Interviewer: I see — I see your shirt I see you're sporting the Davidson shirt.

Dr. Ronald Williams: At the time was only two Black Americans in my class. Me and another guy.

Interviewer: Wow.

Dr. Ronald Williams: So, a dedicated Confederate school that's named after a Confederate General. I don't know. I could have gone to places because Davidson came and recruited me. They came and recruited me. And when we left New York, Columbia University — I went to Peter Stuyvesant High School. I was one of the few people who was recruited to go to their former Brown school. And Columbia, before we left, had guaranteed me if I kept up my grades, a full ride.

Interviewer: Wow.

Dr. Ronald Williams: But my family was breaking up. So, that's a whole another story.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Dr. Ronald Williams: Coming from New York to Fayetteville, North Carolina, and reading the sign, Welcome to Klan Country. When I got the Fayetteville, there was only two schools. There was Senior High and E.E. Smith, the Black high school. Was — so, you had a choice at that time what school you wanted to go to. I chose to go to Fayetteville Senior High. You took a placement test. I play swing, everything. I'm not bragging about this. I want you to understand how — what created me. The principal called me to come to his office. Wanted to see who I was. Why? The anger. And I — that's the truth.

Interviewer: Yeah. Tell me — Tell me a little bit more about that. What was it like? I mean, I can't imagine the culture shift.

Dr. Ronald Williams: Well, it seemed like he was angry because I had already started the stuff they were — I mean, I went to Peter Stuyvesant High School, a very advanced high school. I couldn't help that I knew this stuff. And so, he was sort of angry and always, at that time, it seemed like I had a target on my back for a lot of things. And I'm not saying I was an angel because I was far from it. But the thing to not acknowledge me because I'm Black. It's as simple as that. That's happened all through my life. Really.

Interviewer: What made you choose that high school when you had the option?

Dr. Ronald Williams: It was — good question. I wanted to, again, excel in what they call "the" high school. And I guess I just was trying to prove a point. Same reason I went to Davidson is why I went to that high school. I guess. I did do — I had grades and stuff and I didn't make into honor society because I did something that I shouldn't have done. And so, I didn't have the honor, but I had the grades.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, let's talk a little bit about college. So, you said you graduated from Davidson. What year was that?

Dr. Ronald Williams: 1972.

Interviewer: 1972. Was — were finances an issue when you were choosing colleges?

Dr. Ronald Williams: Absolutely, because I had athletic scholarships from — offers from three different schools. And —

Interviewer: To what sport?

Dr. Ronald Williams: Football.

Interviewer: Football. Okay.

Dr. Ronald Williams: And I chose not to take those. And with Davison they didn't promise me anything, but what they did — they promised that if I chose Davidson, they guaranteed me if I got through Davidson, I could name the medical school of my choice, 90% chance and that wasn't — that was based on statistics. That's how great that school was for pre-med and pre-law. And I said, "well, I'll take that challenge". They gave me a grant and aid — work study. And I did

other things on my own my first year, but I became a **[inaudible] [11:37]** scholar. And so, that last three years I had full tuition, and board, and a little bit of money. Plus, tuition and boards not all that it takes to go — get through school. So, that helped a lot.

But it shows that even though you start on one track, and you think that your dreams are — you never know what's going to happen. Coming to North Carolina was a devastating thing in my life from Brooklyn. And from having been used by Columbia University and — in fact, my family was breaking up too. But it wasn't — I mean, it wasn't easy. It was very hard. Davidson was very hard on me.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, can you talk a little bit about sort of how you — it sounds like by the time you went to Davidson, you were already thinking that you wanted to be a physician. So, how did you start to consider medicine as a career and who started kind of pushing you to this?

Dr. Ronald Williams: I don't think any one person pushed me to it, but I had a pretty serious illness when I was 16. I had post streptococcal glomerulonephritis. And at the time, it was — it could lead to three or four different prognoses. But I started studying about that at that time and that kind of got me interested in medicine. Being in the hospital. I was in hospital for three weeks. And it was a lot different back then. They would put tubes over your bed to show you sedimentation rate. I didn't — I was very sick for about maybe a week, but the last two weeks I was — I just wheeled around in the little wheelchair, just looking at things. So, that got me, I guess, started.

And I can't say one person. But medicine it just — I was always fascinated by it.

