

ZEPHYRHILLS ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Daniel Hill

Recorded December 14, 2018

Steve [Spina]: Good morning, Daniel. Why don't you give me a little information? Tell me where you were born, and where you grew up.

Daniel: Alright. Well, I was born in Brooksville, Florida. I grew up on a small farm, actually. We had pigs and horses, cows, chickens, goats. We grew our own crops, and I actually rode a horse to the school bus stop in the morning. So it was a pretty neat life growing up in the country there.

Steve: And when did you come to the Zephyrhills area?

Daniel: I came to Zephyrhills in about 1998. I met my high school sweetheart, Christina. We both worked at Winn Dixie in Dade City and then we moved, after graduating high school, to Zephyrhills to start a family.

Steve: So you went to high school in Dade City?

Daniel: I actually went to high school in Hernando County.

Steve: Brooksville?

Daniel: Yep.

Steve: Okay. So you moved to this area in 1998. When did you get involved in law enforcement?

Daniel: It all started with the birth of my children. I found out that I was having twin daughters, and, as a nineteen-year-old father about to turn 20, I was panicking, like, what am I going to do to support my family? So I got a job at Zephyrhills Correctional Institute because they offered benefits and steady pay so I could take care of my family, and since it was up here in Zephyrhills, we moved here, and that's how it all started.

Steve: And what did you do at Zephyrhills Correctional?

Daniel: I was a correctional officer. They paid for my academy and put me through it and then gave me a job afterwards. I would just monitor inmates and make sure that everybody was following the rules and regulations and doing what they were supposed to be doing.

Steve: How long did you work at Z.C.I. before you interviewed [for the Zephyrhills Police Department]?

Daniel: I worked as a correction officer there about eighteen months.

Steve: How did you find out about Zephyrhills Police Department and the possibility of having a job there?

Daniel: You know, it never even crossed my mind to get into law enforcement as a police officer. I was content doing what I was doing to take care of my family. And one day—I'll never forget it—Lieutenant Edward Holt stopped me, and he said, "Son, you don't belong out here. You need to be a police officer out there." I thought it was a little strange at first, but he said, "I'm gonna take you down and introduce you to some people, and we're gonna see about getting you a job as a police officer, if you'd like that." And that's just what he did.

Steve: Who did he introduce you to?

Daniel: He introduced me to Reverend Eddie Nunn. He was a local church leader at Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church in Zephyrhills.

Steve: What did you and Reverend Nunn discuss?

Daniel: We talked about my background. He just wanted to get to know me. He didn't know anything about me initially, and Eddie [Holt] had just brought me to him and said, "Hey, I think he'd be a good candidate for a police officer." So Reverend Nunn wanted to vet me a little bit and ask me about my background and my education and history and stuff like that. So we just chatted about that and got to know each other a little bit.

Steve: What was the next step? What did Reverend Nunn do then?

Daniel: Well, I guess he liked me, so he said, "I'll tell you what: let's go down and talk with the city manager at City Hall and see about getting you a job as a police officer."

Steve: So you came to City Hall and what happened? What progressed from there?

Daniel: I came to City Hall, I met with you, and we sat down in the office. Just like Reverend Nunn, you sat and chatted with me a little bit about myself and kind of vetted me a little bit. Next thing I knew, you called the chief of police over. He comes over and sits down in the office, and the rest is history.

Steve: So then you met with Chief Howell?

Daniel: Chief Howell. Yep.

Steve: And then he asked you to apply? I guess that was the process.

Daniel: Yeah, actually. Yep. He said "You need to fill out an application and apply for a job here and we'll take it from there."

Steve: So this was around 2000?

Daniel: Yeah, just before 2001.

Steve: Then you applied and you were hired at Z.P.D.?

Daniel: I was.

Steve: And you had training in *correctional* law enforcement, so you had to go to the police academy?

Daniel: I did, yeah. What they had at the time is, if you go through corrections, you have to do what's called the "crossover academy" and then you can do a three month extension and you would finish the police academy without having to do the full thing. That's what I did. I did the crossover academy from corrections to law enforcement.

Steve: What was Reverend Nunn's goal in having you hired at Z.P.D.?

Daniel: He wanted some diversity. He wanted the community that the police department is representing to have someone on that police department that represented [them], the community they're serving. His goal was to get an African-American officer onto the police department.

Steve: You were about 21 then?

Daniel: Yeah, that would be about right. Twenty-one years old.

Steve: You became the first African-American police officer hired by the city of Zephyrhills.

Daniel: I did. I did.

Steve: What was that like? What was the reception?

Daniel: Awwwww. Steve, man...That was something, looking back. At the time, being 21 years old, I don't think I understood what a big deal it was and the barriers that were being broken and what it meant, more importantly, to the people in this community. And that's something that stuck with me my entire career and still, to this day, I'm grateful for this community and the people in this community [that they gave] me that chance, to be here to be able to bring that diversity and that representation.

Steve: Now, Reverend Nunn brought you out to Macedonia?

Daniel: I can't remember every single aspect of everything. If I miss something, just let me know.

Steve: Do you remember me taking you out to meet Mrs. [Irene] Dobson?

Daniel: I do. I remember going out there a couple times, actually, to talk to Mrs. Dobson. I don't remember the initial meeting.

