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Natasha Wick

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Student Interviewer's Name: Natasha Wick
Interviewee name Calvin Williams

Time and Location of Interview:

The interview was done on Wednesday the November 4, 2015. The interview was done over the phone across time zones so the interviewer was in Chattanooga, Tennessee and the interviewee was in his home in California .Even though we were in different locations the interview was done privately between us on the phone. Because of the different time zones it the interview started at 6:00 pm my time and went on till 8:00 pm my time. For the interviewee that means the interview went from three o'clock his time to five o'clock his time.

About Calvin Williams:

Calvin Williams (grandpa) was born in Kansas City Missouri. Most of Calvin Williams's childhood was lived there until his family sought out a different life in California. From California Calvin Williams trained to be in the army but was denied on the basis of his skin and segregation .Later he was placed into the Marines and part of the 200,000 first black trainee in Marines at Montfort Point. Some years later Calvin Williams was congratulated with the Congressional Gold Medal. This interview will cover the topics mostly from the Calvin Williams experience on the Great Depression but also some part of his time in World War two.

Interviewer: Natasha Wick (NW)

Interviewee: Calvin Williams (CW)

NW: thank you so much for taking this time for me grandpa

CW: Ohh, no, no anytime

NW: Well let's start off this interview with simple question...When were you born grandpa?

CW: I was born on April 24, 1925

NW: What were great-grandmother and great-grandfather like?

CW: You mean my mom and dad

NW: yes

CW: Well I remember mom and dad were very religious they went to The Holiness church and they raised us very strictly ... they did not want us to sing or dance secularly.

NW: Wait, wait a second Grandpa you grew up not dancing? I know now you got some moves so how did you learn all those moves growing up?

CW: (chuckled a little) Well, when mom and dad were away at church my teenage sister and would wind up the Victrola or you young people would call it the record player

Have you seen a record player?

NW: Yes, grandpa mom and dad would have one in the corner of their bedroom but it was also had a cd and a tape casket attached to it.

CW: Oh well we had the victrola and we would wind it up and dance we would do the two step, one step, roll up rug

And then when mom and dad would come back everything would be right back to the way they left it (both interviewer and person being interview laughed)

NW: Grandpa how many sisters did you have?

CW: Well there was 11 of us and I was the 10th child born

NW:WHWHWHWHAAAAATTTT 11 children

**CW: Well, even though I had plenty of brothers and sister I only call two of them
sister one of your great aunts name is Edna and she was born in 1907 and its funny
when people ask my age I say the youngest was born in 1928 (chuckle from
interviewee)**

I remember she died at 85 in November....

(Small moment of silence)

NW: So Grandpa, what was it like for you living as an African American boy in the
1920's?

**CW: Well during that time everyone needed money our family was very poor
I remember that we did not have enough food we lived during the depression. I
remember that Dad worked, but he did not have work all the time.**

NW: What exactly was great grandpa's line of work?

**CW: Oh he worked in construction, and because his work was dependant on the
weather, he was sometimes put out of work for a long time. To get food sometimes
mom would go out green hunting**

NW: Green hunting?

**CW: Yes, that's when you would go out on land pick herbs and food that we would eat
Mom would also make home remedies with it because back then we could not afford
to go to no doctor**

NW: Grandpa, the land where great grandma and you hunted the land was not owned

by anybody?

CW: No....well I guess it may have ... or maybe it was deserted or sectioned off for people to pick.

NW: Oh...So even though great-grandma and great-grandpa did their best was there any other means of money coming from the home?

CW: Yes, in fact my sister worked and back then there was only two lines of work for African Americans one of them was housework another was being a nanny.

Some of my sisters went into house work. Do you remember Diana?

NW: Yes, I have her as a friend on Facebook, and I knew she was family but I did not know how?

CW: Well Diana's mother did house work, and she would bring home at the most ten dollars a week

NW: What that's great well with all your brothers and sisters finding work did they have time for school?

CW: Well in Kansas at the time there were seven negro elementary school and one negro high school. The elementary school was close by but you had to take a street car to get to the high school.

NW: Street car? Do you mean trolley or bus?

CW: Nope, back then we called them street cars...and street cars were expensive. Some children had to drop out of high school because they could not pay the street car to make it to high school. In my own family the oldest would first go to work and use their pay to pay for the next sibling and then the next sibling would do the same.

My sister paid for my street car fair so I could go to school.

NW: Wow that so nice of her ... but grandpa what was the environment like at school?

The teachers and etc..?

CW: Well the elementary and the high school where I went to was not as nice as the white schools, but our teachers did not use that as more an excuse but as motivation.

I remember my teacher would say “the white kids have....”

Even though the schools didn’t do much that means that we had to do better.

NW: So did you get to witness the integration of schools and other businesses?

CW: Yeah but that was later on you see in Missouri, it was like being in a northern state with southern state laws. Negroes could have no business like restaurants and movie theaters they were all segregated. Matter of fact I know segregation in schools and business was something that was nationwide at that time.

NW: So even though there was no difference on how you were treated if you lived in the South and the North, how did you get to living in California?

CW: Ahh... you are trying to find the connection

NW: Yeah

CW: Well remember what I told you about the two lines of work that African American women could do?

NW: Yeah

CW: Well there was this woman that one of my sisters knew and she was a nanny to a white family that moved to California. At the promise that my father could find better work in California we moved there. At first my father went and then he sent for my

mother, sister and then me.

NW: How long did it take before great-grandpa sent for you?

CW: It was not long it was a week or two when I first got there. When we moved because work got slim again, I bought a 3 bedroom house with all my family it in from the GI bill.

NW: Wait a sec was grandma also living there too with your family?

CW: No I met your grandma and by the time we got married my family had moved on and out the house.

NW: Oh..... (Blushing) So from owning a house how did you get into the marines?

CW: Well, I was drafted in 1943 and around that time a presidential order came out that the Marines had to start taking in black recruits. The Marines took me and many others to a training facility in North Carolina.

NW: Because you were African-American where you treated differently from other white marine-trainees?

CW: Oh no honey, even though our commission officers were white, we were still segregated from other white solders. We did have black sergeants but they were all under white officers.

NW: Was there any of the officers or sergeants that were interesting to you?

CW: Yeah, but for the most part they all worked us hard

NW: What was a day of training like?

CW: It was not only hard but it was more steady and vigorous when I entered the service I was one hundred and twenty pounds when I was out of the service I was 135

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NW: Wow 135 of pure muscle right?

CW: Yeah I guess so...

NW: So in the Marines what exactly was your job?

CW: Well at first the only jobs blacks could do in the Marines were the steward branch or the depo unit. The steward branch was like cooking, cleaning and serving the rest of the Marines. The depo unit job was to move heavy things around.

Later the NAACP and the Urban League came by and said "You have all these black recruits and you are using them for kitchen duty? They can do more."

So during my time in World War II assigned to Radar Operator.

NW: How do the marines know what job a Marine could do?

CW: In my case I took a test, and also because I took a electricity class in high school I qualified for the job.

NW: Around the month of June I had the pleasure of going with you to receive Congressional Gold Medal in Washington, tell me what were your thoughts as you received your medal and acknowledgment by your own community later?

CW: I just did what I had to do in those days you did what you had to do NO Questions and I simply just did that....

NW: So what are you doing now?

CW: You know now I am retired, I volunteer at the post office, I do water aerobics when I have time I visit friends and family and life just goes on....

NW: Well Grandpa, I just want to say thank you for taking your time out of your day for me and for your sacrifice for our country

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CW: Awe you flatter, me your welcome.