I am here with Dino Thompson. My name is Candacy Taylor and I am here to interview Dino about Charlie Fitzgerald, or Charlie’s Place in the Green Book. It is December 8th and it is about 2pm and the year is 2018. Could you please state your name and spell it for me?

D-I-N-O T-H-O-M-P-S-O-N.

And can you tell me when you first learned about the Green Book?

The first time I saw the Green Book, I might have been eight. I’m not sure. About fifty feet away across the street from the Kozy Korner, where my father’s restaurant... We lived on top of the restaurant. It was a place called Hart’s Esso, and when the restaurant was slow during the winter, I used to work in the restaurant, when you’re six years old and when you weren’t standing on Coca Cola crates washing dishes or glasses. I’d go over and sometimes...he had a little carport for washing cars. I’d help him dry cars and he’d give me a quarter. I’d get a rag and I’d help dry the cars. I was a comic book reader back then. I loved comics, and I saw a comic in the stand at the Esso station. It was fifty cents and comic books were a dime back then. I wanted to buy one and he told me, Mr. Hart told me that was not a comic. But it looked like a comic. It was colored on the outside. It was not a photograph it was a painted picture and I remember my dad finally explained to me one day. I asked him about that comic and he knew exactly what it was. He was Greek. And he knew why it was needed. He explained it to me and I sort of understood it, that there was a book for colored folks, that told them where to eat, and where to sleep, and where to get a haircut and where to go to the hair salon and where to go to a club to see somebody. So that was my first introduction to it. I was quite young.

Do you know about what year that was?

That was probably ’53, ’54, something like that. And from that day on I was always aware of the Green Book and quickly found out...I knew Charlie all my life, up to then. He died in 1955, Charlie Fitzgerald, who owned Charlie’s Place and the Whispering Pines Motel. But he would come in and eat with my father in the mid-forties, which was unusual at the time, but we didn’t consider it that unusual. And nothing ever happened about it. We’d get some funny looks.

You say it was unusual because it was a white-owned restaurant...?

Well it was the Deep South and it was Jim Crow and a lot of local blacks never thought to come in and eat with us, but Charlie did once a week or so, or maybe twice.

He was friends with your father right?

He would not only eat, but he would shoot the breeze with my dad and other Kibitzers that sat around, a
couple of Jews, a couple of Greeks, Italian, maybe a Lebanese and a couple of Baptists.

You know, a nice little gathering of locals would sit and Charlie was one of them. But he and dad would sit sometime and he'd always have a club sandwich. He liked to eat a club sandwich. So I got to know Charlie at a very young age. I remember one day I was in my cowboy uniform, I was probably six [or] seven, and I noticed he had a pistol. He had a shoulder pistol, it was pearl handled pistol and I had two pearl handled pistols on and I said, “You’ve got a pearl-handled pistol too.” He had a jacket on. He said “Yeah.” And I asked him if I could see it. He took the bullets out, it was a real pistol, I didn’t know it was a real pistol at the time, but he took the bullets out and handed it to me and I put it in my holster and ran down the street, I killed a few people, I came back and it got to be a thing, when he’d come in sometime he’d let me borrow his real 32 revolver and I’d run down the street, shoot a few people come back and reload it and put it back. I mean it just got to be a funny thing. After a while I realized, my dad said it was a real pistol and I knew what guns where because growing up in the South, my dad had a little pistol that he kept behind the register.

So I knew Charlie at a very young age and then dad explained to me that Charlie’s Place was in that magazine [Green Book] and so he went over and got one and showed me. Here’s Charlie’s Place. And Gordon’s Hotel was in it too at Atlantic Beach. But Charlie’s Place since it was in the Green Book, travelers would stop there that were traveling and stay in his motel and he would send them over to eat so sometimes we’d get a black family in 1950, ’52, ’53, ’54. We’d have a black family with children in there. Very unusual at the time. No other restaurants were serving blacks at the time, even though we weren’t noticing it, it just wasn’t a big deal to us. It’s not like my father… he wasn’t Rosa Parks, he wasn’t trying to do anything, it just didn’t occur to him to be bigoted. He was Greek, he was from Cyprus, it just didn’t occur to him. So he could have had a dining room full of blacks and that’d have been fine.

So it was at an early age that I got familiar with it [the Green Book] and I’d peek through it as I got older, you know 10, 11, 12 and look through it. I thought it was kind of fascinating that the colored had a book that told them where to eat. You know, it was a travel guide and I remember asking dad one time, why aren’t we in there? He didn’t have an answer for that. I guess he could have been. If someone mentioned that we served blacks, we could have been in there.

I wonder if he would have been ostracized by the community?

Well he never was.

There’s stories about Victor Green who started the Green Book and he writes letters to places like North Dakota and Nebraska and you can tell he’s trying to get more businesses to participate and they write these letters back and with basically have all of these excuses about why they can’t, and that they don’t want to “alienate” their other customers. And it seems like, especially in the South at this time, maybe it could have hurt your father’s business.

I don’t think he would have…if Victor Green would had sent him a letter, he would have said “Yes, we serve…” I don’t remember an incident…now I’m sure you’re well aware of the ugly Klan incident, but I don’t remember somebody come storming in there saying something. When I got a little older and was aware that people were…that it was an issue. You know when you get to be 10 or 11 you’re a lot more aware than when you’re six. I can remember looking over and seeing a black family, maybe they were whispering something but we’d always notice a family or someone looking but nobody ever got up and
left. And I try to tell people [pause] there was a lot going on down here where we did get along fine. There was a lot of interaction between blacks and whites that were good.

That were fun. I tell people all the time, I think music, as much as any judge’s gavel did as much to bring the races together than any court decision. Because people were integrating in the ‘20s and ‘30s and ‘40s because of music and dance.

[10:00]
I went to many black clubs and I went to many white clubs where the blacks were upstairs in the balcony. I went to clubs where the whites were upstairs in the balcony and went to a few where they had a rope, which was always funny. Called it “Jumping the Rope” and there were blacks there and whites there. I always thought that was pretty funny.

They used ropes to segregated beaches too.

Yeah, well Atlantic Beach had a yellow rope that went out in the ocean to a buoy. Whites were swimming over here, I always thought that was hilarious. This rope is really going to keep people apart. It was just a symbol.

At what age did you realize that Charlie had Charlie’s Place and there was music there?

Well, we used to have… the black population here was the heart of the service station, the hotel and restaurant service staff. The fact that there was no such thing as a Mexican and if you went in the kitchen there would be a black, a Greek, a Lebanese, an Italian, you know, that’s who would work in kitchens. And that’s who was working in our kitchen. Hardly anybody had cars. It was pretty unusual to have a car back then. My dad had a jeep. I still have a jeep, and he would pile the staff in the car and we’d take them home every night, so we’d drive to “The Hill,” which was what we’d call “Colored Town” because it had a little elevation to it and we’d take our staff back to the “The Hill.” And being that Charlie would eat in the restaurant in the ‘40s, dad would stop sometime and have a beer with Charlie. He’d really have a VO. Liquor was illegal but Charlie had plenty of liquor behind the counter back then so dad would stop and they’d have a VO together, shoot the breeze, and I’d listen to great music, they always had a great jukebox in there.