Steve: Do you remember that she asked you if you could arrest me, because of the difference in the color of our skin? Because, back in her day, a black officer couldn't arrest a white man.

Daniel: Now that you say that, it comes to mind.

Steve: I remember that because it shocked me. She wanted to make sure—

Daniel: —Yeah, that I had the authority to do that. Shows you how things are, though, or how things worked.

Steve: What was Reverend Nunn's goal in having you brought in and hired?

Daniel: He wanted me to be the first African-American police officer for the Zephyrhills Police Department.

Steve: He was trying to diversify the department so it represented the community as the community was.

Daniel: That's exactly right.

Steve: What was it like when you came into the police station? How were you welcomed and received in-house?

Daniel: I still remember my first day. I was super excited! I had just become a police officer. I'd just got hired. I had my uniform on and I went into the chief's office and I was in there chatting with Chief [Robert] Howell and it was Captain [Richard] Scudder at the time, and then an officer walked in and they said, "Hey, this is our new officer, Daniel Hill." And I stuck my hand out to say "nice to meet you." And I remember to this day, he crossed his arms and stared at me and didn't acknowledge me, and I just kind of smiled and put my hand back and from that moment, I kind of knew I might be in for a little bit more than I thought initially.

Steve: Right. You had a little more of a job to do than just being police officer.

Daniel: That's right.

Steve: You're going to have to break down some barriers.

Daniel: That's right.

Steve: Was that an older police officer or a younger police officer?

Daniel: He was an older police officer yep an older police officer and you would have thought you'd be offended, but I really wasn't. I just kind of smiled and I said, "Okay, this is why I'm here." I kind of took that attitude.

Steve: How long were you here [at the police station] before you felt like you were part of the department, part of the team?

Daniel: Pretty quickly. You know, the officers here are great officers. Great people to work with. There were some people that were here at the agency in administration that had been here for a long time, and their mindsets were kind of tough to change, but the officers themselves made me feel comfortable really quickly. Starting out right away, I felt very comfortable with the officers I worked with. The administration, not so much.

Steve: So it took time for you to feel that people were reacting to you on the basis of you as a person and not you as an [African-American].

Daniel: Yeah, it took a little while to integrate into the police department and to get over the whole stigma, because—you gotta remember—being the first meant no one was used to this. This was new to everybody, not just to me. So the officers had to become accustomed to it. There was some attention that I got because of it, and that caused some issues, too, with some of the officers and administration. It just took a while before they realized, "Hey, we're not gonna pay attention to the sideshow of this. We're just going to focus on each other." And we did that. And that helped out tremendously.

Steve: Good. How were you received by some of the public? I remember that there was an incident with a Methodist minister here that you gave a ticket to at the stop sign. Do you remember that?

Daniel: Yes, I remember that vividly. You know, in all my years, there are certain events you remember, and that's one. I had been sitting, issuing citations for people running a stop sign. We had a lot of accidents there, so I was watching it to make sure everybody was safe, and he comes through and he runs the stop sign. He didn't even touch his brakes. He just goes right through it. So I stopped him, and he wasn't going to accept it. And I didn't know what the reason was. Maybe he just didn't want a ticket. Maybe there was something else, I don't know, but whatever the reason, he would not accept it.

Steve: Remind me who this was you pulled over.

Daniel: I can't remember his name. He was the pastor at the church right off of Fifth Street. The big church on the left. The Methodist Church there. Yeah. I can't remember his name, though.

Steve: He complained to me, actually, about you.

Daniel: [Laughs] Okay.

Steve: [He and I] had to discuss that. In the analysis, what did you think his actual reaction was when he got stopped?

Daniel: To this day, I'm not one hundred percent sure what he was thinking. I don't know if it was because of the color of my skin or if it was because he just didn't want a ticket, but, uh, whatever his reasoning was, he definitely wasn't going to accept that I was going to give him a ticket.

Steve: Did that happen frequently?

Daniel: I've had incidents where I went to doors for calls, and when I knock on the door, they'll shut the door in my face and say, "Send me another officer." That's happened before, and there have been incidents where people just weren't having me and it was specifically because of the color of my skin. They didn't want me there to help them or to be part of anything that was going on, and that was their right. I would just be there for them if they needed me. Over time, though, that broke down with some of these folks, but the majority of the people in the city were tremendously supportive. It was probably the most support I've ever seen in my life, but there were some people here that definitely didn't want me here. That's for sure.

Steve: So we're talking about about how, as time evolved, you felt that you were accepted by the community. Tell me a little bit about the situation at Zephyrhills High School at the football game. There was an issue that turned into a potentially racial fight.