Interviewer: Yeah. That's great. Were there — were there any enrichment programs for Black students at Davidson? I mean, I guess you said there's only — there were only two at the at the college. But was there any sort of program?

Dr. Ronald Williams: Only two in my class, but there were a total of, I think, five of us on campus. Five or six. And we started the Black Student Coalition, which still exists today. We were chartered members.

Interviewer: Wow. That's great.

Dr. Ronald Williams: But enrichment programs, I don't think specifically geared for Black students, but students that needed help always could get help

from different tutoring programs. I didn't — I didn't really participate in any of those, to tell you the truth. I just — I did pretty well on my own. I did have professors that thought they were fundamentalist though. I had — and I mean in the strictest sense of the word. There was one organic chemistry professor that said he was a fundamentalist and that's when I found out what the strict fundamentalism is in Christianity, in any religion. He fundamentally thought that I could not get an A in this class, even though I had the same — and you can look it up.

I had to go to the department head. I remember his name. He was very, very influential. Dr. Frederickson. And tell him exactly what I was experiencing. And I know he had — he had a challenge on his hands, but I ended up getting the grade I was supposed to get. And I had to speak up and that was hard, you know, with all that pressure.

Interviewer: Yeah. To have to advocate for yourself when there's a faculty member telling you that--. Yeah. Absolutely.

Dr. Ronald Williams: And there were other good folks, but that person — they still didn't really understand. I don't think people in general see another person unless they actually are in their shoes. How — of course, you could see the same thing and get two totally different projections from it, experiences from it.

Interviewer: Yeah. Absolutely. So, as you're finishing up at Davidson, what made you think about UNC? Why did you apply, and did you have people kind of pushing you there? What reputation did it have? Just, how did UNC enter the picture?

Dr. Ronald Williams: I was impressed with UNC. I only applied to three medical schools because of financial reasons. That was Northwestern. And I applied to Northwestern because I was interested in blood and at the time, Illinois had good hematology programs. And there were other schools in that area, but I applied to Duke and to Davidson. I got into both of them. I chose — I mean, I applied to Duke and Carolina and got into both of the medical schools. I chose Carolina because I just — after having been so much of a minority, I wanted to go where I felt like it was a little bit better situation. And plus, I had a brother who was an undergrad there and that helped. And so — but Duke got angry. They sent me a letter asking why I chose Carolina. They did.

Interviewer: The competition. It's still pretty fierce.

Dr. Ronald Williams: They were like, “hey do you understand that this is Duke?”

Interviewer: Wow.

Dr. Ronald Williams: You could have all this. All that’s going to be opened up if you go here. That wasn’t really my thinking at the time. So, I went to Carolina.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. Well, let's think a little bit then. I want to dig into your time at Carolina for sure. So —

Dr. Ronald Williams: Before we go to Carolina, can I say one thing?

Interviewer: Yeah. Absolutely.

Dr. Ronald Williams: One of the things that really was a saving grace for me was really literally going across the tracks and seeing the community of Davidson. The Black folks that really supported that college. They were — I had a family, the Lowry family, which took me in and really treated me like — it’s sort of similar to Colin Kaepernick, but not in the same way. Getting the feel that you belong. You know the story of Colin Kaepernick, Colin Kaepernick in Black and White.

Interviewer: I don't know I don't know the whole story. I know a little bit about him. But, tell me the story.

Dr. Ronald Williams: Well, he was raised by a White family, but he was adopted. And they didn’t see-- they couldn’t treat him like he wasn't different. And so, they were oblivious to a lot of the internal things that he was going through. That's kind of how I felt. I felt like I could really be myself across the tracks.

Interviewer: That's great that you were able to find that community to help support you during your time in Davidson. So, you moved to Chapel Hill. What was sort of your overall impression of UNC? Just if you had to kind of sum up things and then we'll get a little more granular.

Dr. Ronald Williams: I think you got a good education. But I think that as a — as a Black person coming from non-college parents--except my mother went to Fayetteville State Teachers College. I wasn't prepared for the things, the little nuances that happen at Carolina. One of the biggest ones was taking the national boards for credit. Didn’t know that when I took it that if I didn’t pay cash, it wouldn't count. That hurt. Yeah. That hurt. After your first two years of strict medicine,

strict book physiology, chemistry, and all that. You take the first part of your national boards. I took it and did well. But I found out when I graduated that it didn't count for me to get my license. So, I had to go back into that hit of those second-year students after having done four years of my hands on training and clinical work to deal with that strict really — Krebs cycles and —

Interviewer: Yeah. And nobody told you that? No one gave you that information up front.

