



## Oral History Interview with Lance Liverman, [07-30-2025]

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Lance Liverman and Ellen Gilbert conducted on July 30, 2025. The interview took place at the Princeton Public Library in Princeton, NJ as part of the Voices of Princeton Project.



Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

TRANSCRIPT

Cliff Robinson: [00:01] This is Cliff Robinson on July 30, 2025 at the Princeton Public Library as part of the voices of Princeton project. I'm here today with Lance Liverman and Ellen Gilbert.

Lance Liverman: [00:13] I am Lance Liverman, the interviewee.

Ellen Gilbert: [00:15] I'm Ellen Gilbert, the interviewer. Hi Lance.

Lance Liverman: [00:20] Hi, how are you?

Ellen Gilbert: [00:21] Thank you so much for coming.

Lance Liverman: [00:23] Thank you for having me.

Ellen Gilbert: [00:24] Let's start with when and where you were born.

Lance Liverman: [00:27] I was born, believe it or not, at Princeton Hospital on Witherspoon Street. Now it's Avalon, a development, but back in the day, it was a hospital. And I was born there on July 14, 1962 which, as you know, is Bastille Day in France, so I was—I came out ready to take on the world.

Ellen Gilbert: [00:49] There you go. And where did you grow up?

Lance Liverman: [00:53] I grew up in Princeton. I lived in Princeton—the majority of my life I lived in Princeton. And I say that because my father moved here in about 1958, and he was the first African American lighting technician at McCarter Theatre, and they gave us housing on Harrison Street. So I grew up, and we called them the Barracks back then, but that's what we

called them. And I grew up there, and then, when my father passed, I was three years old. And when he passed, my mother moved to Trenton for about two years, three years, and then we moved back to Princeton after that. So I've been in Princeton almost my entire life. Yeah.

Ellen Gilbert: [01:47] Yeah. Where was your father from before?

Lance Liverman: [01:51] Columbia, North Carolina—

Ellen Gilbert: [01:53] Okay.

Lance Liverman: [01:54] —which is outside of the Outer Banks, which is 60 miles from Kill Devil Hills, Nags Head, Manteo, that whole section. Have you been there? I go to about two to three times a year.

Ellen Gilbert: [02:07] Okay, so you still have family there.

Lance Liverman: [02:08] A lot of family there. I actually own land there also.

Ellen Gilbert: [02:13] Okay, and where was your mother from?

Lance Liverman: [02:16] Same exact place. The next block over, "Alligator," North Carolina. Well, Columbia, North Carolina—there's a section there, and they call it "Alligator" as a nickname, but Columbia, North Carolina.

Ellen Gilbert: [02:16] So that's very different than the Princeton environment. What is it like to go there?

Lance Liverman: [02:31] Oh God, it's way different. It's, you know, things are a lot slower, as you can imagine. A lot of farming, a lot of raising of animals, things such as pigs, goats, horses,

actually horses, and things of that sort and it's very laid back. It's developing now more, because the Outer Banks is becoming a gigantic tourist area like everything else. So because it's so many tourists going through, they've expanded the footprint of Columbia. So now there's, for instance, this is going to seem funny to you, but there's a Royal, Royal—the gas station chain, the big Royal Farms, which is gigantic, that was unheard of being there when we were kids, and now there's a big Royal Farms. There's a Shell gas station. These are things that weren't there when I was growing up as kid.

Ellen Gilbert: [03:26] So speaking of kids, what was your childhood like?

Lance Liverman: [03:30] I had a beautiful childhood. I wouldn't trade a lot of childhood for the world. I did. I did. So my mother remarried. I told you we moved back in Princeton. My mother remarried a person by name of Clayton Rhodes, R-H-O-D-E-S. Clayton Rhodes was the facilities manager or janitor, I guess you might call it at First National Bank. But he also earned—he also owned a garbage disposal business. So at eight years old, maybe not eight, nine years old, I worked on the truck for money with the, with the guys at the garbage disposal business, and I loved it. That really was eye-opening, because I met so many exciting people in Princeton, because all of our clients were Library Place, Cleveland Lane, Rosedale Road. So I met a lot of folks, and I got along with them. They got along with me, and we all became good friends. Richard Dilsworth, for instance, who's very well known, Mrs. Vanderstucken, whose husband was able to secure land in Texas, and they discovered all other land and all this—I mean people that you would never usually meet. Dick Woodbridge was a long, dear friend of mine, lived on North Road. And it was great. So even though I was in quote-unquote "the garbage business" at the time, it was a life-learning experience. When I graduated from college, Mr. Dilsworth was the first one to say, I want you to talk to the Strauss family in New York to

work for Macy's, because of the love he had for me. And that's what I did. I went straight to work for Macy's.