After stopping there, I grew up at the Pavilion where black music was infecting the white jukeboxes. We had a jukebox in the Kozy Korner and I convinced them to put some Big Joe Turner and Amos Milburn on the jukebox every now then, and my dad would hear the song and he’d pop up and look at me, “You told them to put that on there?” You know, the guy would come in and put the records. He’s take a Perry Como off and put Amos Milburn on it and Big Joe Turner. But taking the staff home on “The Hill” we got to know Charlie. You know, I’m six or seven years old and I’m sitting in the nightclub with my dad. My dad took me everywhere like a dog. I mean, I just went with him everywhere, he took me everywhere. And he’d actually give me a drink. He’d say, wherever we were, to “give the boy a drink with milk in it.” And they’d always give me a Brandy Alexander. So at the age of six or seven, I would order a Brandy Alexander. I’d say, “hold the nutmeg.” Dad figured it had milk in it, so. But I got to know Charlie at a very young age. And I got to know the club at a very young age and then I got to love music because I grew up watching the Jitterbugs. And we’d go to Charlie’s Place and there’s blacks doing the same steps with a little different style. I was so stupid I thought, I wonder how they learned
Can you talk about the Shag in relationship to Charlie’s, because there was a woman, right?
There was a woman named “Shag,” Cynthia Harold [assumed spelling] she was the first black woman I ever danced with. She was a very good dancer…classy lady. She would teach me a step or two and we’d take it back to the Pavilion. And then some of the great white dancers would occasionally venture out to Charlie’s and dance interracially and pick up steps, and show them a step, and it was just a fun time. There was no rumbles or fist fights about that. I was in Charlie’s Place probably…I saw probably 25 artists there and then I went sometime to listen to the jukebox and hang out, but I never saw a white and black incident. I had one, one time, and that was after Charlie had died. I was about 16 and his wife, Miss. Sarah. And somebody should do, everybody keeps talking about they’re going to do a movie about Charlie’s Place and there might be something coming out…it’s worth a movie. I wrote four movie scripts based on that book and Charlie’s a huge part of it, Charlie’s Place, and the dance and all that. But Ms. Sarah was…when Charlie died, Ms. Sarah started running the club. She was a beautiful lady. Have you seen a picture of her?

No.

Classy lady, and she ran the club with an iron first. I mean she was a business woman running a night club dealing with some of the top acts in the world and handling drunks and a tough crowd occasionally and she did it well. I don’t think she gets the credit, the notoriety that she should because she ran it from ’56 to the ’70s and the club…after integration was so huge and you could go over here to see a black group it kind of slowly killed Charlie’s Place, the club. You know you could go anywhere and see Amos Milburn or any black group now, because they were all playing at the white clubs now.

But Ms. Sarah was classy. I remember her telling me every now and then, a little wino would get into my face and call me something but I knew better than to start any problem there. Even though I grew up fist fighting on the Boulevard, we all grew up that way. Somebody got in your face, you hit the beach. You got into a fist fight. You got it over with and you became friends. You didn’t shoot anybody, you know. But I remember she told me, “Any trouble starts in here, you let me handle it.” I said, “Yes Ma’am. I’m never going to start in trouble in here.” The last thing you’d want is a 15-year old getting hurt by a black guy you know in 1960 or ’59, or something like that.

But I remember one night, every now and then someone would get in my face and some of her…Robert Gore one of her bouncers and bartenders would look across, he was 6’5”, 285 [pounds] he would look across and I would just raise my eyebrows and he would come across and pick the guy up by his armpits, take him out. You know just a drunk…I remember one fella kept calling me gingerbread, asking where in the hell did I think I was. I said, let me buy you a beer with a quarter, I said, “let me buy you a beer” you know. He wouldn’t get out of my face. And finally they started taking him out and he started hollering, “You chicken shit, you chicken shit. You hidin’ behind Mr. Sarah’s skirt. And I went up to Ms. Sarah, she said, “Are you alright?” I said, “Yes Ma’am.” I said, “Did you hear what he said?” She said, “I heard him yelling.” “He said I was hiding behind your skirt. Would you mind just taking him out back, nobody will ever know. Just take him out back, and just let me go out back.” Because I couldn’t face down being called “Chicken Shit,” I just…when you’re 15, 16…I grew up on the Boulevard, you just don’t back off from that. She said…she kind of looked at me… I said, “Nobody will ever know.” So she searched him and he had a big knife on him and I went “whew.” She got Robert to search him. She went out there and told Robert “Get out there. Make sure
nobody gets hurt.” He was real drunk and he took a couple of swings and I popped him twice and he fell down. Ms. Sarah walked right up to him as he was trying to get up and she knew him. She knew his name, and whatever his name was, she said, “George” or whatever his name was, she pulled her skirt up and said, “This is what hides under my skirt.” And she had a little pistol right there, taped to her leg.

And I went “Woah. Okay Ms. Sarah” And she walked back in and said, “Next time you deal with me.” I had even more respect for her after that. I thought, you’re a bad lady [laughing]. Not only pretty, you’re a bad lady.

But I never had any incidents there. I went to see Amos Milburn, Ruth Brown, Charles Brown, Big Joe Turner, Little Richard, Clyde McPhatter, Marvin Gaye, Jerry Butler, The Clovers, The Drifters and The Tams. I can name another 10-15. But [it was] the best music in the world, you know.

**Talk about the beach music scene and what was going on with Charlie’s and the jukeboxes versus what you could hear, you know what was special about Charlie’s and the music.**

Well to me, it was the best music in the world and it was all there at Charlie’s Place and it was not being…in the 40s and the 50s, the black groups were not playing a lot of the other clubs. So if you wanted to see a great black music group, you’d go to Charlie’s and later on in the ‘60s they started appearing everywhere and gradually they diluted Charlie’s power, Charlie’s Place’s draw and power. But when people talk about Beach Music and people from up north come down and they hear the word Beach Music all over the place…essentially Beach Music is this: it’s the music you could hear here on the jukeboxes, on the white jukeboxes that you could not hear if you were from Dayton, Ohio, or Reading, Pennsylvania, or West Virginia. You could hear it here [in] the ‘40s and ‘50s, much earlier than anywhere else in the country and that was mainly because of the influence of Charlie’s Place and Atlantic Beach too. We demanded, because we heard that music at such a young age, we demanded that it be on our jukeboxes. So you could go to Pavilion in 1955 and there was 25 black music songs on there. Great songs, you know. Little Willie John Fever, Sixty Minute Man.

These were not only great music, but great dance songs. Now when people would go back home, they couldn’t hear that music so they started ordering it on Randy’s Record Rack [assumed spelling] and Atlantic Records. You could just call them and they would send you Little Willie John’s Fever. Randy’s Record’s Rack. The President of Atlantic Records was Jerry Wexler and he was the one who changed the term from race music to rhythm and blues on the charts.

He was the one who suggested a more palatable name instead of race music and he came up with Rhythm and Blues. It was great. A great damn name. Couldn’t come up with a more perfect name. It’s not “Blues” it’s “Rhythm and Blues” You know, it’s a danceable blues. This was an interview he did. I quoted him in this little book there, he said, “About every six weeks we would but out six-seven songs. Ruth Brown, The Clovers, The Drifters, Ray Charles, La Vern Baker. He said, “We were marketing strictly to the black community. We didn’t even worry about the white community. But he said, “we noticed in this little pocket of South Carolina, this little beach area of South Carolina, white teenagers by the thousands were ordering our records from Randy’s Record Rack and from Atlantic Records and we were wondering, *What the hell is going on? Why is it happening right there*?”

This wasin1952, he said this. So he sent Jesse Stone down. He was one of the top song writers and he was working with Atlantic Records. He wrote “Shake, Rattle and Roll” for Big Joe Turner and he wrote a lot of great stuff and anyway, he sends Jesse down, he said, “See what the hell’s going on down there.” He said, “I’d come down…” He goes to Charlie’s Place, he goes to the Pavilion, he goes to Ocean Drive, sees all these white kids dancing to nothing but black music and he finally realized that they wanna dance. So they’re digging music that has a backbeat, a danceable backbeat. That’s what they love. And a lot of
black music had a danceable backbeat, *da dant da dantda*... you know.

So he goes back and tells him. So Jerry Wexler said, “Every six weeks we’d put out a black record and it would be a hit at the beach and we’d always call it another Beach Record. So he was even calling it a Beach Record. But that’s essentially what black music/beach music was, the music you couldn’t hear back home but you could hear here and the reason we had on our jukeboxes [at the Kozy Korner] was because Charlie and The Hill had it all on their jukeboxes and some of us little white squirts are going out there, we’re either taking a maid home, we’re taking a dishwasher home, you’re driving down Carver Street and the damn music is coming out of this joint and this Club Bamboo, music’s blowing out of that, the Patio Casino, music’s blowing out of there, Charlie’s Place, the music’s blowing out of there, so you go back home and you think, hey, Keel’s music would come down and they’d start hanging the records and we all demanded we said, “We want Little Richard, we want Chuck Berry and we want Little Willie John and we want Ruth Brown, and Charles Brown, and Amos Milburn, and Big Joe Turner on our jukeboxes, you’d come down here in 1955 and walk up to a white jukebox and the damn thing was full of black music.