Dr. Ronald Williams: Should have. Advisors should have been able to tell me that. Those are the little pitfalls the folks that don't come from backgrounds that have doctors or lawyers, whatever in the family, don't know. And that's still a problem, I think.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, what was it like to be one of a few Black people in your class? Do you remember how many others there were, and did you think about it a lot?

Dr. Ronald Williams: There were a lot! There were about 16.

Interviewer: Okay.

Dr. Ronald Williams: So, after coming from Davidson. And I know that — I think — if I might be mistaken, but outside of the historically Black medical schools, the three of them. UNC's the fourth largest graduate — producer of Black doctors in this country. In fact, I think that's a statistic that it's accurate.

Interviewer: Yeah. And we move a little bit on the scale each year. So, I can't quote for sure where we are, but it's definitely in the top 10 kind of always, so.

Dr. Ronald Williams: Always been. And people like, UNC? Yeah. Even though it's not a whole lot, but you need to have — you need to understand that — that's a school that has graduated a big number of Black physicians.

Interviewer: Yeah. Absolutely.

Dr. Ronald Williams: I always knew that.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, who were you closest to UNC? I mean, in terms of students, faculty, administrators. And what kind of — what formed those connections?

Dr. Ronald Williams: Now, as faculty members goes, I really wish I could remember his name? I think that it's George [inaudible]. He was a — he was like a — he lectured in a big hall, and he always would pique my interest in what he was talking about. I specifically remember him talking about breast cancer and talking about different things. And I kind of wondered, would people taking oral contraceptives increase their risk of breast cancer? There's some way intuitively, you know? I was impressed with him. There was another doctor did a — gosh, it was so long ago. But even with some of my lecturers.

Now so far, as students. I didn't really do a whole lot of associating with the students on campus except for my brother's crowd. And they were very instrumental on change at Carolina undergrad. They, there were three of them, started the Upendo Lounge, which became — what is it now? It became part of the social network at Carolina and still is there. I can't remember some of the names, what they call themselves, but they did have — it's a student union. They had a section that was dedicated to their music and stuff. And that's great.

Going back to the professors. There's one doctor that really did influence me a lot. His name was Dr. Dalldorf. I almost thought about becoming a pathologist because of him. He was a pathologist and I worked one summer with him where we really saw some interesting things. We saw — I saw — the first time I ever saw maggots just everywhere. The plane crashed. It had been missing for a long time and they brought them to the morgue, of course, and we had to put on our boots to go see what we could find. That was an experience I won't forget. That's what made me realize, no, I don't.

Interviewer: Maybe I'll think of something else.

Dr. Ronald Williams: He was very good. There's several. It's hard to remember, but Carolina had good things and bad things, but overall, good.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well, so, you talked about the challenge obviously with — with the board exam, which I can imagine — I can't — I can only imagine how—

Dr. Ronald Williams: Because I didn't pass the second time, I took the first part in the national boards even though I passed well thinking that —

Interviewer: Well, you hadn't you hadn't been in those courses in two years.

Dr. Ronald Williams: Yeah. I took FLEX and passed it the first time, 75.6. Anyway, that was —

Interviewer: Did you ever doubt your own abilities as a med student, or can you tell me a time that you either felt unwelcome or that you — you didn't belong?

Dr. Ronald Williams: I — I've always had something. Still to this day I have doubts about me, myself. This has always been something that I guess I have to deal with. More fear than doubts, I guess. Because I always push my own self trying to make sure I do the right thing. But most of the time I think that was a problem. Worrying too much.

Interviewer: Yeah. I know a lot of times in higher ed, we talk about imposter syndrome. And we talk about it especially as it applies to first generation students. Students who haven't had those kinds of opportunities.

Dr. Ronald Williams: Yeah. Because even my own grandfather. I remember when I graduated, something I'll never forget. He asked me when am I gonna start looking like a doctor? And I just wondered, what does a doctor look like?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Dr. Ronald Williams: So, I've come to accept that no matter how much I know, and how much I tell people, it's still, even my own family won't believe it, until they hear it from someone else. Especially if they're White. That's how I feel.

Interviewer: Thank you for — for sharing that. I really appreciate your honesty there.

Dr. Ronald Williams: I'm not good on bravado and stuff, but inside I still feel very little and afraid.