Daniel: Okay. Yeah. So, at the Zephyrhills High School football game, I was working an off-duty job. I was there patrolling the game, and all of a sudden, I hear this huge ruckus. And I see this massive group of people, and they look like they're about to get into a really serious fight, so I run over there. I was the first officer to arrive on-scene, and when I got there I saw a huge group of people around this one guy. It turns out that this guy had yelled some racial slurs to the children of these people, and they weren't having it. They wanted him, and it was going to go south really, really quickly. You could tell. So I ran straight into the middle of the group, I grabbed him, and I just said, "I have to get him out of here. Too many people here. I've got to get him out of here. Something bad's going to happen." Not to say he didn't deserve it, probably [laughs], but I had to get him out of there. So I take him and I immediately start heading to my patrol car. All of these people, everyone's all around me. I can't even see who's behind me and in front of me. It's just a massive crowd of people. I'm thinking, tempers are flaring, everyone's really angry. Something bad can happen. I've got to get him out of here. I start walking. I thought I might have some issues, but the relationships I had [formed] in the community over the years really paid off that day, and I'm confident of that, because I heard people yelling, "Hill's got him! He's going to do the right thing! Hill's going to take care of this!" They let me take him to the patrol car. I say "let me" because—let me tell you right now—police officer or no, there were enough people there that if they didn't want me to get out of there with that guy, he wasn't getting out of there. So those relationships I had allowed me to get him to that patrol car and I throw him in a patrol car. I slammed the door and I yelled to the first officer I saw as I tapped on the car, "Get him out of here! Get him out of here!" So the officer jumps in the car and gets him out of there so he's

not in their sight anymore, because he's still agitating them because they can see them. That was something I'll never forget. Had it been another officer, would it have been the same outcome? I don't know. Thankfully for me that night and for that guy, too, that it worked out the way it did.

Steve: Yeah. So being an African-American police officer here gave the African-American community confidence that certain issues or incidents would be handled in a fair manner. They felt that they could respond and reply to you and that you would take care of those, and it wouldn't be—for lack of a better word—“whitewashed” or not handled right.

Daniel: Yeah, Steve. Yeah. That's so important what you just said about how people in the African-American community wanted to have that representation. You know, they didn't look at me and say—I never got this from anybody in the community—“Hill's just gonna not doing anything because he's one of us. He's going to take care of us.” That never happened ever. I was held to a higher standard actually. But what did happen—it was so important that it should never be lost—is that being black, growing up the way I did, growing up in my family, when I'm out there patrolling the streets and I see a young black kid running around, I see, “That looks like my cousin. That looks like my brother.” And that's so important when you go to these calls, and people are upset, and they're yelling at each other. You'll go to one call with a white couple, and you may sit down on the couch with them and discuss the issues they're having, then try to fix the problems and go on about your way. And then you go to an African-American family—same couple—but you're putting people in cuffs immediately. You're not discussing anything. And I've seen that happen a lot over my career, and it's different, you know. Now I go there: “This looks like my aunt. This looks like my dad. This looks like my family members.” And when I go there, it's not “immediately put somebody in cuffs; Somebody's got to go to jail.” It's, “Hey, what's going on guys? Let's sit down and talk about this. You guys have been together for awhile...” We're not talking about any violence or hitting each other. Just a lot of arguing. But those are huge differences, and it makes a difference in people's lives: whether they get arrested that day or not and how they perceived that the police treat them. And I think it's so important to have that diversity, because now you have somebody who can relate to you, who's representing you.

Steve: So you were able to. It almost reminds me—what you said—of when Trayvon Martin was killed and President Obama said, “My son would look like Trayvon Martin.” You were able to relate to people in the community that you [pulled over], or if you were called to a house, you were able to say, “I look at you as a normal couple and citizens in this community, and I can see it from your point of view as well.”

Daniel: Yep. Absolutely. President Obama was right on with that, and that just gave me chills when you said that. But you know, even more importantly than that, it's family. You see them as if they're your family, you know. It could be your family, and that changes the way you deal with things. Law enforcement officers are fair and impartial, but they are also people. It does matter when you stop somebody and it reminds you of your grandma. When you stop somebody, those relationships make a difference in how you approach that person. Your guard may be down a little bit less if you can relate to that person, rather than if the only experiences you have with people of a different race or

different color are through negative interactions in your job or life experiences. It makes a big difference.

Steve: Right. Well, let me go back to Reverend Nunn then, because that was the whole purpose of his establishing Law Day at Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church. Tell me a little bit about your first experience at Law Day at Macedonia, and what you've experienced there and what you took away from that.

Daniel: That was pretty neat. Reverend Nunn was so far ahead of his time [in terms of] decisions he made and the leadership he had. The Law Day he established back then...look at how relevant it is to today with what's going on. He said, "Hey! We need to make sure we bridge that gap between the community and law enforcement officers. We need to make sure that we see that we're all one team, that we're a community [that's] together." You know, he was so far ahead on that. So he established Law Day and Law Day was a day to celebrate police officers and their relationships with their communities. He would invite officers in from everywhere. All agencies were welcome, and all officers were welcome. It really helped to let the community meet their police officers that serve and protect them. It was a great program he started with that.

Steve: Tell me, about how long were you the only African-American on the force before a second officer was hired?

Daniel: Wow. Over a decade. Over a decade.

Steve: Tell me what Reverend Nunn asked you.

Daniel: We were at a church event and talking about being the only African-American law enforcement officer here. Reverend Nunn turns to me and says, "So, Daniel: are you still the only black?" And I say yes sir. Then he turns to you and he says, "What are you going to do about that, Steve?" [laughs]

Steve: And then Vince Williams was hired a little while after.

Daniel: Yup. Yup.

Steve: You had kind of a comraderie there.

Daniel: Yup. Had a teammate, someone to show that there's some progress, finally. I think that's what people needed to see.