It was a phenomenon at that moment. Now it gradually infected an entire world, but we started it here earlier and I think that the most important influence was Charlie, Charlie’s Place. It was Charlie’s for a while and then Miss Sarah’s for a while. But it was just good music. Perry Como’s got a pretty voice and Pat Boone’s got a pretty voice but when Pat Boone started singing Tutti Frutti, I mean we all just had a big damn laugh. We just thought *Jesus, that’s funny.* But Little Richard said, Pat Boone made me a lot of money.

*That’s great. So talk about what happened with Charlie and how old were you when the Klan incident took place?*

Well I was quite young but you know it’s like a hurricane, you remember those things, you remember incidents like that. But Charlie… the Klan didn’t come down here to get Charlie. Some people say that, they would come through a town… the first incident happened in Conway [South Carolina], they came parading through Conway before a vote when there was an election and sometimes they would show their butts by parading through a town before an election, I guess to… as far as I was concerned they were just showing their asses. They marched through town and scare everybody and I guess they’d try to suppress the black vote by just their presence.

They weren’t there during the election but about four or five days before an election they’d parade through Conway. And then it wasn’t long after that, it was in August, they did a parade through downtown Myrtle Beach and they came right in front of the Kozy Korner and I remember my father… there were customers in the restaurant, and I remember everybody was frightened and my father told me to get down and my mother was crying because we all knew the Klan… their hit list didn’t just include blacks, it included Jews, immigrants, Catholics… if you read any of the Klan books there were chapters on immigrants, Catholics, Jews, and Negroes. And they’ll have a chapter in there explaining why they’re inferior.

So I remember Mom was crying, afraid, and dad and I were watching from the window. And they paraded right through Myrtle Beach, there were 26 car loads, I think, about 80 men and many of them were walking beside the slow moving little caravan and many were carrying, shouldering rifles and shot guns. And the lead car, I’ll never forget, the lead car, I think it was a Continental because we all knew
what a Continental was, it was a cool car back then and the Continental kit on the back was a Lincoln. And that was Thomas Hamilton's car, he was the Grand Dragon of South Carolina. He had had ambitions to be the Imperial Wizard of the entire South but it never worked out that way. But he was from Leesville, South Carolina. He was a grocer. And they were just parading though town, scaring the hell out of everybody and they went through downtown Myrtle Beach and they went up Carver Street which is ten blocks long, they went past Charlie’s Place.

*Wasn’t that lead car kind of lit up or something?*

Yes, it was. The lead car had a welded angle-iron cross welded to the bumper about four feet tall and it was punched out with red light bulbs. It was pretty ominous looking, like a burning cross, I guess. Their symbol. And that was easy to remember. Who the hell had ever seen that? But it was actually welded to the bumper. So they went through to Carver Street which was 10 blocks long and they came out back to the highway, they went up to Atlantic Beach, it was August, it was quite a popular black beach, back in the day. They called it Black Pearl. And they scattered a lot of people. Just the sight of them scattered people. And then they went up… I think they stopped at Loris [South Carolina] I think they were probably getting some liquid courage, sitting there tickled with themselves, you know that they had rattled the towns.

And that’s when Charlie, some of the blacks in the neighborhood came back to Charlie’s Place and they had guns… two, three, four or five… there were a hundred but there were several men who had brought back guns. And Charlie thought *jeeze, this is a Saturday night*, people were drinking, so he calls the Sherriff, Sheriff Sasser, and tells him, “Tell the boys they’ve had their fun but not to come back, there may be bloodshed.”

Well, he… I’m convinced that he was not threatening them, he and the Sherriff got along pretty… he was bootlegging and the Sherriff knew he was bootlegging and he got away with it. My dad couldn’t get away with it, he’d get raided. So he and Sherriff were friends. The Sherriff was a good guy, he was not a Klansman, he was not a racist but you know, Charlie’s probably taken care of him a little bit so he could serve liquor. But I guess somebody heard that. They probably had those radios on the desk back then, so I guess one of the deputy’s heard it who was a Klans sympathizer and he contacts the Klan bunch, Thomas Hamilton and says, “You know, those niggers said, ‘Don’t you dare come back. They’ll be bloodshed.”

You know, when you say that—here they come. And they parked in front of Charlie’s Place and they shot for several minutes, the newspaper report said that they might have shot from 300 to 600 shots, who knows, even if it was 200 or 300 that’s a lot bullets. And then they went in and destroyed his place with bats. They liked to carry bats. They broke the jukeboxes up and the windows up. They manhandled Shag, Cynthia Harold [assumed spelling] she got roughed up, one of the waiters in the pink house got shot in the leg and one of the Klansman was shot dead in the parking lot in his uniform in his Klan sheets and when they took his sheets off he had his Horry County police uniform on and he was a magistrate elect, he had just gotten elected magistrate and he was in Conway.

There was probably four or five people from Conway there, there were no Myrtle Beach people there, I’m sure there were Klansmen in Myrtle Beach, but no Myrtle Beach people in that group, most were
from out of town. Most were from the upper part of the state. And the Klansman that was shot dead was in…his name was Johnson [assumed spelling] and Charlie was abducted, put in a trunk, taken to a remote part of the….off highway 501, tied to a tree and beaten badly. And they left him there, maybe for dead but he was beaten badly, and the snipped the ends of his ears off. The Klan would sometimes mark you, that was one of their things sometime they might mark you or cut across your head, they liked to do stupid stuff like that and that was their marking on him and we all heard about the incident and we knew something terrible had happened to Charlie’s people said that he had died and was killed. But he struggled and got loose and stumbled to the highway 501 and someone picked him up and took him to a doctor, called the Sherriff, the Sherriff came to get him and took him to the police station and then they whisked him away to Columbia, to the prison hospital, and hid him out for a while. And Charlie disappeared for months.

Some say that he went to Washington, some say he went to New York and now we know that the FBI, who interviewed him, and Thurgood Marshall actually interviewed him, that’s a fascinating part of that story. And he came back…I’m not sure how many months later, but he came back. Then he ran his club another five years and died of natural causes, but I remember when he first came back, a lot of the kibitzers discussed it and everybody was pretty upset about that.

I don’t care who you were, when things like that happened, that’s disgusting. Charlie came into the Kozy Korner, it might have been a year later, six months I can’t remember the kibitzers were sitting there and he walks in and he was looking good, he was always dressed. He always had starched clothes on. If you went down to the club in the day, he would wear a set of overalls on, white shirt buttoned up and his overalls were starched. I used to remember. I’d think damn. I mean he had creases on his overalls, You know you could cut cheese and he’s out there hammering something. Damn he looks good and he’s hammering. But, he was kind of Cab Calloway-ish you know, about his clothes. But he walks in the Kozy Korner, and I remember, it was a startling moment, you know, because we expected to see him looking bad but he wasn’t, he was looking good, he was all healed up. We had heard his ears were cut off, I had heard his ears were cut off and I remember I was staring at his ears and he’s walking by and he swooped me up and said, “Boy, you looking at my ears?” And he kind of stuck me up there. He had ears, his earlobes had been cut but you couldn’t tell, they were all healed up. I said, “No sir, no sir, I’m not looking at your ears.” And he laughed, and everybody laughed. And that was the last time they ever discussed it.

[43:31]

That group of men. Of course this group of men, my father, another Greek Guy, Joseph Sikel, his entire family had been wiped out by the Ottoman Turks his father’s, mother’s, sister’s, brother’s, uncles had fought in two wars, and this was the greatest generation, they didn’t talk about their…the horrors they had seen and I remember Charlie, he sat down with the old boys at dinner and it was not like “Charlie tell me what happened…here’s your club sandwich.”

And life went completely back to normal, just like that. And that’s the way people handled things back then. I’m not saying don’t dwell on it. But that’s the way that generation handled it. They didn’t talk about the war. I knew many people that were…saw horrors in the war, as a kid sometimes I’d want to talk about it and I thought it was cool to hear about war. They never talked to me about it. And that’s the way Charlie was. When I mentioned it again, I’d ask other people, “Charlie ever talk about that?” Miss Sarah never talked about it either. Miss Sarah, after Charlie
died, many people wanted to interview her. She just refused, she would never talk to anybody about it and then she became a Jehovah’s Witness. And then she wouldn’t talk to anybody about Charlie. People came from major magazines. They came down and she wouldn’t give interviews. She didn’t want to talk about that part of her life.