Interviewer: What helped — what kept you steady? Kind of, moving on? Where did you —

Dr. Ronald Williams: Steady?

Interviewer: Yeah. What kept you steady? What kept you kind of resolute in the face of all of that?

Dr. Ronald Williams: I guess one of the things is knowing that I had a good — I was — I had a good wife who always could believe in me and also my

belief in God. And what will — so, this is — it's something you're born with. That you have. If you see the miracle of everything around, you gotta know that this — there's something above man. It's simple. And it's not religion. Because this one God and how we look at God is our contravention. We all are human beings. God created us, not man. That kept me going.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well, that certainly sounds like it was a powerful — power influence. And you speak about your wife and it's — I'm so happy that you had — had your faith and that you had that — that support. So, that's great.

Dr. Ronald Williams: And that's still there.

Interviewer: Yeah. Absolutely. So, when you transitioned out of school — when you graduated and went to residency, how did that — where did you go? And how did that compare to UNC? Was it at UNC?

Dr. Ronald Williams: No. Actually, it was not. Let me see. Well, my post — my first post-grad experience was this great surgical internship at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit.

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Dr. Ronald Williams: Yeah. And I definitely was not prepared for that at all. They had five general surgeon services. It was a pyramid system. And it was every other night on call. I think that's against the law right now. In today's — in today's — that's actually against the law.

Interviewer: Is it? It seems like it might compromise patient outcomes to have people on call every other night.

Dr. Ronald Williams: In spite of all that, I wouldn't trade it for the world. I'd be more aware of what I was coming into, but I — that experience was something that I'll never forget.

Interviewer: Tell me — tell me more about it. What was it like going to Detroit? I mean, again, that's another — you've gone from Brooklyn to North Carolina to Detroit. Like you made some big changes.

Dr. Ronald Williams: Detroit was really the wild, wild west. It was — Henry Ford is still the mecca. It is on Grand Boulevard. And believe me, Grand Boulevard can be something, especially on holidays getting from where I stayed. My family didn't come with me that first year. They were still in North Carolina, and I stayed in a hotel called the

Golden Key. At that time, they didn't have the housing that they have now for the new — they have this luxury building. It's a couple of buildings, but — and it was a — it was kind of this mistake. I had my car stripped there one day, but it was something.

I mean, you really saw a lot of things. All different kinds of stuff. But I don't think many places where you can experience that kind of trauma and medicine, just everything. But he had no life though. So far as — I'm kind of glad my family wasn't there the first year because I was always working. It's the — you're really imbued into medicine. But they're also — you also — I was an outsider. I was never gonna make it there.

Interviewer: What do you — what do you mean by that?

Dr. Ronald Williams: Most of the other people live from all over the world. First of all, they had sponsors. They had doctors that were supporting them. They knew the steps that they were going to take to get where they wanted. They were sponsored. And basically, I see now they — I'm left-handed, I'm short, and I'm Black. Places — during a gallbladder operation. It's simple. If you let a left-handed person do it the right way. I had to stand on the right-side table. Put my hands — when I can stand on the left side of the table, go straight in. And the instruments are all made for right-handed people. Come on. Surgery's a trip. I had to learn how to use my hemostats backwards instead of — but I still — I did.

Interviewer: Yeah. That is amazing. As a fellow left-handed person, that's right.

Dr. Ronald Williams: I knew I liked you for a reason.

Interviewer: That's right. You know, I think it's a great metaphor — it's a great metaphor for a lot of things too, right? That how would you expect people to be successful when you're designing tools for somebody else, right?

Dr. Ronald Williams: When something's precise. When you gotta use it. What can you guys — why can't — don't you see I have to go in there. I takeout the gallbladder backwards. But I did a few and I didn't have a lot of blood loss. Maybe I did, maybe I didn't.

Interviewer: Good to hear. Good to hear. Was there any particular moment when you felt, kind of either in your residency or later on, but when you really just felt like you came into your own as a medical professional? Where you — you got comfortable with what you were doing, and it just really felt like you — you owned it.

Dr. Ronald Williams: Well, for different spurts of time when I got out of — when I -- I did not finish my surgical residency. I had a lot of experience in the emergency room at the time. I had a — I had an obligation to pay back. So, I chose the public health service instead of going into the Army or Navy as officer or anything. But paying back my public health service time was a great — well, I felt like I did a lot of accomplishments. I started out in a place — in a clinic called West Louisville Medical — no, Park DuValle Medical Center, which really wasn't a medical center. It was a clinic that was actually made into the projects where it was. And it was a community health center, but they used it more like providing emergency care.