Steve: Tell me about your S.R.O. [School Resource Officer] experience. After you were [patrolling] the streets for quite a few years, you became a School Resource Officer.

Daniel: I did.

Steve: What's it like to be an officer at a school?

Daniel: For me, personally, it was one of the greatest experiences I've had in my life. My daughters were young at the time, so they attended some of the schools that I was a School Resource Officer at, so I was able to see them while I was at work. [There's an] impact on the kids still today. I call them kids; they're adults now. They're twenty-four, twenty-five years old, but they say, "Hey, Officer Hill! You were my School Resource Officer! How are you doing? You taught me D.A.R.E. [Drug Abuse Resistance Education]." To have those relationships is something I'll cherish forever. It was a great experience.

Steve: I think that was a good way to expose young children to a black police officer at the same time, too.

Daniel: Aw man, you just reminded me of something. I'll never forget this either. I can't believe it didn't immediately pop into my head. So, I'm a School Resource Officer at Woodland Elementary School, and there was a young African-American kid there, and they were picking on him because of his hair. They're laughing at his hair, saying, "Oh, look at your hair! Look at your hair!" and this is a group of white kids that were doing this. And I walk over and I say, "What's going on?" "Oh, look at his hair!" I say, "Well, look at my hair. We have exactly the same hair" and I give him a high five. Next thing you know, all of the kids are like, "Oh man! You have cool hair!" It kind of changed that. That was something that couldn't have been done if that integration hadn't happened. So it's sad that it took so long, but it's really, really positive that the right people were in the right place to make it happen.

Steve: Good. Let's talk about the Martin Luther King street naming situation. That kind of put you in an awkward position. What are some of your memories about that?

Daniel: I remember it was a heated, heated debate whether it should be changed or whether it should remain the same. It made national news. The renaming of Martin Luther King Boulevard was a controversial issue. It impassioned a lot of people, and I don't think it was for the right reasons. I don't know why some people got so upset about it, except for they didn't want the name Martin Luther King, Jr. on the street that they lived on. It became a big thing. It made national news. I remember that they were making fun of it on one of the late night shows. I think Jay Leno said, "They should put it back to its original name of White Cracker Lane" or something to that effect. So it became a national joke that people were making such a big deal about honoring one of the greatest civil right leaders in our nation's history.

Steve: And you attended the council meeting when there was a lot of debate about it. Reverend Nunn spoke. Do you remember what he talked about?

Daniel: I don't really remember too much about that.

Steve: But you got up and spoke.

Daniel: Yeah. But I don't remember too much what I said either.

Steve: I think you defended the approach to making the street name, and that people were doing the right thing.

Daniel: Okay. Okay.

Steve: Tell me when you started to go back to school.

Daniel: Well, you know, I decided to go back to school, because I had been here for quite some time and actually applied to be a detective here at the police department. I got passed up for it, and then I tried to get promoted and move up, but it wasn't working for whatever reason. So I decided to get some leadership experience. I've got to get it somewhere if I can't get it here, so I decided to go back to school and get my bachelor's degree. It also helped being surrounded by so many teachers and educators who encouraged me to go back and do it, too. As an S.R.O., I'm around educators every day, so I was encouraged to get that education. I went to Pasco-Hernando State College and then to University of South Florida to get my bachelor's degree. Then I enlisted in the military as a specialist, and soon after I got promoted, I went to O.C.S. [Officer Candidate School] for my officer training. That was a part of the transition. I went to basic training as a specialist and then I become an officer at Fort Benning, Georgia after I completed Officer Candidate School.

Steve: So at this time you're juggling a full time job, a family with two young daughters, and going to school and officer training. How did you find time? What carries you through all of that?

Daniel: Just a lot of drive. I just wanted to do good, and so many people gave me so many chances in my life, and I just really wanted to do as well as I could with those opportunities because I truly felt blessed that I had those chances given to me.

Steve: And then you were happy in Zephyrhills.

Daniel: I was very happy. Very happy.

Steve: But you did end up running into a problem with one of the captains.

Daniel: Yeah. I think he was a captain at the time.

Steve: Tell me about that.

Daniel: That was one of the worst experiences I've ever had in my life. Here I am at the school with the kids, and we're having a great day. Kids have so much positive energy. It's just a great day. Everybody is smiling, laughing and happy, and my phone rings, and I see it's Captain [redacted at Daniel's request] calling me, and I'm like, "I hope everything's okay. He never calls me. He's not my direct supervisor." So I pick up the phone: "Hello?" And I remember that he says to me something to the extent of—I can't remember exactly what words he used. I don't want to say something he didn't say—"Hey, you're talking"—and he says an expletive—"You've been talking about these new cars" and just

really starts hammering me about this and I have no idea what he's talking about at all. I literally have no idea what he's talking about. "This is Dan Hill. Do you have the right person?" And he just continued to go off.

Steve: So he was accusing you, basically, of criticizing some department policy.

