

Dr. Necochea: Okay. I am now recording. Today is Thursday, October 13th of 2022. And my name is Raúl Necochea. I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Social Medicine at the UNC School of Medicine. And I'm speaking to Dr. Uril Greene, UNC School of Medicine Class of 1978.

Dr. Greene: Right.

Dr. Necochea: Welcome, Dr. Greene. Thank you for talking to us as part of the UNC School of Medicine Black Alumni Experience Project.

Dr. Greene: Yes. Now part of the – you say it's 1978, but I was in the class of '77.

Dr. Necochea: Oh.

Dr. Greene: I had a break, and I graduated in December. So, my diploma still says '77, but it's December of '77.

Dr. Necochea: Okay. Thank you for the correction. Well, let's go back a little bit to the beginning, and would you please tell us where you were born and when?

Dr. Greene: I was born in Kinston, North Carolina, which is a town on the east coast of North Carolina about 100 miles from Chapel Hill. My family's farm is in Trenton. Both my grandparents were tobacco farmers in Trenton North Carolina, which is about 20 miles from Kinston. So, the nearest hospital to be born in was in Kinston even though we didn't live in Kinston. Our family lived in Trenton. My dad was Army, and he was in the service. So, my mom and I were living with my grandparents at the time I was born.

Dr. Necochea: What year was that when you were born?

Dr. Greene: 1962.

Dr. Necochea: And so, you grew up mostly with your mom and your maternal grandparents?

Dr. Greene: No, I'd say mostly with my parents. My dad was Army, but I spent all my summers at my grandparents' farms. And we were stationed over in Okinawa for two years. So, I lived two years of my life in Okinawa with my dad and my mom over there. He did like six months in Korea till the end of the Korean Conflict, that last six months. And then his next assignment was Okinawa, Japan. They moved the troops back from Korea after that and families were

allowed to come over. So, I've got a younger brother that was actually born in Japan. So, yeah. But once we got back from there, I was about three or four years old. We spent almost all of my summers in Trenton, North Carolina on the farms, so I considered myself a farm kid even though I really wasn't raised on a farm. I was a military kid – brat.

Dr. Necochea: Right.

Dr. Greene: Yeah.

Dr. Necochea: So, when you were then about three-four years old, you moved back to the United States.

Dr. Greene: Right.

Dr. Necochea: And you stayed put after that?

Dr. Greene: My dad was assigned. We lived in California for a year or two. He was assigned to an army base just north of The Presidio in California. And then we were out at Fort Hood in Texas for a couple years. And then he got an assignment to do some training with the Marines as an instructor there so he could be close to home. It was only like a two-hour drive from Parris Island in South Carolina to the family farm in Trenton, North Carolina.

So, we were living back on the farm again, and he was commuting during the week to South Carolina and working and coming home on the weekends. So, I was all over. I used to tell kids when I was in middle school I was from Texas because that was a cool place to be from even though I only lived there for two years. It was a military base. So, that was kinda my upbringing was split between military life and farm life.

Dr. Necochea: When you were growing up between these two different settings, the farm life and the military life, who did you think was – who did you consider most influential in your youth, relatives or friends, school teachers, church?

Dr. Greene: In my upbringing?

Dr. Necochea: Uh-huh.

Dr. Greene: All the above. We went to church regularly. My mom and my dad are both members of a community church there in Trenton. They had been there all their lives. And so, when we were there, we

went to church every Sunday. And, then, growing up, my school teachers were influential. And, then, family, I've got – all the men in my family all went into the military. So, I got an uncle who's a fighter pilot who I would always look up to. I thought he could walk on water when I was growing up. And, then, a couple school teachers that are aunts and uncles. So –

Dr. Necochea: Was there a physician in the family, or was there a physician nearby that you knew?

Dr. Greene: No. My mom's a nurse, so that was my medical – she was the medical draw. And I have an uncle that was up in Baltimore that was a physician, but I never really knew him directly. Yeah.

Dr. Necochea: But your mom was.

Dr. Greene: Yeah. My mom was a nurse, yeah. So –

Dr. Necochea: Where did she work?

Dr. Greene: She was working with the hospitals on the military bases early on. And then she worked at Cherry Hospital, which is actually a mental hospital there in Goldsboro, North Carolina –

Dr. Necochea: Yeah.

Dr. Greene: – when my dad got out of service. That's where she retired from.

Dr. Necochea: The Cherry Hospital. I know the Cherry Hospital. When you were a little bit older, where did you go to high school?

Dr. Greene: By then, my dad was out of the military. My mom was kind of tired of traveling, and he was tired of traveling, too. And the State of North Carolina had a program where you could take your military time and enroll it into the state's retirement system, so he took advantage of that. And that's how we wound up in Goldsboro, North Carolina, which was only like an hour's drive from Trenton where both sides of my family are from.