Ellen Gilbert: [05:20] Where did you go to college?

Lance Liverman: [05:22] I did two. I did fairly Dickinson University and Trenton State at the time, College, which is The College of New Jersey today.

Ellen Gilbert: [05:29] So you went to work for Macy's.

Lance Liverman: [05:30] Yes.

Ellen Gilbert: [05:31] How did you like that? What did you do?

Lance Liverman: [05:33] I know, I know you believe it or not, right? So we started with the assistant buyer program. We started with that, and I went from there to being a manager, but assistant buyer program. And I, I switched from New York down to Quakerbridge Mall to be closer home, and it worked out well. And I did that maybe two years, and then I realized that retail wasn't for me. But going in the morning and leaving at night was not for me. I would go into the dark house, dark going into work and leave with dark coming home, and I said, "This is it. I'm not a I'm not a retail kind of person." So that didn't last long, but it was a good start.

Ellen Gilbert: [06:19] So what came next.

Lance Liverman: [06:21] After that, a guy walked in Macy's by name of Glen Paul of Clancy Paul Computers, and said, "I have a job for you." "I said, "No," "Yeah," he said, I've come here many times and done things. And so I said, "Well, I'll give it a try." And I went over to Glen Paul's campus. At that time, it was 8A on route 130 and I was one of the inventory managers

for Glen Paul Computers. And I did that for a while, and I left there and went to work for North American Phillips Lighting Corporation, which was in Dayton, New Jersey, and I was account executive there, and I worked there. On August 2, 1988—which is strange, and it's funny I remember these dates—I woke up and I said, I'll never work for anybody else in my entire life. And that was it. The last time I worked for anybody was August 2, 1988.

Ellen Gilbert: [07:19] And what did you do then?

Lance Liverman: [07:20] When I was at North American Phillips Lighting Corporation, I was paying crazy amounts of money to have things delivered the same day that time you didn't have a Federal Express and these guys think these were actual delivery services. So I said, "I can do that." So before I left Phillips Lighting, I went and bought a van and started a delivery service called the Special Courier. And I went from one van to three vans, two employees, and I did that for 15 years. And then something called 9/11 came, and I had to end up selling the business to Princeton Courier Service, which was owned by the brother that owned Nassau Courier up here. Their brother Claude owned it. I sold my business to them. And meanwhile, I mean, what I was doing, when I had the courier service, because we were making money, I was buying real estate. So I ended up buying different pieces of real estate during the fifteen years I was in courier service, and when I sold my courier service, I decided to manage my real estate myself, instead of at that time stock and real estate manager.

Ellen Gilbert: [08:33] Sounds like a natural progression.

Lance Liverman: [08:35] Yeah, it was very nice, very nice.

Ellen Gilbert: [08:37] Lance, who, who was the most important person in your life?

Lance Liverman: [08:44] That's a good question. And I always think about that, and I always go back to my mother. Okay, my mother, her name was Minnie, was one of the most influential people. I know it sounds, sounds cliché to say that, but she was—my giving back to the community. My giving and always investing in people comes from my mom, because that's what she did. She donated countless hours, countless hours. PTA, I mean, just everything. She always gave back—Eastern Service Workers—I mean, we we never knew. I mean, we were bringing people in our house and feed them, and we never even knew their names. I mean, that was my mother, so that that inspired me.

Ellen Gilbert: [09:31] Okay.

Lance Liverman: [09:32] Yeah.

Ellen Gilbert: [09:33] Thank you. What was the happiest moment in your life?

Lance Liverman: [09:39] That's—so my daughter, my oldest daughter, Kelsey, gets married on September 6, 2025. And when Kelsey was born, it was like nothing I've ever seen before. It was—Oh, my God—I was there for the whole thing. So you can imagine! So, I look back and I think my first daughter—all my daughters are special—but when Kelsey, I just still stayed just was overwhelming, just unbelievable, that was probably one of the happiest days of my life.