Daniel: Later on, I found out there was a new car purchased, and I guess they gave it to a junior guy. And another officer actually said—this is all in retrospect; now I know he's talking about another officer who came to me—"Hey, they got a new car and they gave it to so and so." I think it was Matt Hillen they gave it to. I remember saying, "Matt's a good guy. I'm glad they gave him a car. He deserves it." That was the conversation. Somehow between that conversation and a conversation that somebody—I'm not even sure to this day who it was—had with that captain, they told him that apparently I was talking bad about the decision they made about giving the car [to Matt] and something got lost in translation, maybe. I say maybe, because he didn't even want to hear what I had to say. It's kind of funny when he called me that he was just so adamant about how he felt about it, and he didn't say he's going to get me, but he made it sound like he's coming for me. Something to that extent. I was like, okay, this is a captain at the police department saying he's coming for me. It's time to figure out what's going on with this and get some other people involved, because this is getting out of control, and I still have no idea why he was even calling me. It was really shocking that he called me and said that to me.

Steve: That incident escalated a little bit. You ended up applying and going to the City of Tampa P.D.

Daniel: Yeah. There was an investigation, and he actually lied in the investigation. When he lied in the investigation I said, you have a law enforcement officer—not just a law enforcement officer, but a *captain*, and not just a captain, but someone who's directly over me—that's willing to lie? I've got to get out of here at this point; I've got to leave. And that's when I made the decision to leave. Otherwise, I never would have. I probably would've stayed here, because, like I said, the community here...I really had roots here and enjoyed this community. I enjoyed patrolling and helping people here, and I probably would have stayed, but that incident led me to take another path.

Steve: Describe the overall impact of the Zephyrhills Police Department on your life.

Daniel: The overall impact of Zephyrhills police department on my life...Wow. It was a tremendous impact. It really shaped everything about who I became going forward, because, like I said, at such a young age, getting hired as the first black police officer here, I didn't really understand what it meant, but I soon found out, and it helped me to understand that there are bigger things out there than just going to work everyday and doing the job. There's still a lot in this world, you know, still a lot. We have a long way to go still. And I [learned that] here, and it helped me grow up pretty quick and molded my attitudes and beliefs—I think for the better.

Steve: Sometimes I'm surprised that it took us until 2001 to bring a black police officer into the department. Overall, how do you view your role in that in retrospect? I think at twenty, you probably weren't thinking that way, but in retrospect, how do you look at playing that role here?

Daniel: Looking back over the years at my role here at the police department and being the first black officer in retrospect, it was a tremendous, tremendous responsibility. I didn't know it at the time, but looking back, it really it shaped so much. It shaped a lot of my life. It shaped other people's lives, too. Moving forward, it changed the complexion of the department. It changed the attitudes of the community. It did so much. That's why, a lot of times, I'm very thankful that you were in the position you were in, because I don't know if it ever would have happened. That's something I'm always grateful for. When you look back at our history and some of the great civil right movements and things that have happened over the years, it always took a great leader to kind of start that and say, "I'm going to break this trend. We're going to do something about this." Because a lot of people wouldn't even recognize that there's a problem. "Everything's fine. There's nothing wrong. Our community is fine. Diversity? Who needs diversity?" That's not the attitude you took. Someone brought that to your attention and you said, "You know what? You're absolutely right. That needs to change." And it did. And I'm thankful for you, for giving me that chance, because you really need to take a chance. Doing the right thing sometimes isn't easy. It's not what everybody around you wants. It takes a lot of courage to do that, and I greatly appreciate you taking that shot on me. Thank you for that.

Steve: I'm getting emotional. [pauses] When you sat in my office that day with Reverend Nunn, before Chief Howell got there: tell me what you told me then.

Daniel: When I was sitting in your office, trying to get a job here at the police department, I remember I turned to you and I told you that if you gave me a chance, I'd make you proud. I'd do a good job for you. And I truly meant that. So I hope I did that.

Steve: You did.

BREAK

Production: Let's go back to the idea of your relationships in the community helping you do your job better. What did you do as a police officer, even when you were off duty, to build those relationships?

Daniel: As a police officer, my relationships with people in the community were built on trust. They were built on shared experiences. When I got called to a house for whatever reason, I'd respond and treat everybody with respect. When I was done, I'd stop at the park and play basketball with the kids that were out there playing basketball. I would go throw a football around with people throwing footballs. I'd stop and get out and talk with people sitting on their porch chatting because that's my job. Police officers are civil servants. Some people say, "I don't like the word servant." Well I do. I love serving this community. I love serving the people in it. And to do that, you've got to get out and

you've got to communicate with people. That's how you build a relationship. That's how you get to know the people in your community and what they're about. And it just helps you do a better job for them.

Production: So you felt like you were a part of the Zephyrhills community?

Daniel: Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. Not initially, but over time, yeah. It took getting out and making those extra efforts that some people might not have to make, but I knew that I had to take that extra step. I knew I had to do better than everybody else did. I knew I couldn't make any mistakes, because everybody was watching me. "Just normal" wouldn't get it done. It wasn't good enough. I knew I had to go above and beyond in everything I did, because that microscope was on me because I was the first.

Production: You were the only black police officer in the police station. Can you describe the hiring of the second? What was that like for you and for the rest of the department?

Daniel: [Laughs] I remember a big smile on my face. I was the first black police officer here for such a long time, and I remember finally, working through Steve and the chief and everybody else, they got another black officer hired here. I remember walking in and seeing him and just smiling because I was like, "Wow, it's actually happened! There's some change coming. Things are finally moving along." So it was a tremendous feeling to see that. Something I won't forget

Steve: If I can say something: Now, we have two more. We have a number of Hispanic. Some female officers. A couple of gay officers. It's a very unique situation now.