Now after that incident there were a lot of people in the black community who were upset with Charlie, probably because they thought he’d brought it on him. He didn’t. The Sherriff said, the white…the Mayor said, white people were going out there and that was probably not a good thing. But that’s not what happened, it’s just they did their thing, and I think that one statement “Tell the boys they had their fun and don’t come back, there might be bloodshed.” Of course, when the Deputy passes that line on, it sounds a little different. They’re daring your ass to come back? And then they come back and shoot up. And all the rednecks, me too, growing up, we could all shoot, all grew up…we all had a rifle, so. They weren’t aiming at people. They could have killed 50 people.

They were just shooting the damn place up, you know. And that’s bad enough. I mean, sometimes, I hear people say that they were shooting at everybody but that’s not…people were running, I’m damn sure they were running and going off into the woods and running behind the club. There was a patio and some of the people that were in the club got hit with glass and things like that. They didn’t get shot, except that one fella got shot in the leg, grazed. But Charlie carried a 32 during the day and sometimes he carried a 45 at night with his suit. He could have been the one that killed that Klansman but he was never…the Sherriff, they never questioned about that, who killed the Klansman. Too bad. But it was a horrible incident, but you know after that incident. They all got arrested. The Klan got arrested and they were found innocent. Surprisingly.

But after that, I can’t remember how long after that. That same damn bunch comes back and takes over a black church. They went into a black church at night. They were having a night service. This was in Conway and it was in one of the larger black churches in the county. And they went in there and locked the doors, barred the doors, the Grand Dragon got up there and started preaching, of course it terrified everybody, they didn’t hurt anybody, or beat up anybody, and they didn’t destroy the church. But they took over the church and the congregation for about two hours. That incident, along with the Charlie incident, galvanized the community to the point where that’s enough. A lot of people who sort of went, I know there’s a Klan but I don’t want to talk about it, I don’t want to do anything about it…that was enough. White or black, Greek or Jew, back in the ‘50s everybody was religious back then. Everybody believed in a God. Everybody went to church just about…I mean the black community, even the white community, the church was the center of their…you just didn’t go in and blaspheme a damn church. So whites and blacks on both sides, community leaders, preachers and reverends, all started meeting.

Strom Thurmond was the Governor, he condemned the Charlie incident to high hell. He said it was mob violence, we won’t stand for it. But that church thing, that was like, it’s enough. And after that incident, if you sympathized with the Klan, you didn’t say anything about it anymore. You know, if you thought it was a good thing, you didn’t talk a lot about it. It just put a stigma on it that you couldn’t scrub with Ajax. They went atook over a church. It didn’t matter if it was a black church. Baptists are Baptists. God was in there and that was enough. So that incident, it kind of did them in around here. We never had another incident.
I think when I was 17, I was driving along the countryside one time and I saw six or seven Klansmen out there in the middle, with a damn cross in the middle of nowhere and I’m thinking look at those idiots. There was about eight people out there. I just laughed and I said, “nice crowd you boys are gathering.” But that was sort of the end of it. But Charlie survived and lived to fight another day. He ran his club another five years and he died of natural causes. His wife ran the club for another… sixteen, seventeen years.

*What happened to Miss Sarah?*

Well she kind of got religion and when she became a Jehovah’s Witness she moved to Columbia to get away from her previous life. It was like she had sinned, in her previous life and she didn’t want to talk about it, and she wanted to leave it behind her. Like I said, a lot of people tried to track her down and interview her and she would have nothing to do with an interview.

*So she moved away.*

Yeah. She didn’t want to talk about Charlie, or Charlie’s Place. People were fascinated by that whole incident and that whole era but she didn’t want to talk about it. It would have been truly fascinating for all of us, for her to tell her story…You know, here’s a woman who ran a night club, for seventeen years, through Jim Crow, pretty tough to deal with band promoters, and Big Joe Turner, Amos Milburn, you know she’s booking bands, and negotiating contracts. Ruth Brown, I remember seeing her. I was the President of the Beach Music Hall of Fame. We met her one time at an event and I said, I saw you at Charlie’s Place when I was 14. And she said, “I remember that!” And she did. She said, “Yeah.” That was a fungig. She says, “You know what? They paid us! A lot of places we went, they didn’t pay us.” She said, “We got a good little paycheck.” And I asked her, I said, “A lot of places you went, you didn’t get paid?” “Yeah, after the gig, they’d say there wasn’t no money. We wouldn’t get paid.” She said, “That happened more than once.” Everybody got ripped off back in those days. But she remembered Charlie’s Place.

[52:54]

But the *Green Book* was a big part of Charlie’s Place for years, because it was one of only two places in this little fifty-mile stretch. And Charlie, like I said, would send us a party occasionally that would stop at his hotel. He had a little restaurant there, if they wanted to eat somewhere else, he would tell them, “Kozy Korner.” We were actually serving Marines too. All the Parris Island graduates, which stopped here for lunch on their way to Camp Lejeune. And the reason we got the contract was that there were so many black Marines and nobody else would take the contract.

*My stepfather, he died last November but he was a Marine at Camp Lejeune.*

Really?

*Yeah.*

How old was he when he died?
About 70. He was training for the Vietnam War. So he may have been at the Kozy Korner.

He might have. He might have. Wow. Every now and then, I'll see an old timer with a Marine hat on and I'll ask him, you know, when he graduated. If he did from '51 to '58 or 9, I'll ask him if he remembers stopping at the Kozy Korner for lunch and sometimes they remember me.

*I'm sure he probably did, because he loved his food.* [Laughing]

Yeah.

*Wow.*

And talk about an army of waitresses. We had some great servers there. People that I grew up with. They took care of me. Some of the greatest women I know in the world, were those waitresses, hardworking ladies. Some of them were very attractive people and they handled themselves you know, like a…elegantly. The white uniform, those waitress shoes. We had a lady named Nell who was a gorgeous redhead. She was like a cross between Gina Lollobrigida and Maureen O’Hara, but she was a very shapely, beautiful lady. This was in the ‘50s, you know, those little white uniforms, you know what are they nylon? She would wear panties and a bra and no slip sometimes and you could see through and that was quite…that was more controversial than blacks eating in the Kozy Korner. My mom would say, “She can't work like that!” And my dad would say, “It’s fine.” A lot of people would ask for Nell. She was our best advertisement.

*I interviewed one waitress.* [for my first book, Counter Culture] named Laverne, she worked in California at DuPars...She wasn’t supposed to wear her uniform to work because it was taboo, they weren’t supposed to do that, but her uniform was ruffled panties, and that’s it, with you know, stockings. And I guess because when you sat down to drive to work you crumpled the ruffles, so that’s why you weren’t supposed to wear them to work, but there’s a great photograph her son took of her on her way to work to get her in trouble, because she was wearing her ruffled panties on the way to work. It was such a different...

It's interesting.

Yeah, your mother really would have had a fit about that outfit [laughing].

[56:54]

Some of those ladies were the greatest. They worked with my mom and dad for twenty-some years and now I’ve got servers that work for me up at the Flamingo Grill, I’ve got [counting] one, two, three, four, five, six…I’ve got six people who’ve been with me 27, 28 years. Great gals. I’ve got a bartender that’s been there 33 years. So I'm lucky to have people like that, you know. But I’ve always admired the hardworking server so I'm a silly tipper when I go out, for the hardworking waitress. What else would you like to know?
Whatever you’d like to share about Charlie or Charlie’s Place. The highlights of the story, I think we’ve covered. Is there anything you want to talk about with what’s happening with Charlie’s now? I had Herbert talk about that a little bit, but just your perspective of knowing that you were there and what do you hope they’ll do with it?