Dr. Necochea: Right.

Dr. Greene: So –

Dr. Necochea: And your mom went to work at the Cherry Hospital. And what did your dad do?

Dr. Greene: My dad was a little bit of everything. He had a band for a while. He had been a musician when he was in high school, so that was like a dream he had always had. He had a band. He worked for the state. He worked for the hospital system also. Back then, the mental health system had – I forget what they call them. They're just like different kind of compounds for inpatient housing in the psychiatric patients, that sort of thing, actually stayed in the middle of the medical facilities. And with his military background, he became almost like a dorm supervisor. There were like three or four dorms out there at Cherry Hospital. And then he worked for the state also doing survey – was a survey contractor going out and surveying land.

Dr. Necochea: What was high school like for you in Goldsboro?

Dr. Greene: Got there just as the schools were starting to integrate, so I went to an all-Black middle school. That would've been the – I don't even know what grade I was in now – 7th-8th. And then the schools integrated in '69. And I went to 10th grade at the Goldsboro High School. It was the first big integrated school.

Dr. Necochea: Wow.

Dr. Greene: And that was kind of – for me, it wasn't that big of a deal because I had been – in the military, you go to mixed schools already.

Dr. Necochea: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Greene: So, I had done all that. It wasn't that big of a deal, but it was a big deal for the community. So...but we started it off.

Dr. Necochea: Can you tell me a little bit about that, about this integration being a big deal in the community where you were? What did you hear, for example?

Dr. Greene: Well, there was a lot of – what I saw is – you're 15 and 16 years old. You don't really get politics at that age, but you felt that there was them and there was us. And there were these camps, and the one camp had all the money and all the wealth and all the control. And your camp didn't have anything, but you were busting into the system. And you had to prove yourself. Every day was a challenge. Same way with medical school. You always felt like somebody was trying to – “I got you” moment, assure that you really shouldn't be there or you really weren't smart enough or you really weren't clever enough or you really weren't rich enough or you really weren't cultured enough to be there.

- Dr. Necochea: Mm-hmm.
- Dr. Greene: But then, as a kid, you just had your own groups that you hung out with. And I had some White friends that I hung out with, especially on the wrestling team and the basketball team that I played and in the band. But 90 percent of my closest friends were all Black because you didn't have to play the "got ya" moment with them.
- Dr. Necochea: Mm-hmm. Right. The "got ya" moment.
- Dr. Greene: Right.
- Dr. Necochea: I understand. Yeah.
- Dr. Greene: That's the best way I can explain it. It was like – I wasn't afraid to be there. It was just that I felt like I was always – there was never a moment where I felt like – There were a few professors, but it didn't feel like they were there to help me. They were there to do their job but catch me and document my flaws as best they could.
- Dr. Necochea: Right.
- Dr. Greene: Yeah.
- Dr. Necochea: When you were in high school, were you more or less set on going to college?
- Dr. Greene: Oh, yeah. I just wanted to be a doctor or a veterinarian. I was very into biology since the sixth grade. My mom said I had fit one day going through a department store when I was in the third grade, and they had a microscope there that I had seen a microscope – we had used a microscope in elementary school, and I had to have it. She put it on layaway because she couldn't afford it and got it for me for Christmas.
- Dr. Necochea: Oh, sweet.
- Dr. Greene: Yeah. And I just thought that was the most fascinating thing to look under a drop of pond water and see microorganisms swimming around in there.
- Dr. Necochea: Were you – so, close to finishing high school then, you began the whole process of applying to different places? Tell me a little bit about what that was like.

- Dr. Greene: Applying to college?
- Dr. Necochea: Yeah.
- Dr. Greene: I don't know.
- Dr. Necochea: Was it stressful? Was it easy?
- Dr. Greene: No. Actually, it wasn't that stressful because I just applied to about 20 colleges and assumed that I'd get into one.
- Dr. Necochea: Did you say 20?
- Dr. Greene: Yeah, there was some kind of program back then where you could – you pay for 5 and then they would sponsor you for another 15.
- Dr. Necochea: Oh.
- Dr. Greene: And I remember it was very cheap to go – it was almost the same thing to apply to five as it was to apply to 20.
- Dr. Necochea: Wow.
- Dr. Greene: I applied to the ones that I – the two or three that I wanted to go to, and I got the second one that I wanted to go to. I wanted to go to Chapel Hill, and I wanted to go to East Carolina. And I initially got accepted to Carolina as an undergrad, but I went to East Carolina undergrad because they gave me a wrestling scholarship. And that solved some of the finances.
- Dr. Necochea: Right. That was gonna be my next question. I mean, how did you pay for it? I get that it was a little bit less expensive then, but still, it's not free.
- Dr. Greene: Yeah. When I put it in terms of inflation, going to college was a big chunk of my parent's annual income. And that's how I measured things. What did my parents make, and how big a chunk of that would they have to divide up between the – so, basically, four of us going to college at the same time. I've got a brother that's two years younger than me, and then there's twin boys that were two years behind them. So, in a span of four years, my dad was putting four kids through college.
- Dr. Necochea: Ooh.
- Dr. Greene: So, it was hurting a lot. So, the wrestling scholarship was a big

decision-maker for where I went to school. It turns out East Carolina at that time, had one of the best pre-med programs in the country. I didn't know that at the time, but it did.