Production: Why do you think diversity in the police force is so important?

Daniel: Diversity in the police department is so important is because our job as police officers is to serve this community. In order to do that the best way possible, you have to have diversity. There's not only one type of person, race, color, creed, religion in the community; there are many. If you don't have police officers that represent that, things can get misinterpreted. You see a lot on the news lately people getting shot when they probably shouldn't have been shot. A lot of that comes from not having those shared experiences or not knowing that culture very well. Things can get misinterpreted. You may look at somebody because of their religion and say, "This person is this" or "this person is that." Or [based on] the color of their skin, you may have preconceived notions about that type of person, but somebody from that culture will understand them better. Somebody from that culture will see things differently, and when you pull that person over and you see that person and you know their culture, something they do that another officer might take as a threat, you may say, "I understand why they're doing that," and things can go a lot differently, having those experiences.

Production: In that same kind of vein, did you ever participate in the Law Day at Macedonia Church?

Daniel: I did.

Production: Could you describe that experience for me?

Daniel: Absolutely. Yeah. I was there for the very first one and then for several after. It's always a great experience. It grows every year, bigger and bigger. Officers will get up there and they'll share their experiences with the people in the church there. Some folks in the church will ask questions of law enforcement officers that they might want to know, [questions] they might not otherwise ask. It's a real open forum where people are sharing together and they're there to worship as well as learn about each other and share those connections and experiences with each other.

Steve: Tell them about last year. Who came to Law Day with you?

Daniel: On Law Day at Macedonia last year, both my brother and my sister came to Law Day with me and they didn't come just to support their brother and be there with me. They came because they are police officers, too. My brother is actually a police officer with Tampa Police Department, and my sister is a police sergeant with Tampa Police Department. She is actually the highest ranking black female officer with Tampa Police Department. She's in charge of personnel—in charge of the applicants that apply to the police department. I'm so proud, because she is in a position where diversity really matters. She sees all the applications come through Tampa Police Department and she's in a position where she can make some changes and make some difference. That's so important.

Steve: I mean, you're the oldest—

Daniel: Yes.

Steve: —so they followed in your footsteps.

Daniel: Yeah. Yeah.

Production: Let's talk about that for a second. How do you think your role in this history has influenced other people?

Daniel: How did my role in this history influence other people? Well, for starters, both my brother and sister are law enforcement officers now. You know, they're their own people. They make their own decisions. But I'd like to believe I had a small part in that. They're both very successful and doing a good job. It's these small things that happen in your life: Eddie Holt talking to me at the prison and saying, "You don't belong here. You need to be a police officer." At first I was like, "What do you mean? Am I not doing a good job?" He was my lieutenant, you know. He says, "No, you're a very smart kid. You need to do something else." Why he stopped me that day, why he'd said that to me...I have no idea what made him do that, but I'm certainly glad he did, because that completely shaped what I was going to do. It changed the course of my entire life. And then, meeting Reverend Nunn...again, another pivotal moment in my life. And then going over to meet Steve...these three people completely changed the trajectory of my life, and not just my life, but the life of my family and my brothers, my sisters. To go

beyond that as police officers: how many people do we come in contact with on a daily basis? How many experiences do we have? It's countless, the effect that they had by giving me that opportunity that day in Steve's office and giving me that chance to become a police officer.

Steve: We interviewed Lieutenant Holt about two weeks ago. He told us that when he went to high school in Zephyrhills, he graduated and went to U.S.F. [University of South Florida] and then he joined the army. Three years into the army, he came back to Zephyrhills on leave and went to the police station, interested in being a police officer, and they wouldn't take an application from him. This was in 1975 or so.

Daniel: Wow.

Steve: Do you think that may have influenced him?

Daniel: I think maybe a little bit. Wow.

Steve: It's an interesting dimension there, the connection: he saw you and wanted better.

Daniel: That really is. Man. It makes sense. Yeah.

Production: Knowing what Steve just told you about Eddie, and now you come to visit this police station—I don't know how long you've had since you've been here—but you see Reggie [Roberts] as second in command. How much progress do you feel has been made since, the seventies or sixties compared to now? Just taking Zephyrhills or taking the country as a whole, how much progress do you think has been made?

Daniel: How much progress has been made? In law enforcement in general? Specifically here in Zephyrhills, I think a tremendous amount of progress had been made in a short period of time because we had people that wanted to see that change. We had a department that had no diversity whatsoever. When I got hired, we had two females in my class that I got hired with. So not only did we have you know, the first African-American police officer in Zephyrhills, but we also had two females that were hired in the same class. So we have a very diverse group right out of the gate. And then from there it just kept continuing. We hired Hispanic officers, black officers, more female officers, to the point where now there is a captain here at Zephyrhills Police Department that's [African-American]. That's how much we have progressed here. I think it's just really goes to show that change really did set in and it's for good.

Production: Do you think there's still work to be done?

Daniel: Of course. We're imperfect people and there are still attitudes out there that are racial attitudes towards certain groups and religions. Whatever the attitudes are, there's still a lot of those negative attitudes out there, and they really represent some people, the way they think. As long as there are people out there that think that way, we still have work to do, and I don't think it's going to stop.