Well a lot of people are coming at it from different angles. I remember when Herbert and I started talking about it, I told him, I said, “you’re going to run into some headwind” because they didn’t think of it... and you’ll get some resistance even from the black community because everybody will have a different take on what it should be. My take and Herbert’s take, we kind of agree on this, is the hope that part of it is a cultural center, which just means you can do anything. You can bring speakers in, you can bring a musician in, you can bring a historian in, you can bring a celeb in, maybe there’s a black musician in town, there’s a black singer, there’s a black educator. You can bring them in and have a little wine and cheese, invite people over to hear them speak, or just to meet and greet, you know, just so some young kids can look up and think, Hey, I can do this too...that lady...I can do this, I can do that. I don’t have to be a hustler. And if they do that then it’s open for anything, the community can use it for anything. They wanted to make it into a museum and museums get boring. If you go once, are you going again? No. So I told Herbert that we can make the museum out of it visually without calling it a museum. I can make posters about the...I can put Big Joe Turner up there and I can write the history of Big Joe Turner and have several pictures of him and album covers. I can do posters of a lot of people that played there and just say, “Here are the people that played at Charlie’s Place.” You know, Little Richard, Big Joe Turner, Amos Milburn, Ruth Brown. And that will be the history. Unfortunately, a lot of young blacks turned away from what I considered maybe the greatest artistic contribution in America, which is blues, jump blues and R&B. If I was black I’d be so proud to a part of that. Just to know that my relatives, my ancestors, or whatever did that.

But a lot of young blacks turned away from it because they were popular during Jim Crow and everybody thought they were “Uncle Tom-ing” it because they were playing for white audiences, but you know, he’d laughing about it, Look at all these white people come to see me. It’s not Uncle Tom. They paid to come and see me, come listen to me.”

Louis Jordan, he’d always have two shows, he’d have a seven o’clock show for the whites and then he’d have a ten o’clock show for the blacks. He’d always have two shows. He’d pack ‘em both. And Louis Jordan, they should build a statue for that guy. He’s the one that invented Rock ‘n Roll. Not Chuck Berry, not Little Richard. I mean he was playing Rock ‘n Roll in the ‘30s and he was doing soundies in the ‘30s. Have you ever seen some of his soundies?

No.

You can Google it. You can go to YouTube, Louis Jordan and it’s a video, he’s in a...they’re usually have a motel room or something and they called it Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five, and back then the big bands were so expensive, after the Depression people couldn’t afford to have a 30-piece orchestra so these tight little groups and Louis Jordan said, “I can make more noise with my thigh than some of the
bigger orchestras” which was true. Yeah, he was doing soundies and Chuck Berry said, “Louis Jordan was playing Rock 'n Roll long before any of us.” That's one of the reasons I wrote that book, I was just hoping that people would appreciate this great transition from this sick blues, I'm sick, I'm hurt, I'm dying, I'm persecuted, you know, which is a lot of blues, and then all of the sudden people were putting a little rhythm to it and then jump blues, people were dancing to it and then it became race music, R&B, but R&B music, it was happy music, it was uplifting, it told about what the blacks were doing, how they were enjoying themselves, to me, it's just a wonderful era.

Now they're sampling a lot of it in hip hop but you know, everybody that ever worked for me that's black, they appreciated that because I sort of...I talk about it all the time, I talk about...they knew about Charlie's Place fifty years ago, everybody that worked with me. But that's just a music that shouldn't be forgotten. It should be honored. Because to me it's the African American community's greatest artistic contribution to America. It's a gift. It's not forgotten, but it's...not too many of these people know about it. So if we could do a little of that history and bring some people in that could talk about it. Maybe we can bring a grandchild of Big Joe Turner in there somebody that would want to say, yeah...

I remember I was sitting on the porch one day talking to a couple of guys that worked at Charlie's Place and I looked over there and Big Joe Turner's sitting at a picnic table, he's got a t-shirt on, he's eating a big plate of ribs, and I said, “Is that Big Joe Turner?” He said, “Yeah.” I said, “Is he playing?” He said, “No, he's just been here for a month. He came and stayed for a month.” Little Richard came and stayed for two months. Came back stayed for a month. Amos Milburn used to hang around. Marvin Gaye, I came out of the club one time and Marvin Gaye's playing basketball behind the barbershop with some of the boys. I came back another time and he's walking out of the barbershop and he's combing his conk. He's slicking his conk back. He wasn't even playing he's hanging out. That's a great history. That's a juicy history. You know, people that live here, don't even know about it. You know, the greatest music in the world, right over there, you know playing right over there. There's a teeny little town, it wasn't like Myrtle Beach was Philadelphia.

*Do you think they knew who Charlie was? Why do you think they stayed for...or just would hang out for a month?*

Well they'd come to the Whispering Pines, the motel and hang out.

*It was just this community kind of happening and people just wanted to be there.*

Yeah.

*Wow.*

So, the new...if they can do the cultural center they're going to renovate some of the rooms. We're talking about doing one of the rooms in the ‘40s motif and one in ‘50s and one in ‘60s and one in the *Green Book*, we'll have one room about the *Green Book*, which will be cool. Hopefully, we can get some...they're reproducing some of the copies now, aren't they?

*Well, yeah. The Schomburg has them on their website. You can download them basically for free, the high-rez, so if you ever need any prints or anything you can go to “NYPL” and if type in Green Book and they've digitized their editions.*
That's what we need to do. We could have some posters of different cities.

Yeah, you can get big tiffs that you can download and just print. But then there’s a company that is reproducing facsimiles of Green Books and I know him, so if you need some of those, he may give you a wholesale deal, or whatever, or maybe you can sell them.

Yeah. I’ve got a picture of Hart’s Esso, I gave it to Becky to use on her documentary. But if you want, give me your email and I’ll send it to you.

Thank you.

If you want to include that little tidbit I told you about discovering the Green Book at a young age and that was the Esso.

Thank you because I do write about that story in my book and I could put it in the book.

Ok, I can show you the picture over there. I’ve got it on the computer.

Do you know what happened to any of the...thankfully you’re going to preserve Charlie’s, but after Miss Sarah left, were there any artifacts left? Do you know?

I went and talked to Miss Dolly [assumed spelling] at the barbershop and she had pictures and she wouldn’t give me any, when I was writing this book, I tried to get pictures and I said, “Do you have anything from Charlie’s Place?” And she said she had this and that, but she never came across them. Herb’s tried to get some things from her. So I don’t know of anybody who had…Leroy who lived across the street, Leroy Bronson, he and I used to go to the club with, that was the first time. Other than the next black girl I danced with was his girlfriend. Her name was Costella [assumed spelling], and I remember, he said…we were sitting there, I think was 14, 15 and he said, “You wanna dance with my girlfriend?” I said, “Yeah.” And Costella, she got up and I took her hand and we got to the dance floor and she kinda stopped me and she said, “You damn sure better know how to dance or I’m leaving you right here.” And I said, “I can dance a little.” [laughing] I remember she came to Flamingo Grill about 15 years ago. I said, “Costella, you remember what you said to me?” She said, “Oh my God, that’s rude. I would never have said that to you.” I said, “You sure as hell did! You said, you’d leave me right here.” [laughing] She said, “I did not.” I said, “Yeah, you did.”

[1:09:16]

But Leroy…when the Klan was shooting up the place, they lived right across the street...the club was right there and his mother, everybody had a stoop back then, they’d build the house about this high [gesturing] off the ground you know…his mother and went and made them crawl, he and his brother, made his crawl under the stoop and Leroy said they were sitting there watching the whole shooting, what a horrible memory.

Apparently it traumatized the whole community, people didn’t talk about it for years...

It did. It did. One of the best stories, and I’ve written, like I said, several movie scripts, I’ve tried to get a movie made. I met a lot of oily people. I have a great scene in there…that Leroy told me… Carver Street is ten blocks long, 10th Avenue to 21st Avenue and the Kozy Korner is on 9th
Avenue. So right in the middle, about the middle one day, Leroy said we were about ten years old, eleven years old and we were playing baseball right in the middle of the street and it was a dirt street and he said somebody came running from 10th Avenue all the way to where we are hollering, “Charlie’s sittin’ down eatin’! Charlie’s sittin’ down eatin!” Leroy said, “All 15 head of us took off and we ran all the way down to your daddy’s restaurant and all of us lined up in the window and he said, Charlie was sitting down with your daddy, eating.” Now this is a 65-year old man telling me this. He said, “That’s the coolest thing I ever saw.” He said, “We just took turns staring at that… [thinking] it can be done, it can be done. At the time you think that it cannot be done and there it is, right there. The coolest guy, the most important man that lived on Carver Street is eating in a white man’s restaurant in the middle of Myrtle Beach. Leroy said, “We all said as soon as we can make some, save some money we’re going to come down here and get us something to eat.