Ellen Gilbert: [10:13] Okay, so what was the saddest?

Lance Liverman: [10:15] Probably my mom dying. Because she went to hosp—I didn't have her in hospice, we took care of her at my house. So that's probably what the part is that's saddest. I think.

Ellen Gilbert: [10:28] Let's focus on Princeton. [Laughs]

Lance Liverman: [10:31] [Laughs] Oh no!

Ellen Gilbert: [10:36] In an article in 2022 in TapInto, which is an online Princeton newspaper, the writer Pam Hersch described you as, quote, unquote, "the community Superman of problem solving." Talk about that.

Lance Liverman: [10:58] Oh, Pam is too kind. Pam is too kind. I am. Yeah, I work with all organizations in town that I can think of. You, name an organization, it'll be hard pressed that I don't have a footprint somewhere. And the reason why, because I just want to give back and help, and I've been doing it for years. I'm a Chairman of the Trustee Board at First Baptist Church. I've been doing that for like twenty-four years, I think, I've been a chairperson. And I'm involved with a lot of organizations, you know. So with Pam asking—she picked that title, I didn't tell her Superman of anything, but she took the title, and I told her that that's totally fine. And she knows a lot of things that she's—forums that she may have served on, or committees that she may have served on to always see me.

Ellen Gilbert: [11:53] Okay, you are very deeply involved with your Church.

Lance Liverman: [11:57] Yes.

Ellen Gilbert: [11:57] And you're also very deeply involved with the Princeton community in general, and I'm wondering whether those two ever conflict, and if they do, how.

Lance Liverman: [12:08] That's a good question. Usually, no. Maybe when we talk about conflict—we had a young man pass away in Princeton who was quote, unquote, involved in



what they call "gang activity." And the community would rather us not have a funeral in Princeton because of the crossroads of what would happen if the other gangs' members attended this service, and our Church thought the young man should have a decent funeral, and we proceeded to have the funeral. We had so much security at the funeral from the town that it was something that was mind blowing. We had metal detectors at the door. They had sharpshooters on these roofs. We closed Paul Robeson Place.

Ellen Gilbert: [13:27] And when did this happen?

Lance Liverman: [13:29] This had to be, oh God, had to be 15-20 years. It's when the Bloods and the Crips were big in the City of Trenton. And this young man from here went down and joined the Bloods, but that would be the only major conflict at the time with the town.

Ellen Gilbert: [13:49] Did anything—was there any fallout from it?

Lance Liverman: [13:51] No.

Ellen Gilbert: [13:51] Okay.

Lance Liverman: [13:51] There was no fallout. But the town was very receptive, once we went forward, to make sure everyone was safe. But that was the only—I see—the Church and the town conflicting—was the only issue at that point.

Ellen Gilbert: [14:08] Okay, and does one inform the other? Being engaged with the church and being engaged with the town?

Lance Liverman: [14:16] Yes, we do. There's—

Ellen Gilbert: [14:18] In what ways?

Lance Liverman: [14:18] Many ways! I mean, the communication process is excellent. For instance, as you know, there's a lot of—what do we call these—marathons in town. So a lot of times they start off at a church. So we we can't get to church if there's a marathon outside your door. So you have a thousand people there, you can't even get into your church. So we work together to communicate how we can make things work of that sort all the time. We also help out if, if needed, if the town needs us to do something. We're, we stand up to try to help out.

Ellen Gilbert: [14:59] So in a recent article you wrote for Princeton Perspectives, you said that you quote, unquote, "personally feel that democracy is on trial." Talk about that, especially in light of the coming 2026 celebration of America's independence, and also you were here in 1976.

Lance Liverman: [15:26] [Laughter] Yeah, I've been here a while.

Ellen Gilbert: [15:28] What was it like then?

Lance Liverman: [15:31] Democracy is relatively new when it comes to a form of government. Democracy has been tested time after time. My thinking and my reasoning—and this is talking to a lot of political pundits and various people—is that with the current situation we're in, and I'll just be honest, the Trump administration and the things that have been occurring.