Production: Where do you think that work begins? Where do you think that change starts?

Daniel: It starts with leadership. It starts with the community. It starts with people realizing that those changes need to happen and then making something tangible out of it and doing something about it. A lot of us sit back and we say, "Something really should be done about this or that" but it never gets done. Making change is important.

Production: Do you think having people of color and people of diversity in government positions and positions of power within the community is a catalyst for that change?

Daniel: I think having diversity in our government is a huge catalyst for change. However, it just can't be anybody. It's got to be the right people. You've got to have the right people in those positions. People that really know their jobs well and do a good job and represent the community well and themselves well. That's how change happens, because there's a lot of small-minded people out there still, and if you put the wrong people in those positions, they're going to say, "Look, see! I told you. I told you this was gonna happen!" If you put the right people in those positions and you see what most of the world sees, you see that diversity is important, and that, in the end, we all are humans. We have different cultures, we have different religious beliefs, but we're all the same, and we're all on one team, and that's what's important.

Production: So there's a lot of pressure on the people who take those roles, then, to be the best example they can be and the best role model they can be, right?

Daniel: When people decide to take a role to affect change, that person has a tremendous amount of pressure put on them and they really need to be perfect, just about, in everything they do, because if they're not, they're going to let down not just themselves, but a lot of people that are depending on them. And a lot of change that needs to happen may never come or may be slowed because they didn't do what they're supposed to. There's just a tremendous amount of pressure in addition to just doing the job like everybody else has to do.

Production: Let's talk about mentors. Who were the people who influenced you? Did you have anybody who you particularly looked up to in the community?

Daniel: Ironically enough, the same person that I wound up leaving here because of was the same person that I did look up to initially: [redacted name]. He did a good job as a police officer, as far as I could tell when I first got hired here, but he also has some flaws. I remember he was my field training officer when I first got hired, and I'd ride around with him in addition to other field training officers. He was in charge, and we would go across the tracks, and—this is on one of my first days here—he would see some people standing on the corner, and we'd hit the gas and run up on them real quick and then "get out! Get out! Run! Run!" He chased them, and I got out my car, but I never ran because I didn't understand why. Why are we chasing these people just standing here? He'd come back and say, "Well, they're selling drugs." He didn't know what they were doing. He just saw some black kids standing on the corner "selling drugs." You might be thinking, Why did you look up to him? I was a brand new cop, and aside from things like that that he

did, he did a good job. He was a good cop. He knew how to be a police officer. He knew how to solve crimes and knew how to investigate stuff, but it became more and more apparent later on, looking back, that those little things that I saw him do...he probably had some other things going on as well with him that made him do things like that. And then it came to a head with me that day at the school.

Production: One person that Reggie brought up—kind of well-known in the area—is Bo Harrison. Did you ever have any experiences with him?

Daniel: I did. Yup. Some experiences I had with Lieutenant Harrison: he was at some events where he would speak and I would be there. And I remember, when he spoke, he truly represented the community, and he was somebody that I looked up to. It was amazing to see how much respect he had from the community. He was from the community and he never forgot that. And everybody knew who he was. That's something that stuck with me and I said, "It's important what he's doing. The people know him. They respect him. And he hasn't lost touch with his roots." That was something important.

Production: Do you remember when he died? Do you remember what the impact on the community was?

Daniel: Of course. I'll never forget that. It was sad for everybody. He was really, really good man. I remember the night he got shot. I heard the news, and the worst thing about it—you know, we've been talking about a lot of racial stuff today—from my understanding, it was retribution against law enforcement, where they thought they were shooting a white cop. They didn't know Bo was in that car, and it was him that got killed that night. Understand, it doesn't make it any better. You should never kill anybody. But the irony of trying to commit an act like that because of racism, and it turned out to be something like that...it was just a lesson for us all. It's never the right answer, and it just shows you how wrong racism is.

Production: Did that incident have an impact on the police force in Zephyrhills? Did any attitudes change, or did that motivate anybody in any way?

Daniel: When Bo Harrison died, it affected everybody. It affected every agency around, too, not just because he was such a well-known, respected law enforcement officer—a person in the community—but because there were so few of us out there. Now another one was gone, and now who's going to step up? You know, he really was the leader. He was *the man* and now he's gone. So who's gonna step up and take over that mantle? It took some time for everybody to kind of gather their thoughts and understand that he was truly gone and [decide]: what are we going to do now?

Production: Let's talk about outside of law enforcement. Let's talk about the community. Names that keep coming up for us are people like Irene Dobson, people like Eddie Nunn, these kinds of people. Did you know those people?

Daniel: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

Production: Okay. Give me some memories of Reverend Nunn. Can you give me a description of him?

Daniel: Reverend Nunn was a character. Physically, he wasn't a really tall guy. He wasn't somebody that was imposing, but his mind and his character were imposing. When he spoke, you listened. He had that demeanor about himself. He was a true leader. A leader at church, but a leader in the community, too. He took on a role of a mentor for me, where I would go to him for guidance, and when I was having hard times—and I would have hard times frequently, you know—he would kind of help me get through some of those times, giving me some of that fatherly advice that sometimes you need. Not just in law enforcement-related matters; in personal matters, too. He just really cared. He was always there for everyone.