[1:11:44]

But I remember Leroy, we went to lunch one day we started talking about Charlie and I told him some cool stories about Charlie, he said, “Let me tell you one.” And I remember thinking… I’m not black, but I was trying to put myself there thinking, what a cool moment, what a defining moment, what a Zen moment to think, “Hey, that could be me. Yeah, we could do that.”

That’s amazing, that’s amazing. And it is very cinematic.

Yeah, I was thinking that would show up good. All those kids lined up in the window. And we had some writing on the window that said, “Seafood, Steaks.” And it was about this [gesturing] big and it was a little too tall, so Leroy said we actually had to hold each other up to look down on Charlie and your daddy and see that there was food. He said we actually took turns holding each other up.

[1:12:46]

[Looking at pictures] This is where I grew up right here, my mom’s room and my dad’s room. This was downtown Myrtle Beach, there was a dime store and there’s the movie theater and Charlie used to sit in the white section of the movie theater. He’d always sit in the corner, he’d always go in and sit, first or second row and he’d sit against the wall. And me, I’d sneak up, there was a whole section on the movie theater there. I did some horrendous things in the movie theater up in the balcony with blacks. They taught me how to spit in people’s Coke’s.

You know it’s interesting. I never knew the Kozy Korner was spelled this way [with two K’s]. Do you know what the origin of that was? Why your father chose that?

Well, it was already there.

Oh, it was already there.

Another Greek fella was running it, a Lebanese fella built it and my dad was, essentially the first four-five [of his book] pages will tell you, we were coming from Newport News. My daddy had gotten out of the Army and we were on the way to Florida. I was three months old and he stopped for lunch and that’s the day we arrived, right there. Dad took a little Brownie shot right there. That’s right
in front of the Kozy Korner. And we went in there for lunch, and there was a Greek running the place, a Greek sitting there. Started shooting the breeze and this Greek was a fast talking guy. He used to wear three-piece suits and spats. Dad said, “We’re going to Florida to find a life, start a business.” And he said, “I’ll sell you the lease on this place. It’s ready to go.” Dad told him how much money he had and he said that’s the price. Hour and a half later, dad was…he owned the business. He handed him cash, no lawyers, shake hands and Tom went up and took all the money out of the cash register, dumped it in an A&P bag, took his pistol, put it in there and some papers, [said] “Good luck” and walked out. Dad introduced himself to the waitresses and cooks. And along with the lease, the apartment on top went. So within three hours, we were moving in and owned a business after stopping for lunch. And I grew up there until I was about 14. It was a great place to grow up. The Pavilion’s right across the street, the music part, the Jitterbugs were over there, the movie theater’s right there.

*And you still own it?*

No, no. [looking at photos] That’s dad and his Jeep there. I learned to drive in that and got my first car date in that.

*That’s amazing. What’s interesting…we don’t know for sure, but there are stories that businesses that labeled with…that were spelled with these odd, you know where a “C” would normally be, but a “K” is?*

You think that has something to do with the Klan?

*Well [fix his mic]*

I don’t think, we spell it with Syrian [???] that built that.

*Right, this is a tradition. There were places called like, “Kathy’s Kountry Kitchen” for instance and Kountry is spelled with a “K” and that’s still open and there would have to be three “K’s” and now servers wear t-shirts that say “I got caught eating at the KKK.” They are very hostile to the Somali immigrants and it’s very obvious that they don’t want…*

*Where is this?*

This is in Noel, Missouri. And that’s been around forever and that’s the only one we’ve found that are still around. I’ve been talking to the Southern Poverty Law Center and we trying to figure out if there’s any real truth to it. Because other’s with three “K’s” in the title that were nefarious.

I’m sure that existed.

*Yeah, this [Kozy Korner] was only two “K’s”*

[Looking at his book] Look at that big cross [on the building], did you tell me you’ve not ever looked at that and thought that…Hurricane Hazel blew that sign away, we never did find it. In ’54, so it’s just gone. Couldn’t find it on the ground anywhere.

*Wow.*
Every chapter [of his book] kind of reads like a story so you can read any chapter and it sort of has a beginning and an end.

Good. I'm looking forward to it. So...you know I just turned in my manuscript and I'll have my edits in about a month. As you know, it's daunting.

I have to edit my own books because I write such slang, nobody can edit it. I make up words and I drop the “g” and say shouldn't a’ and whatten...you know, ain’t. I use so much slang nobody knows when I'm writing incorrectly on purpose or by accident.

*Your own style.*

My publisher is Abrams, so there will be a lot of photographs in my book, too.

*How long did you work on it?*

Well I've been working on this project since, Gosh, I don't know, it's been four, five years, it's 2018. Yeah, about five years. Yeah, for this project, I found it by accident, I was commissioned to write a book on Route 66 and it was one of the first “commissioned” books I had done and kept thinking *why did I do this?* Well I needed the money and I figured I’d just do it. So I got into it and I thought *Why do we keep telling the same story about these good old days, and where were the black people and...what was going on? And I found a Green Book tucked under glass at a museum, at the Autry Museum.*

And that was your first introduction?

*Yeah. And I had no idea such a thing existed. I called my parents and asked, “Did you know about this?”*

Did they?

*My mother didn’t. She grew up in Ohio, though, but my stepdad.*

But it was in every state, every Esso station.

*I know but she didn’t know about it. But my stepdad, the Marine, who was from the South, grew up in Memphis and he said, “Yeah, I know about this.” And I knew at that moment, it was kind of like the heavens [opened up]. This is why I’m writing this stupid book, THIS is the project.*

Damn right.

*This is the point, right. So that’s what it was. I was off to the races.*

[Mic starts buzzing]

[1:22:22]

*But it’s been an interesting process doing this project. Because I’ve been a travel writer...I’ve been doing this work for about 20 years, and being a black woman, I do all the road stuff on my own, I’ve scouted close to...God...3800*
Green Book sites because when we first started, there were only two Green Books that were digitized online, so we had no idea, until the Schomburg, they came out in 2014, 2015 and digitized all the editions, well not all of them, but most of them. I think Wikipedia said there were 1500 Green Book sites when I started the project and now I’ve cataloged over 9600.

Really?

Yeah, so you know we’re just discovering all of this.

It’s amazing in the last five years, that it’s gotten… it didn’t do this, it exploded exponentially, the interest in it. I met so many sharp, young black people and I’ll ask them about it, and they haven’t heard of it. But now lately…

Yeah, the movie is coming out and there’s all this stuff. Thankfully, Calvin [Ramsey], calls me his Green Book spouse, because we were the only two, he was the first, and there was a piece in the New York Times in 2009, where Calvin was writing about, or talking about the Green Book. But I’m the one who’s more the historian, he’s the storyteller, and he’s got his plays and the documentary and everything. But for me, getting the book out there is important and the book is looking at the Green Books chronologically, and understanding how the pendulum of justice kind of swung back and forth through history and we made big gains in black communities in terms of whether it’s the car, coming back from the war, there were all these different ways the Green Book facilitated how we got through the Great Migration and so it’s looking at all of these historical markers in time, but as you go chronologically it’s also examining why…there’s stories about me on the road and when I first started this project...well, I was on the road in 2016 when Trump was running and all of this stuff was going on and I’d get these calls from my well-meaning liberal friends, “What’s happening?!” I’d say, “Well, we’ve been here before. This isn’t new and this isn’t really surprising, especially to black folks.” So it was interesting for me to frame the book around this discussion around [the fact that] progress has never been linear, it’s always been reactionary…

True.

And so the fact that we’re in this place now, you know the book really leaves the discussion with mass incarceration as the Civil Rights crisis of our time and all the things that, you know, the Green Book was so much more than a travel guide, there were articles, there were like a Yellow Pages for black businesses.

Right. I have a pretty large paragraph in my new book about it and I always thought, I quoted the copy of the behavior clause that tells you how to act. That was interesting. It’s a teaching moment. You travel around the country and you have to represent the community, with courtesy. Yeah, it’s never too late to learn. It’s never too late to teach somebody to be polite even though a lot of people aren’t being polite to you. It’s kind of like the new movie.