Interviewer: Wow. I'm sorry, where was this? Was in Detroit still or —

Dr. Ronald Williams: No. This was in Kentucky. Louisville, Kentucky. It was called Park DuValle. It was the first one. Anyway, we actually had some gunshot wounds come in there sometimes, which is not totally — not supposed to happen. Well, I was there for a time, but my accomplishments — what I want to say is from that community center, eleven more centers came to Louisville. Not when I was there, but from that beginning. One of the Kennedys, I forget which one, came to actually commend Park DuValle as being **[inaudible] [37:52]**.

When I when I came back not too long ago, I saw how many clinics have grown from that. And that was really great. Of course, at that time that area was really underserved, Louisville. And also, while I was in the public health service, I would — paying back my time in underserved communities. That's how I got to Wilson, North Carolina. And that's where a lot — I actually — Wilson was a tough nut to crack. Now, I was one, not the first, but one of the first permanent Black doctors in the emergency room there. The emergency department, it was more of a room at a time, but now it's grown — but my point is that it — I really ran that.

And it was — Wilson was — is still a redneck town, but there were times when I thought I wasn't going to make it because folks would just say, "I ain't gonna be seen by — ", but there was a nurse there named Jane Lamm and she was just as tough as nails. And — but she was a good woman. And she saw that I was a good doctor. And because of that, I think, it came to be that I really ran that department, and they respected me. And so, that was great for — like I said, I helped establish a community health center here

too. That's another story, but that's — those are the few things that —

Interviewer: Yeah. Those are great. I love hearing about just kind of your passion and experience in community health. That's wonderful. Who would you say were your most influential career mentors? And what were — what were kind of the big things you took away from them?

Dr. Ronald Williams: Well, I guess career-wise, back in medical school it was the professors I talked about. But in Kentucky, even though he was a surgeon, his name was Dr. Moses he — he liked other things, not just surgery — he was influential in me thinking about different things other than just surgery. And he did have me. I did assist him in some cases. So, it's not — was only. So, that was an influence too, but he had influenced me to buy my wife her first piano. Going over to Indiana where he lived. He lived across the bridge. The bridge from Kentucky to Indiana. It's one side it's Indiana and the other side it's Kentucky. What was the name of that? New Albany, Indiana. We bought that piano, and she still has it. It's a beautiful piano. He played — he played with — yeah. Beautiful baby grand. So, that was — that was a — I don't know. Just different people.

There was a — in my younger years, and this wasn't medicine there, but teaching me to work and have a work ethic was a Jehovah's Witness. And he managed janitorial services at Fayetteville called — I forget the first name. Tobin Janitorial Service, but it was kind of —

Interviewer: Yeah. No. I think that that worked out and clearly served you well.

Dr. Ronald Williams: He helped me a lot. And my uncle ran a restaurant and worked me to death, but it's — they taught me — they taught me good habits because I'll see today that we're not teaching that in school at all. We're teaching people to be lazy and not — expect something for nothing — not for nothing, but just something to be given to them. And that's bad because I know for a fact it's having a very, very negative effect. All of — this whole culture. America's got to repent. That's all I got to say.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. So —

Dr. Ronald Williams: Oh, and there's one other doctor when I was at Columbus County in Whiteville. Work in my emergency medicine payback community. There was a doctor Ogden who was an orthopedic

surgeon, and I did a lot of work with him too. He was a hunter. I mean, he was a good old boy, but he was a good human being. I remember going to his house and having some bear stew one time. It was okay.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah.

Dr. Ronald Williams: But he was really he — I think he helped me a lot. I did spend 17 years at Columbus and a plaque was put up in honor of me. There, so far as, I don't think — I forget the — A son. The mother came in having a heart attack and I was on call, but everybody worked. The whole department got a commendation. So, that was a highlight.

Interviewer: Yeah. Absolutely. Gosh. I mean, it's so interesting, just hearing about all the different things that you've done and the different places that you've been. You've clearly had a fascinating career.