Production: Do you remember a piece of advice he gave you? Is there anything that you could share with us?

Daniel: I'd rather not share some of the advice he gave me [laughs], but yeah. Let me try to think of stuff that I can tell you. A lot of it was personal stuff, relationship stuff, but let's see...He just told me to make sure I do my best and to make sure I always put my best foot forward, because everybody's watching and everybody's going to be looking at me, and they're going to judge what I do harsher than they would anybody else. And he just always encouraged me to make sure I'm always doing what I'm supposed to be doing.

Production: What do you think his total impact on the community of Zephyrhills was?

Daniel: Reverend Nunn's total impact on the community of Zephyrhills? Man...I mean, look what we just got through talking to about? Just a few doors down, there's a captain of this police department who is a black officer, a black man. That was unheard of a decade ago. Beyond that, we have more diversity this police department than we've ever had. And that specifically all goes back to Reverend Nunn and him taking that chance and going down to City Hall and making that contact with Steve and saying, "We need some change here." Anybody can step up and say, "Hey, we need some change. Let's get some change. Look what I did" and that's it: "I made some change!" That's not who he was. That wasn't it for him. He said, Okay, we got this now: what's next? We need more. This isn't enough. We still have a long way to go." And he never stopped fighting to try to get more done.

Production: He was constantly trying to help the black community gain ground in Zephyrhills?

Daniel: Not just the black community. Bigger than that. It was the whole community for him. He wasn't a "black and white" guy. He was, this is our community. Everybody benefits from this, not just one group of people. And that was so unique about him. It wasn't just about "we need a black officer here because I want a black officer here." It was "we need a black officer here because it's the right thing for everybody." And it turns out that he was right.

Production: Let's talk about Mrs. Dobson, too. Similar to Reverend Nunn, what was her total impact on the community?

Daniel: Mrs. Dobson was a community leader and a personality in her own right. She had a huge impact, I know, with our street renaming and her role in that. I was talking to Steve a little earlier, and he shared a story about when he and I were over visiting Mrs. Dobson and we were introducing me for the first time, meeting Mrs. Dobson, and saying, "This is our first new new black police officer we have here." And just to show you how things were so long ago, Mrs. Dobson turned and asked me—pointing to Steve and touching his skin—"Can you arrest him?" And [Steve and I were confused]. What she meant was, he's a white man, and black officers weren't allowed to arrest white men back in the day. So she wanted to make sure that I was legitimately a police officer that could arrest a white man. And that's just something to show how long she's been around in this community, how much she's seen and how things were back then.

Production: I'll ask this kind of as a final thought: We touched briefly on the Martin Luther King Street renaming, and it's a theme that keeps coming back in all of these interviews. Do you feel like that was a setback for Zephyrhills at all?

Daniel: The Martin Luther King Street renaming, was it a setback? Yeah, it definitely was a setback. There's no doubt about that. People were bringing up reasons, saying that we have a grid. I remember the "holy grid" came up in conversation: "We don't want to mess the grid up." Well, you know, I understand that streets being in consecutive order is convenient, but Zephyrhills isn't a big town. We're not a big city. You're not going to lose your way if one street is renamed, and the bigger picture is why we're doing it, who we're representing. The reasoning for it was all so positive and it shouldn't have been overshadowed by such a petty thing. So I do think it set us back a little.

Production: Do you remember anything that anybody was saying? Do you have any specific memories of things, like maybe the reaction from the community? We've talked about why people were objecting to it. How did people react to those rejections?

Daniel: I remember there were some very passionate conversations. I don't remember particulars of them, but I remember that tempers were flared on either side and I really couldn't understand why. I remember that. I don't have any specific memories of exact conversations people were having or anything like that. I remember that it was a big topic, and everybody was talking about it, and people were very upset about it. The reasons they gave may not have been the actual reasons they were upset, but, like I mentioned, the grid and then property values was another thing they kept bringing up: "That's going to lower the property values!" But I don't know if those were the real reasons, in retrospect.

Production: There were protests and things, too. Did those ever escalate to a point where, as a law officer, the hairs on the back of your neck kind of stood up?

Daniel: No, that's not something that I really recall as a law enforcement officer happening.

Production: Okay. I wanted to get that perspective.

Daniel: Yeah.

Production: Final question: Do you think things have gotten better? Do you think that, despite the setbacks, things have moved forward since then?

Daniel: Have things moved forward since the street renaming? Absolutely. I see it everyday, just people in the community talking to people. Everybody has moved past it. Attitudes have changed. Like I said, [there's] diversity, not just in the police department, but the entire city. Everything's growing and changing and everyone's accepting. I would say everyone's moved past it for sure, but it was a good conversation to have, though, because it was needed. Sometimes when those things happen, they bring out feelings and attitudes that you might not know your neighbors—your friends—have, and then when you have those conversations—not easy conversations to have, but when you have them—everybody's usually better for it, because you get different perspectives and you can all grow.

Production: And the final thing I'll have you do is just introduce yourself.

Daniel: Should I put anything in there about the Tampa Police Department? I'm not sure.

Production: State what you do currently, and then we can use the context of the interview to talk about “first officer.” Go ahead.

Daniel: My name is Daniel Hill. I'm currently assigned as a detective with the Tampa Police Department.

END