I told these six ladies there, they are the richest damn women in Horry county, they come to dinner together and they’re all real sweet ladies. But they happen to married to some of the richest people, the largest hotel owners that own twenty hotels. They were in [his restaurant] last night and I told them about ten days ago or two weeks ago, they know about Charlie’s Place and I’d been telling them for a year about Charlie’s Place. And I told them about the Green Book six months ago. And so the last two weeks, I told them about the movie, “There’s a movie coming out.” And they all went to see it together and they came in last night and they were so tickled, they said “It’s a wonderful movie.” They said “It’s a lesson. It’s a good lesson, but it doesn’t slap you in the face.” That’s good. I haven’t seen it yet. Have you?
No. I kind of haven’t on purpose. Universal Studios came out and interviewed me for it, so I’m the voice explaining what the Green Book is. They’ll use the [interview] on the DVD and for their social media but I’m trying to stay out of it because politically, it’s kind of charged right now. I’m a Schomburg Fellow, and the Schomburg has refused to screen it.

Really?

Yeah, they find it really offensive.

Why? Why is that?

Well, like I said, since because I haven’t seen it so I can’t speak to it exactly but from what they’ve told me, the Chief Librarian had a discussion with me. And it’s mostly because it’s typical of what Hollywood will do. They named the film the Green Book and it has nothing to do with the Green Book apparently. The Green Book is mentioned briefly three times in the entire film. And it’s really more of a buddy film, the performances are supposed to be great, and the chemistry between the leads, it’s kind of a reverse Driving Miss Daisy...the humor element...he makes fun of those things that are so dear to black people. You know whether it’s food, you know he says he doesn’t know who Etta James is because he’s too...

I didn’t know that. I haven’t seen it.

And there are things about it that are true, that was his personality, in a way.

He was aloof, yeah.

And again, it’s hard for me to make a judgement about it, especially since I haven’t seen it and I’m only getting the history piecemeal, but my agent had to make sure that in no way was I endorsing the film because they interviewed me to talk about what the Green Book is, so I’m in a hard place because I’m also a Harvard Fellow right now, with Henry Louis Gates, I’m a Hutchins Fellow and they’ve extended my fellowship and Skip Gates loves the film and he’s all excited and he’s talking about me at these panels, so I’m just being quiet over here [laughing].

I see, it’s a shame that you have to tread so lightly. It’s kind of a shame. We’re all so ready to be insulted and it’s a shame sometimes we can’t just sit back and just say well, at least, the word Green Book is in the movies and appreciate that because now how many more people will be interested in your book?

And know what it is. Exactly.

How many more people will be interested in Becky’s documentary? How many more people will know that this thing existed because of the darn movie? Because it’s getting good vibes, good reviews, it’s nominated by the Golden Globes.

And the women who came into your restaurant, those are the...that’s really the audience it’s made for and I think that’s the issue, for black folks, they’re like “Oh, this still has nothing to do with us.” And it’s based on the bouncers life story, this Italian guy, so it’s really his story. The son of this man is the one who wrote the screenplay for the movie and it’s being done by the Farrelly Brother director, Peter Farrelly, so I understand kind of how it happened the way it did, but he just shouldn’t have called it the Green Book at this point, because he’s constantly coming up against this opposition. Even CBS Sunday Morning filmed me a few weeks ago, they’re doing a Green Book segment based on the Green Book and some Green Book people, business owners I told them to go talk to and they’re interviewing me, but they’re like “We don’t want to feature the film because of this
It's sort of a shame, it ended up that way. And it sounds like you're in a tight spot. You're tap dancing. Yeah, and hopefully with good guidance, but...anything that's race related that's going to push this country, there's going to be landmines. It's always going to be that way.

Unfortunately we've gotten to a point where you really can't, you can't say anything. I mean, we're, I try to talk about it sometime, not in the restaurant, I don't...somebody'll say something and I don't like to talk politics in the restaurant. Sometimes I'll hear somebody I know it's stupid, but I think we are little bit too deep...we're too sensitive now to even discuss it, everybody's walking on razor blades. The white population, half of them are terrified. They have good intentions but they're terrified to give their point of view because it could be taken wrong. I just said the N-word to you a while ago, I hope you weren't offended. But that's just...the way people talk. I never used it. Why? I don't know. My dad never used it. And that's one of the things.

I have a chapter in my new book about the N-word. I'll probably catch hell about it, but I don't care. And I've always asked...I can remember asking 35 years ago, I ended up with a lot of blacks in my kitchen because gradually some of the whites left and I had a couple of great black employees and I'd say I need another guy and they'd go bring me his cousin. And they brought me great people. I've got three cooks at the Flamingo Grill now that have been with me 40 years. They're just great people. And I remember I would ask them, why don't you use the N-word? Because some of them were using the N-word a lot and I would say, “You've got to tame this down. It makes people uncomfortable. Even some of the blacks.” But it makes people uncomfortable...just talking jive, and remember I asked Cliff, Mr. Cliff and was kind of the leader of the kitchen. I said, “Cliff, you've got to tone it down. Tone the MF's down and the N-word down.” I said, “Nobody's a prude. We're all working here together, the girls and boys, some people are a little bit Christian and some people are just uncomfortable. I said, “Why do you use it so much? And if I use it, it's toxic.” He said, “Simple.” I said, “What's simple about it?” He said, “It's our word. It's not your word.” I said, “That's it?” He said, “Yeah. That's it.” I remember I went home and thought about that all night. I thought, Is that right? Maybe that's as simple as it gets.

[1:33:45]

I actually asked people over the years, why don't you use it? Usually...and Cliff, two guys that work for me now, they never use the word, they said, “Because our mother wouldn't allow us to use it. If we said that word, we'd get slapped on the head.” I never heard my mom or dad use it so I never used it. I can remember...I went to black pool halls, I went to black nightclubs, and I didn't hear it a lot, a few times when I heard the N-word was when someone was demeaning someone, they didn't say “my n---”, they didn't say that back then, they would say, “Don't be a sorry ass...” N-word. Anyway, that's when you'd hear it or talk to some guy who was involved or something, “Why you acting like a sorry ass...” That's the only time I heard it, growing up and I'm in an all-black environment, you know, black pool hall...used to shoot craps on the hill and played pool, I was a very good pool player. I went to a lot of black...hardly ever heard the word back then, the '60s. And then it changed. But of course now with hip hop it blows out the windows, you know every known curse word blows out the window so I'm not real enamored with hearing twelve-year-olds reciting that music and they can
recite every lyric, you know Little Kim and 50 Cent, but it’s always an interesting phenomenon about the N-word. I remember I asked one guy that used to work for me, he came to me and I just thought since I’m writing a book, his name is Marvel [assumed spelling], I think his mom named him after a comic book. I said, “Marvel, you work for me, I’ve never heard you use it.” He said, “Nah.” I said, “People use it to you?” He’s a real powerful guy. He said, “When they use it at me, I just pick ‘em up, hold them til they go to sleep and drop them we’re they’re standing. Walk away.” [laughing] I said, “Okay.” He is, he’s like 240 [pounds], you know he’s got these [gestures big and round] kind of arms. I said, “That’s one way to handle it.” He said, “No, people call me that, I just pick ‘em up, put the sleeper on them, and drop ‘em where they are.”

Now I’m asking people that, I’m just kind of fascinated by the toxic power of the word now. You can be the damn head of CBS and if you use the word, you’re going to get fired.

Well, you know, I think in a culture where so many people are so disempowered, I think it is the one, it is a source of power for some black people.

Do you feel that way too? It’s your word? Is that a good way to...

I don’t use the word unless I’m reciting something or referencing something.

Yeah, me neither.

I never grew up being told it was okay to use that word, but I understand why people do use it and I think they should have the right to use it if they want to, and I think they have the right to tell white people they don’t think they should use it.

Ok, I always like to hear the take on it. We cannot understand that and I think I’m a little different from the average dude because I grew up doing a lot of different things, but I just...

But I don’t believe it should be banned. If people are referencing it or saying it, regardless of race, you should be able to say it because I think shying away from, or pretending it wasn’t said, or you know when they try to take it out of Mark Twain’s books or whatever I think it’s wrong to deny...

Well they’re doing it. They’re taking it out of Mark Twain.

Yeah, it’s terrible.