Dr. Necochea: What did you like the most about being at ECU?

Dr. Greene: It was high school all over again as far as socially. I had my clique of kids that I hung out with and friends that I've kept up with over the years.

Dr. Necochea: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Greene: But it was traditionally in Science, and Humanities were big at East Carolina. So, it was a crowd of hippies almost.

Dr. Necochea: Oh.

Dr. Greene: I'd say about 40 percent of the students were from out of state, from up north. Somehow or another, East Carolina had become known to kids up north, and they were like, "It was a good school with a good reputation that was cheap in the south." And so, I didn't feel the southern politics as much at East Carolina because so many of the kids were from up north. And they didn't have that same politics. Their parents didn't have that same politics. High school was like going to a school where 90 percent of the people were – I hope you're not a Trumper – but Donald Trumbers.

Dr. Necochea: No, I'm not.

Dr. Greene: And that be the best way to describe it. It was just like the town was that mindset.

Dr. Necochea: Right. And Greenville – what was Greenville like back then?

Dr. Greene: It was a college town. I've never had problems with the town itself. The locals didn't seem to be part of the activity of the town. There was Greenville, the locals, which didn't interact with Greenville, the people associated with the university.

Dr. Necochea: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Greene: And the university people who were educated, more liberal, you know, academic types, and the locals were really just not part of the everyday lifestyle.

Dr. Necochea: When you were – so, you tell me you were really into biology and keen to either go into medicine or veterinarian school. How did

that work out in college? Were you kinda straight as an arrow into that still, or did you stray?

Dr. Greene: No. By the time I got to college, I was set on becoming a doctor. I had settled on being a physician by the time I was in 11th grade. I was just talking about when I was in the eighth-ninth grade. I knew that I was gonna do something along those lines, veterinary medicine, biology research, or physician. And there was a Black doctor in town in Goldsboro that I would talk to every now and then. And, actually, my dream in the 11th grade was to come back to Goldsboro and take over his practice, which never happened. You know, just a kid's dream. I would say, "Oh, I'm gonna come back and work with Dr. Whitaker and work in his office." And just not having a clue how life really works.

Dr. Necochea: A moment ago you also told me that you didn't know this but ECU turned out to have a really solid enrichment program for pre-medical students.

Dr. Greene: Right.

Dr. Necochea: Did you eventually find out about it?

Dr. Greene: Well, at first, I remember being in line. Back then it was for computer enrollment and stuff. You had to get in line, and you get in the line of the courses you wanted to take. And I was standing in line, and I was talking to a couple other kids that was signing up for biology courses. And they were saying there was a pre-med club getting started, did I wanna join? I said, "Yeah, I could probably go. I don't know how much time I got to be going to meetings and stuff, but I do that." But it turned out to be a wealth of information and a source of what I learned. And through the pre-med club, I found out that they can help you with strategizing, getting into medical school and what you needed to do. And, you know, what school requires what.

Dr. Necochea: Wow. That is very helpful. I mean, just knowing how to navigate those applications.

Dr. Greene: Right.

Dr. Necochea: Yeah.

Dr. Greene: And what courses to take. I know I remember just thinking it was a big wealth of information was to know that some schools valued math more than they valued foreign languages because everything

I had read said you had to learn Latin and all that. And I said, “Well, I’m not strong in languages.” I lived all over the world. My mom said I spoke a little Japanese when I was a baby. I don’t even remember it. And I never learned any of the other languages in my childhood. And so, I said, “That’s gonna be my weak spot trying to get into medical school.” And then I found out that they would substitute foreign language for math. So, I majored in math. I had enough math classes. I took Advance Calculus in college. And my real reason for going that direction was I was good at math, and I wasn’t good in foreign languages. For me as an individual, that was a wonderful tip.

Dr. Necochea: You know, speaking of coursework that you were good at and professors who helped teach those courses, do you remember anyone in particular at ECU that helped you that you felt you could go to?

Dr. Greene: My chemistry professor and my organic chemistry professor. They were just geniuses, and I just felt like I could talk with them for hours. I don’t even remember their names now. Geez. It was Sullivan – her name was Miss Sullivan.