Dr. Ronald Williams: Just one more place. At the end of my career. I spent 10, part time, 10 years in the correctional — North Carolina Correctional Services. In prison. So, I see so many discrepancies. Now, all the dots are falling together. How systemically and systematically things have happened. And we blame a lot of — we gotta blame everything. Now, it's not — look how wild these guys are — they have no discipline. There's a reason for that. It's not by chance. And so, that bothers me a lot. It still does.

Interviewer: Yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. So then, sort of as we think about legacy and think about kind of passing — passing along. How would you say that being a Black physician matters or has mattered to you in your workplace, in your family, and in your community?

Dr. Ronald Williams: Well, for one thing, people still are gonna look at you and they try to critique things that you do more so then maybe some other professions. But at the same time, we — it's a group of people in this country, different ethnic groups. Black people — we have a lot of self-hatred that we can't quite explain. It's kind of contorting. So, you still have gotta be verified by a higher source, but you are our representative. In the medical field? Yes and no. It's hard to explain, but what-- I would say this. So far as the students that are present — are presently in medical school, they should think about things other than medicine to try to be as well versed in the liberal arts if you can.

I've — I believe if you're gonna go to a four-year school, at least have some type of liberal arts and I believe that medical ethics should be more stressed and the history of medicine. The whole history of medicine. You need to know where medicine comes from to understand where it's going. So, those are a couple of things. And I believe that's what the students today should be doing. Really think about it. Not just getting so focused into technology first, but it's so much information, it's hard to say that it's powerful that both things to happen.

Interviewer: Yeah. No. I couldn't — I couldn't agree with you more. I think that those are certainly things that should be prioritized in medical education and in medical school. I think I completely agree with you on those. How has your experience helped you think about how — how we can better support students from underrepresented or from marginalized backgrounds?

Dr. Ronald Williams: One thing, I know curriculum's already jam packed, but first year students that don't have a professional background, like their daddy was a surgeon. And he took you into the operating room when you were four years old and showed you the instruments. We need to have a little bit of business. The business aspect of medicine taught and how — because I had no idea about a lot of things. And I didn't have a whole lot of help, at least, everyone networks now. Where you can plug in. We need sort of — in a language just a whole — If you've got somebody coming from say when they've really never been outside of their community more or less, there's faith. Or never been to Manhattan. You live in Brooklyn. I ain't going outside. You gotta give some kind of eye-opening experience about the business sense of — aspect of things. Otherwise, kind of lost without that.

Interviewer: Yeah. If they don't understand sort of what the expectations are going to be, how can you live up to those — those kinds of things? It's — I think, sometimes we call it now, the hidden curriculum. The things that like nobody tells you is going to be — that you're going to be tested on and judged on, but you are still. So, it's not the formal curriculum. It's not what's in the syllabus, but it's how — the things you have to know. All right, so, just a couple more questions and then I will let you get back to your Wednesday. Over your entire career what is — what are you the proudest of?

Dr. Ronald Williams: Well, it actually wouldn't be directly related to medicine. It would be related to wrestling. Because I feel like that when you — when a young man is in his formative years, wrestling is a sport that makes you be introspective because even though it's a team sport,

the team can cheer you on. When you're out there on the mat, it's you. And you got nobody, but yourself to be proud of or to blame. And it shows you the character of a person quick. A bully is gonna — what he finds out, he can't just bully. If he gets beat by somebody with better skill than him, not shake his hand, and run off the mat.

And first few times, that's okay, but you get to him, tell him, to get better, you got to learn why you made those mistakes and got to improve. And that's when you're gonna feel good about yourself. So, it helps build character and, like I said, these young people going and killing people. And you see a good coach, that wouldn't be happening. I think the closest, he's gonna be this, he's gonna be that he's gonna make this kind of money. That's not the point of sports. It's not really the point. And that's okay. Nothing wrong with that, but you've got to teach character. And that's why I feel like some of the people have come back to me and told me what I meant to them. That means more than anything. How I shaped their lives at a young age.

Interviewer: That's great. Thank you. And then the very last question, what advice would you give to current Black medical students?

Dr. Ronald Williams: I'd say it's just a new day. I think awareness is better. I think if you stay positive and stay focused on what you're supposed to be about in your life. Your purpose. That you're gonna make it. You're gonna make it differently than when I was coming through. Because it's so much more open, and so much more knowledge about the world than when kids were coming up — or students were coming up when I was your age, in your position.

Interviewer: Great. Well, thank you for that. I'm gonna go ahead and stop the recording.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 53 minutes