Viggo [Mortensen, the actor] said it in an interview about Green Book and he caught hell. He was being interviewed somewhere and he said the word. He doesn’t look like the kind of guy that uses it, but he said it and he had to apologize, you know, he’s an actor, they can’t fire him, but you know, to me, words are an interesting, you deal in words, I deal in words. I love them. I love words. I love playing with words, making up words, but now that one word, I’m trying to think through...there’s nothing like it. I can remember in the Kozy Kornner, there was a Jew named Murphy Cohen [assumed spelling], he had an Irish first name and he taught me when I was six-years old the slur word for, I think I mentioned that in there, for every race. He said, “I’m a kike, your dad’s a grease ball, Charlie’s a daygo, and this Charlie Fitzgerald is a spade.” This is what he taught me and he said, “Mexicans, he said, Puerto Ricans are spics, and Poles are Pollocks.” And he taught me all the slur words, about 10 of them. All the kibitzers sitting around they’d all laugh. He’d come back a week later, he’d ask me and I’d name
him and he’d give me a silver dollar and everybody’d laugh. I’m thinking now if they did that to a six-year old did that, I’d be on NBC. It’d be a child abuse…something that he taught me. He taught me all the slur words for every race, but that was a different era.

*I think the difference is since we are in a society where white supremacy is baked into the DNA of how this country was built. All the policies and all the things that have happened since then and if there wasn’t such a top-down dynamic we could all say, “Oh, there’s a way to hurt everybody.” There’s something anyone could say something negative or that’s offense to any person of any race, any gender, you know but the difference is the race that has been hurt the most by that power structure has always been black people, so I think the argument that black people can be racist, it’s like well, but they don’t have the power to really use that against them in any real way that’s going to hurt their…whether or not they are going to get decent schools, or health care of all these other things.*

Well don’t you think everybody has a vice?

*Of course they do. We’re born that way. They’ve done studies at 18 months we start figuring out who we can align ourselves with to survive.*

One thing everybody should admit is that we all have a bias and it’s okay. What’s not okay is to have a bias that inhibits you from being successful or finding happiness or…you can’t act out on your bias. If you can think it, you can have a bias. Ok fine, you’re not going to hell for that and you shouldn’t be burned at the stake because you might have one. The point is when you act out on that I keep you down in some way and I keep you from being successful or keep you from getting the job you want or going through that door, that’s wrong. So if we could just all admit, “Yeah, everybody biased about somebody.” My old man told me one time when I was young, after the Charlie incident, every now and then, people would talk about it. And I said to him, “Why do some people hate people, dad?” And my dad says, “Son, everybody has to look down on somebody.

Everybody has to look down on somebody. It makes them feel better.” I said, well we hate the Turks, right? Because the Turks wiped out half his…he’s from Cyprus, they killed a lot of his family. He said, “Do you know any Turks?” And I said, “No, but they killed…” He said, “You ever met a Turk?” I said, “No. But you gotta hate somebody.” He said, “Well why in the hell do you hate Turks?” He said, “You’ve never even seen one.” He wouldn’t even allow me to hate the Turks, who I thought surely I know we have to hate the Turks and he wouldn’t allow me to do that. I realized he didn’t want me to look down on anybody.

But he told me, he says, “Everybody looks down on people. They’ve got to find somebody.” You know when I realized when that that was necessary, I remember I met a young man from India and I asked him, “What caste were you in?” And he told me, and I said, “Did you actually treat the untouchables the way we hear they used to treat the un….they wouldn’t touch them?” They couldn’t hold jobs. If you gave them money they’d put it on the ground. If you gave them food, you’d sit it down. You wouldn’t hand them anything. You actually did not touch them. And they were born into the caste.

It wasn’t like we developed a bias against Greeks, or Jews. They were born as an untouchable. And you were born as a Brahmin. And then he explained to me that within the untouchable class are levels of untouchables. And I remember, I could not get over that. *You’re an untouchable. You’re the lowest form of thing in all of India and you’re treated that way and you choose to treat somebody else that way*
Hesaid, “Yes,there’sa couple of ayers ofuntouchables whereuntouchables treatother people as untouchables.” I rememberI went home thinking, “Jesus Christ. I guess theyreally do need somebodytolook down on.”

Yeah, evenyou know, I did a project on beauty shop culture, called American Roots and I went into all these different hair salons,ethnic hair salons of all different races throughout the country and interviewedthem. I put [archived] that project with the Library of Congress as well and yeah, there were Indian, Lumbee Indians, especially in the South. The theaters were [segregated] and at least you weren’t black. There was a pencil test. There were some Lumbee Indians that had African blood in them somewhere.

Yes, they do.

And so to test that they’d put a pencil [gesturing at the scalp] and if it didn’t move, that meant they were black and that determined where they sat in the theater because the black people had the worst seats. Same thing with Mexican...

And where was this, in North Carolina?

_In North Carolina._

Boy I never heard of that one, the pencil test.

Yeah.

No kidding.

And in the Southwestern United States, similar things with, Mexican... it was bad enough to be Mexican, but you definitely didn’t want to be black, because you were treated worse, or you got even worse seating. There are stories of black, light-skinned people who go to hotels during Jim Crow and they’d say, “We’ll let you stay as long as you pretend to be Mexican, if anybody asks. You can’t say that you’re black.” So when you live in a society with that kind of a tiered system, in terms of race.

Yeah, the darker the…we had a fella that worked for us and we’d tease him, the blacks used to tease him because he was jet black. I told ’em “You just can’t say another word.” And they’d all start laughing and he’d laugh with them, but I know it hurt him. And that goes on, it’s always going to go on. I don’t know how you solve it.

_I don’t think it’s even something to be solved at this point but I think we can talk about...I think the good thing about Trump is that so many people are so outraged, because he’s saying so many outlandish things, finally, lets lift the lid off of all these...because there is a difference between having your own bias, which we all have, and being honest about that then being an overt racist and that word racist meets many layers because we all have it in us, right?_

Yeah, we’re slinging it around a little too much so it dilutes it. There’s so many times, where I hear that somebody’s a racist. I’m thinking, _the man’s not a racist._ A friend of mine got sued by the NAACP, you know black biker weekend.
I closed at Cagney’s [assumed spelling] two days because the traffic was six hours long, couldn’t get there, my staff took six hours to get home. And so the next year I had a vote, all the blacks and whites voted not to open Friday and Saturday and we got sued for that, because of racial animus.

And really it hurt me to the quick and it was very expensive, too. But I remember they sued another friend of mine, I went to court to speak for, and he closed because he couldn’t get to his place. They had put the shoot up and he just couldn’t get to his restaurant so he closed for one day, two days, but he had fostered over 150 black children in the past 25 years and they called the man a racist. I thought, Jesus. You’re throwing that word around, you’re slinging it a little too far. But when they do that, it loses its power. There are racists. Don’t call a guy like that racist. Called me a racist. I mean I was infuriated. Lawyers would call me once a week asking if I wanted to settle before they sued me. It was a bad time. I told them, I said, “You’ve lost your way. The NAACP has lost its way. You’re bringing people together? It’s revenge because we closed? We didn’t close because of racism.

I’m open the Friday before. I serve blacks on Monday and I serve blacks on Friday and Saturday and I close. That’s racism?” And I had the Flamingo Grill open because the traffic wasn’t too bad. If I’m a racist why did I forget to close the Flamingo Grill? You know. They’ll sue somebody next year…but we don’t close anymore. I never close the Flamingo because the traffic isn’t up here. You know everybody’s trying to go to Atlantic Beach and traffic backs up for miles. It’s not as bad now that they’ve opened another highway. But what happened the first year is Freaknik got so intense, the black mayor and the black Chief of Police they had to stop it. They had 400,000 people there and they gridlocked Atlanta so they stopped it. And the next year they all came here, so we had 300-400,000 kids in cars. We had never seen so many cars in our life wondering what happened? And so the next year we just decided to close those two days and we got sued.

Yeah, I think we’re in a different…I’m hoping that the heightened emotions on both sides is an opportunity to really push through to some harder conversations and getting to some real policy issues, I think that again, mass incarceration. I think is our Civil Rights crisis and I think we have too many things now happening that we can’t ignore and I feel like politically we’re in such a heated space where people really do want change and the status quo, whether it’s the Democrats or the Republicans, it’s not really working.

No. We’re having trouble talking now. And if you don’t talk, you’re not going to get anything done. Trump. I’ve never seen a guy who could say something stupid every 36 hours. Unbelievable. I was trying to think if I know anybody like that in my life and I couldn’t remember another person that said so many stupid things.

*I think they broke the mold.*

Yeah. [END]