Dr. Necochea: Did you meet many African American faculty?

Dr. Greene: No. At East Carolina, very few. I had like one teacher that was there. She was – we had a speech course, and she taught that. There were not very – I’d say less than one percent of the faculty was African American at that time at East Carolina.

Dr. Necochea: And, when you were, I guess, getting close to the end of your college career and you were thinking about your next step, were you keen to apply right away to medical school or wait a little bit?

Dr. Greene: No. I rushed right into it. I felt like I was on a roll. I had taken Honors Chemistry, Honors Math, Honors Calculus, Honors BioChem. And I said, “I don’t know what I’m doing right, but it’s all hitting just right, and I’m not gonna stop.” So, I just figured I could apply right away. I think I was the youngest guy in my class. I was 21 when I started medical school.

Dr. Necochea: Wow.

Dr. Greene: But I was afraid of money, too. I was afraid that – I had a little money from my wrestling thing, and that lasted a year and a half. But, after the year and a half, I couldn’t do the wrestling and the Organic Chemistry and all that. It was just too much. And I had to

– plus a guy that was a state champ for the State of Florida in my weight class came there. He was my sparring partner. I said, “My spots gonna be gone soon anyway.”

Dr. Necochea: Right.

Dr. Greene: And I started getting serious. Wrestling was my kid dream. My other dream was to be a professional wrestler.

Dr. Necochea: Really?

Dr. Greene: Yeah. You know, go to the Olympics or something like that or become the W – the World Wrestling Federation was the – WWF was a big thing back then. And people were coming out of college and going in and going wrestling with them, so –

Dr. Necochea: Wow.

Dr. Greene: – that was one of my pipe dreams at that time also, but –I was a good college wrestler, but I wasn’t that level of a wrestler. And I decided, “Okay, you gotta pick one.” I can’t be a doctor and a wrestler, too.

Dr. Necochea: I mean, it’s just really incredible, right, that such different paths that one can think of when one is at that age.

Dr. Greene: Oh, yeah.

Dr. Necochea: Medicine versus showmanship almost.

Dr. Greene: Right. Well, I mean, like I said, when I went off to college, I was 18 years old, and then I finished college at 21. So, I went through about three renditions of my future in about two years. I even considered being a pilot. I have an uncle that was a fighter pilot, and I have a cousin that was a fighter pilot. And I said, “If they can do it, I can do it.” Then I found out my vision wasn’t that good, so I couldn’t do it.

Dr. Necochea: Right. Yeah. So, you were applying almost right away. And tell me a little bit about where you applied for medical school.

Dr. Greene: I applied to all the North Carolina schools. I applied to a couple schools in Texas because I had lived there before. I think I applied to Baylor and UC Texas, UW. And then I just randomly applied to a couple other schools. I applied to – I don’t even remember where – I applied to a couple Ivy League schools, but I don’t which one,

if it was Harvard just to see what would happen, you know.

Dr. Necochea: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Greene: But as soon as I got accepted to Carolina, I took the acceptance.

Dr. Necochea: Do you remember about North Carolina if anyone encouraged you or discouraged you from applying here?

Dr. Greene: Not directly, no. I mean, I had a biology professor who wanted me to go to East Carolina because East Carolina was just starting their medical school that next year.

Dr. Necochea: Oh.

Dr. Greene: And I did apply there, but it was so new that even though I knew some of the professors there I wasn't sure what was gonna happen with the school, if they were gonna get the funding for the school, if it would last. And, then, when I got accepted to Carolina, that was like, "Okay."

Dr. Necochea: Right.

Dr. Greene: Yeah.

Dr. Necochea: Did you get into ECU?

Dr. Greene: Yeah, I got into ECU also. Yeah.

Dr. Necochea: Do you remember at the time what was the reputation of the UNC School of Medicine?

Dr. Greene: Well, I mean, it was a kid's version. I mean, I still considered myself a kid at 21. But it was a kid's version of reputation. The reputation was that they were a fantastic medical facility on par with anything else in North Carolina. I've had family members who had gone there to be treated and – they had a good reputation as far as I knew from a medical standpoint. But in terms of being a teaching facility, I had no clue really.

Dr. Necochea: You know, I was looking at some of the information that we have about alumni from the UNC School of Medicine in '77 and '78. It looks like there were quite a number of African American applicants who got in, especially people who graduated in '78. But I don't really have a good sense of how many people were accepted in total. Do you remember how big your cohort was when

you started?

Dr. Greene: I remember there was – the class was 110 students, and 20 of us were Black. We were the biggest class ever. There had never been a class with more than two or three Blacks in it before then. So, we were the big wave of Blacks that came in.

Dr. Necochea: Yeah.

Dr. Greene: And part of it was due to integration had been like three or four years before. And the schools had started opening up. Like I said, they really – even though there was no written policy that they wouldn't accept Blacks. They just wouldn't. You had to walk on water to get in.

Dr. Necochea: Yeah. That's something – yeah. I have heard about this that prior to the mid-70s, it was just known, right, whether there was data or not that this place would only admit like one person every year who was not White.

Dr. Greene: Right. Right. Exactly. And everybody else, there was something wrong with you. You literally had to be – like I said, be able to walk on water to get in. And that was an issue that we knew of. And you gotta remember the 70s, there was a big push to say, "Okay. Show me why not. And tell me why I can't come here, and prove that I'm not capable." And so, we felt like we were pioneers. We didn't go there with anybody – expecting anybody to help us with anything. It was like we were the other.

Dr. Necochea: Yeah. At the time, I mean, as you said a moment ago, you were a kid. You were early 20s.

Dr. Greene: Right.

Dr. Necochea: Did it register the fact that this was a really large increase in the representation of African Americans in the student body?

Dr. Greene: Oh, yeah. We felt that. We knew that very much so. We knew the politics, but we – it's kinda hard to put it into perspective. We knew that probably 90 percent of us were only there because of the bigger push from – I don't know another way to say it – the Black power movement at that time. That without that pushing us, they would've found some reason not to let us in. We didn't speak English well enough, or we didn't go to the right school, our grades weren't good enough because they weren't taught by the right professors. There'll always be something.

And it'll usually be something that you have no control of or no – there were very few of those Karate Kid moments where, you know, just kinda say, “Okay, I’m gonna take you over the top. Here’s what you need to know.” It was “No, I got you. You don’t know this; therefore, you’re not good enough. You didn’t have this course; therefore, you’re not good enough.” And we were – I’d say out of all 20 of us, we all knew that we were there to fight for our positions, not that anybody was gonna give us anything.

Dr. Necochea: Hm. I imagine that was – that instilled a strong sense of solidarity among you.

Dr. Greene: I’d say that 90 percent of us – there was one or two that would always – there’s always one or two that feel like “I know what the game is. They’re only gonna let one or two of us through; therefore, I’m gonna make sure I’m that one or two.” And so, if I can make you look bad, it’ll be me, and it won’t be you. But I’d say 90 percent of us there was that solidarity. There was that, “We’re all in a big fight. And, if we don’t stand together, we’re gonna fall together.”

Dr. Necochea: Who were you closest to in med school among students, faculty, etc.?

Dr. Greene: Dr. Anderson, Alton Anderson was one of my closest friends. He passed away this past year, unfortunately. He was about five or six years older than me. So, he was like 75 when he passed away.

Dr. Necochea: Can you spell his first name, please?

Dr. Greene: Alton, A-L-T-O-N.

Dr. Necochea: Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Greene: And Anderson, yeah. And let’s see. Yeah, not only – what was his name? – Bass, Dr. – blocking out his name – Dr. Bass. He was a doctor in Raleigh, North Carolina as a matter of fact. Roman Rawling, he’s a good friend back then. Carl – you know, I call them by their first name so much I don’t even remember their last names. It’s been so long. It’s been 50 years since I’ve talked to a lot of them.

Dr. Necochea: Right.

Dr. Greene: I can get you his name though.

Dr. Necochea: Thank you. When I follow up, I'll make a note of some of these things to ask you again. At the time – I mean, the curriculum was already divided in pre-medical years and your clinical years, right?

Dr. Greene: Right.

Dr. Necochea: What's your strongest recollection from your pre-clinical years when you were in class all the time?

Dr. Greene: It's all a blur. I just remember long hours and a lot of studying, getting stacks of books – you know, books I would obtain. I didn't do anything online. There was no such thing as online.

Dr. Necochea: Right.

Dr. Greene: So, getting stacks of books and having 10 or 12 books to read, trying to speed read through them and hold onto the information at the same time. And then having classes with exams and trying not to choke on the exam because there was a lot of them was stressful. I know a couple guys that gouged it, failed exams just because they stressed out. I knew they could do it. They just were under pressure, you know, emotional pressure. But I just remember that. But other than that, it was just day-to-day work. It's kinda like when you're in the fight, you don't realize you're in the fight. That's just what you're doing.

Dr. Necochea: Yeah. Tell me about yourself, a little bit about those first couple of years in medical school. Do you recall them also being hard and stressful?

Dr. Greene: Well, I do recall them being hard and stressful. But, you know, you gotta remember I was still a college Joe when I went off to medical school. I could almost tell you all the top 10 hits from 1973 because, I mean, I was still going out dancing on the weekends, stuff like that, dating. Whereas, I had some classmates that were in their late 20s-early/30s that already had kids. I had one guy that was like 35, and he'd give me a hard time. He said I was only like four years older than his daughter. Yeah. And I had to think about that for a second. And I'd think, "Oh, yeah. You're right." It was just – for the first year, it was almost like college all over again. I was just feeling like I was taking Organic Chemistry and everything all over again. And they doubled the price of the tuition, which sounds like nothing now, but it went from about \$8,000 a year to \$16,000 a year. I said, "I'm gonna have to drop out. I can't afford that." Sixteen thousand dollars was more than

- what my family's house was worth, kind of looking at it at that time.
- Dr. Necochea: Yeah.
- Dr. Greene: And that was a lot of money back then. You could buy a car for \$2,000, so –
- Dr. Necochea: Wow.
- Dr. Greene: It's kinda how I measured things. It was like 10 times the cost of a car. I couldn't even afford one car let alone 10 of them.
- Dr. Necochea: Wow.
- Dr. Greene: So, I looked around. And my dad was Army. Two of my uncles were in the military, Air Force. And I decided to join the military. I took the HPSP Scholarship Program to pay for medical school. So –
- Dr. Necochea: Ahh. Wait. Can you please spell that one again, please?
- Dr. Greene: It's called the HPSP, Health Profession Scholarship Program.
- Dr. Necochea: Got it.
- Dr. Greene: Its basically ROTC for medical students.
- Dr. Necochea: Oh, okay.
- Dr. Greene: They pay your tuition. They give you a stipend. They gave me a \$400 a month stipend, which doesn't sound like much now, but \$400 was \$200 more than the apartment rent at that time. And gave me \$50.00 a week to live off of, which was – back then, that was a lot. You could go to Burger King or McDonald's back then and buy a full meal for \$2.00, so –
- Dr. Necochea: In entering that program, did it add to your responsibilities as a med student, or was it supposed to be something that you would pay back later in –
- Dr. Greene: Well, you obligated yourself to the military. And, if you didn't finish the program, you still had to go in the military. So, it put some stress on me that if I didn't finish medical school, I would wind up in the military and not as a physician in the military. It's whatever they wanted me to do. I came from a military family, so

being in the military, even though the Vietnam war was still going when I got there, it kinda filled another square that if I did get pulled into the war because by that time, I didn't know when the war was gonna end. It coulda gone on another 10 years for all I knew. If I did get pulled into Vietnam, I already had gotten something out of the military in terms of support, and I'd have some control over what I did in the military. I wouldn't just go in and be a foot soldier. So, even though it obligated me, it obligated me to something that I thought I understood because my dad had been military. And it took the financial pressure off of me, and it took some of the political pressure with the war going on that if I did get drafted, I'd have some control as to what I would be doing in the military.

Dr. Necochea: Oh, really.

Dr. Greene: Yeah.

Dr. Necochea: How so?

Dr. Greene: I would be in the – when you take the scholarship, you become part of the medical corps.

Dr. Necochea: Okay. Right.

Dr. Greene: So, if you flunk out of medical school, their first choice would be to put you into the medical corps. You got to think about a 21-year-old. I was a 21-year-old then. Twenty-one-year-old thinks “Okay, if I wind up going to war because I flunked out of medical school, I got a chance to get back into medical school through the military.” So, it just gave me a lot of options, and it paid for a lot of things. And it just kinda stabilized some of my plans or –

Dr. Necochea: Right.

Dr. Greene: It gave me some control over the world a little bit.

Dr. Necochea: And, in joining this, did not slow you down in the four-year path of medical school, did it?

Dr. Greene: I don't think it did. I had to go spend like six weeks every summer, but two of those summers I just asked for a waiver because there were other things I had to do at medical school. And they gave me the waiver, so I didn't have to go off to a military base and do their corps training.

- Dr. Necochea: Okay.
- Dr. Greene: But, no.
- Dr. Necochea: And, once you finished those first couple of pre-clinical years, was there already a USMLE Step Exam waiting for you?
- Dr. Greene: A US what?
- Dr. Necochea: The USML – the Step 1 Exam that – did you have to take that at the end of your first two years?
- Dr. Greene: I took some exam. I don't know. They didn't call it a Step 1 Exam back then. It was just you had to take an exam to go on to the third and fourth year.
- Dr. Necochea: Right. That's the one.
- Dr. Greene: Yeah. It didn't have that name at that time, but I assume it was the same test. It was a big exam at the end of the second year.
- Dr. Necochea: Yeah. This – yeah, that's the name – the colloquial name is the Step 1 Exam, and this is quite a stressful right of passage for all our medical students nowadays.
- Dr. Greene: Right. Yeah, we had that. But I don't remember that being that stressful for me. It was basically – the stressful part was that they asked you questions from the beginning of the year at the end of year. And I would say, "Oh, man. I gotta go back and restudy that because we haven't talked about that subject in six months, eight months."
- Dr. Necochea: Right.
- Dr. Greene: And, yeah, so I remember studying for it, but it was more of a what's important from six months ago. I wasn't worried about the stuff that we had in the last three months. It was the stuff we had 12 months earlier that we would be tested on.
- Dr. Necochea: And, say, once you got passed that exam and moved to a different stage of your training, moving through different services and wards and rotations, tell me what that felt like to you.
- Dr. Greene: I just had the – some of the rotations were very good. I really enjoyed rotating and actually seeing patients. As a matter of fact, one of the reasons I do emergency medicine is I had a very good

relationship with a couple of the ER doctors on my rotation through the Emergency Room, others I didn't, like the pediatric rotation. I didn't want to be a pediatrician, and somehow or another they knew that, and it seemed like everything was hard. Everything was a setup.

A patient would come in at 6:00 in the morning, be admitted, and I'd be told to go examine the patient. And then we'd have a meeting an hour later and they'd want me to know everything about that patient and know everything about his condition. And I hadn't had any chance to read about it or anything. I had never seen the condition before. And I said, "Why they setting me up like that? It's a rare condition, yes. It's a kid with Prune Belly Syndrome I remember. And this guy just pipped me and pipped me and pipped me."

He kept asking me questions until I finally would stumble, and then he'd come back to me and ask me another questions of – question me and question me until I finally stumbled and couldn't answer. And it was about a subject that I had no idea we were gonna be talking about. It was like a setup. And there were just times when I thought it was just over the top. I know that's just a technique with a lot of instructors is to basically embarrass you about a question or just keep asking you questions until you finally stumble.

Dr. Necochea: Yeah.

Dr. Greene: Kinda German mentality. That's what I get at because I was in Germany. I lived – I was assigned in Belgium in Germany for three years, and I saw it again over there. But it's a teaching technique that's – I guess it's done, but I think it was like tortured to Black kids. It was like a setup for the Black kids. And I said, "Well – and I asked the other kids, "When did you find out you were gonna be asked these questions?" "Oh, last night, 12 hours ago." I just found out an hour ago.

Dr. Necochea: Wow.

Dr. Greene: Then I said, "Why would they do that? They know I'm gonna stumble on it." It's just to set me up and embarrass me in front of everybody. I said, "Okay. So be it. This is part of the game we play."

Dr. Necochea: Did you do most or all of your rotations here in central campus in Chapel Hill?

- Dr. Greene: I'm sorry. My alarm went off. Did I do most of my rotations where?
- Dr. Necochea: Did you do most of your rotations here in Chapel Hill?
- Dr. Greene: Yes, I did – what did I do? – I did a rotation up at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. I was considering going into OBGYN, and I wanted to go to a good externship, you know, third/fourth-year rotation that I could use on an application to kinda build up my resume for applying for residencies. And so, I took a rotation. I spent three months up at Johns Hopkins doing a OBGYN rotation. I went down to Wilmington to the AHEC Clinic down in Wilmington to do a rotation there, which was kinda more like family practice pediatrics. But most of them were right there in Chapel Hill.
- Dr. Necochea: Which rotations did you like the most? I mean, you told me that you like ED and maybe OBGYN. So, was there any other that made you think “Hmm? Yeah, I could do this.”?
- Dr. Greene: At that point in time, it was OB. It was Emergency Medicine, spinal practice, and – what else? – those were the rotations I remember that I really enjoyed.
- Dr. Necochea: If you step back now and take stock of your years at UNC both the pre-clinical and the clinical rotations, do you remember a time when you felt unwelcome in this place?
- Dr. Greene: Oh, there was never a month that went by that didn't happen in some situation.
- Dr. Necochea: Oh.
- Dr. Greene: Yeah. I mean, you come in contact with a lot of people, a lot of professors. And things would just come up. The simple things like you wrote a report and you didn't write down the race of the person on the chart. And I didn't think race was relevant. And so, part of my political stand was not to write race down or to indicate that the chart is full of the fact that this guy is Black, and he's really not Black.

He's American-Indian of the Lumbee Tribe. He's got very little, if any, African American in him. But the chart is filled with he's Black. He's African American. And I said, “You don't have to be an anthropologist to know that somebody's categorizing you.

You're either White or you're the other." And so, if you mentioned it to somebody, now they're giving you a hard time.

Dr. Necochea: Right. Yeah.

Dr. Greene: And so, little things like that would come up all the time.

Dr. Necochea: Wow. Like people asking you to do things that were just nonsensical?

Dr. Greene: Yeah, just nonsensical, had no relevance. They were political statements. They were dog whistles. They were indications that I've had a better life than you've had. It's just an issue of America, and you gotta deal with it. And I said I wasn't here in 1619. I'm here now. But, you know, that was my mindset at that time was like, "Okay, you're dealing with me. You're not dealing with that situation back then." But, like I said, I was young.

Dr. Necochea: Yeah, I know. I keep on forgetting that you were in your early 20s when all of this was happening.

Dr. Greene: Right.

Dr. Necochea: Do you remember a time when you asked for help to deal with some of this stuff?

Dr. Greene: Asked for help in what way?

Dr. Necochea: You know, if –

Dr. Greene: No, I mean, I never – it was – I don't know. How do you put a description of what's going on? You gonna help somebody stop setting you up? How do you even prove it? How do you even document it? How do you make it look like you're not just whining? How do you make it look like you're giving up, that you're wanting special treatment? No, I never asked – wanted any help because then that makes it look like I need help.

I mean, I have complained when I felt like I was outright mistreated, but most of the time I never was like, say, go to – I would not know how, at that time, to go to a civil rights attorney or to go to a – I don't know – they didn't have any kinda advocacy committees or that. I could go to NAACP and say, "Look. This is happening to me. Can you do something?"

Dr. Necochea: Right.

Dr. Greene: That would've been a step too far back then. I woulda been blackballed and never been in there. They woulda found some way to kick me out. So, no. I mean, I had my individual fights with individual professors one-on-one. But to take it out of that to a systemic level, no. No, that just didn't cross my mind.

Dr. Necochea: Do you remember administrators maybe getting involved to make things fair and easier for all students?

Dr. Greene: I think the last year they brought in a – I don't know what it is. – just a Black guy. I don't even remember his name. And his title was basically student arbitrator, something like that. And you could go to him. I never did. I don't think anybody ever did that I know of. It was like – you know, you're fighting the whole system at that point.

Dr. Necochea: Right.

Dr. Greene: And, if you're gonna fight the whole system, you gotta be prepared to get kicked out, and no one was really that willing to go that far because it was a battle you probably wouldn't win.

Dr. Necochea: What sorts of things kept you steady in pursuit of your medical degree, like people, friends, hobbies, sources of inspiration?

Dr. Greene: I couldn't say any particular hobby. I just kept my nose to the grindstone and just kept on the treadmill, try to ace as many tests as I could so that I – my performance would speak for itself. But I guess I had an athlete's mentality. At the end of the game, it's the team with the highest score that wins. All these little battles on me, they – so, I just studied harder and worked harder. If I had to do things twice as hard as the next guy to get an average grade, then that's just a part of it.

Dr. Necochea: When you were toward the end of your career at the school of medicine, what did you wanna do afterward, residency, of course, but how did you choose what to do next?

Dr. Greene: Well, part of that was chosen for me because of my military obligation.

Dr. Necochea: Right. Okay.

Dr. Greene: So, I took a residency – I looked for residencies, but in the end, the best residency that I could get into was one with the military up at

Andrews Air Force Base. It's a big program. It's part of Bethesda Medical Center and all that. So, my choices were – well, at that point by the time I finished medical school, was to enhance my career. And so, I went into a residency with the military and wound up doing 21 years with the military.

Dr. Necochea: Wow. So, after that, you were in the military for about 20 years.

Dr. Greene: Yeah, 21.

Dr. Necochea: Twenty-one.

Dr. Greene: I retired as a Lieutenant Colonel. I was up for Colonel, but I would've had to stay in another two years to put it on. And my two boys were teenagers, and I was ready to settle down. I had been overseas a couple times. And my last time was in Cairo, Egypt for two years running the embassy there, embassy clinic there was CENTCOM, Central Command. And so, after medical school, my life took on a whole different military medical career and all that.

Dr. Necochea: What is that like? Does it look like – you complete a residency program in the military and it's like in a civilian program only in the military?

Dr. Greene: Yeah, it's the same program. They add some things on. I did three years of general residency, kinda like a family practice kind of training. And then I did a year of general surgery internship. And then later on I did two years of orthopedics because they needed doctors to be proficient in orthopedics. There was a time when the Pentagon decided they weren't gonna have enough orthopedic surgeons, so I did two years at Georgetown University on a sponsored military program doing orthopedics.

And then I was stationed in Belgium for three years, stationed in Germany for two years, stationed down in Egypt for three years. By that 20 years, I was all over the place. But early on, it was – part of the draw was I was a doctor, but I was traveling. I got to see the world. My friend Alton, he settled down in – what's that town? – I can't remember the name of the town now. It's like up there on the border of [inaudible] [00:57:14]. It's like about –

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Duration: 58 minutes