Democracy is being tested. The three branches of government are being tested. The people's will, what they accept and what they don't accept, is being tested. And my thinking—and this is just me, I'm just one person—that we are entering dangerous times, and a lot of us don't see it, because we—our rights have been taken away from us, and we don't realize that that is what is occurring. And that's what I meant when I said democracy is is being tested. And, yeah, we're, what, 250 years anniversary coming up. I think it's great. I mean, there's no other country I

would want to live than the United States, and that's why I try to do what I can to preserve and keep things going the way they are. I just, I love the United States. I mean, I've, I think that we're the best country in the world. Um. I just want to keep us that way. [Laughter] I want to keep us the best country in the world, and not slip backwards. And it can happen.

Ellen Gilbert: [17:12] Do you remember the 1976 celebration?

Lance Liverman: [17:15] I do.

Ellen Gilbert: [17:15] Maybe you were in North Carolina.

Lance Liverman: [17:17] I was here. I was here in 1976 and for that celebration, I bought a Varsity Schwinn from Kopps, Kopps Bicycle place that said it was a 1976 edition. And that's, that's a Schwinn 10 Speed I bought. Because of the 1776. I remember very well. And Kopps was on John Street, then, over that way.

Ellen Gilbert: [17:41] So, do you have advice for people, since things feel threatening now?

Lance Liverman: [17:47] Yeah, I still believe that people should vote, and I think that people should speak up, and I think that people shouldn't be afraid this recent ICE raids that we've had in town. Yes, that have taken place, have in store nothing but fear. Fear in a lot of folks, you know, it's—it's awful, and the last thing you want to do is have any community not trusting our local government or our police. When that occurs, you're in trouble, because if there's outbreaks of TB, if there's outbreaks of anything, and you don't have that trust, then everyone's going to be affected.

Ellen Gilbert: [18:28] That was my next question. Princeton has been designated a sanctuary city. So how do you interpret that, and how does that relate to the ICE raids?

Lance Liverman: [18:39] So, what we have done, and we were doing that when I was in office, is we would ask the police not to get involved our local police with any federal agency like ICE, when it came to our community, that means arresting or detaining or anything of that sort. And we did it because the eroding of trusts is just something you just can't have. ICE comes in for 20 minutes, 30 minutes, 40 minutes, 50 minutes, and they leave. We're still here. [Laughter] We're still here. We have to work with everyone. We have to get along with everyone. I go to bed at night, I go to sleep, I wake up. I mean, we're still here. You can't have a system buckle like that, and think it's fine. So that's why. So the whole sanctuary city, you know, it's fine, but I just think that we should treat people in a more humane, respectful way. I can understand if some criminal, if they've killed somebody somewhere, and you want to pick them up and take them back, I understand. I mean, I'm not. No one's that crazy and I think that's fine, but for regular citizens, say they broke the law because they're here making a living for their family, and they haven't bothered anyone, and they pay taxes, pay the rent. The kids are in school. Better life for everyone. I don't so I have to bother them. I mean, truth to be known, all of us are really illegal aliens in United States. I mean, unless you are a natural-born Indian here or something, I mean, all of us came here from somewhere.

Ellen Gilbert: [20:22] So you were on Township Committee, and then the council afterwards. So talk about [Laughter], talk about consolidation.

Lance Liverman: [20:32] Ugh, um—

Ellen Gilbert: [20:34] Why did it take so long? And how do you think it's worked out?

Lance Liverman: [20:39] I think consolidation is great. I was on Township Committee, and then I switched over and consolidated to Princeton Council. So I served a total of fifteen years in public office, elected official, and ten years also on boards and commissions in town. So twenty-five years of donated time, and countless hours. We were having duplicate. So we had duplicate this, duplicate that, and it didn't make any sense. But believe it or not, not many towns, even after we did this, have consolidated. We thought that we were starting a trend of consolidation, but towns are not doing it. They're just not doing it. It's rare. I don't know why, but they are not doing it. Our consolidation was easier than most because we were sharing services before. So it wasn't like a gigantic so for instance, this library we're sitting in, this was a shared Princeton Township, Princeton Borough, we all share in the expenses of the library. Many projects were like that, our recreation department, Princeton, housed in Princeton Township, Princeton Borough paid a portion. Princeton Township paid a portion. So our consolidation just meant it made sense. It made sense to come together.

Ellen Gilbert: [22:02] It took a long time.

Lance Liverman: [22:04] A long time.

Ellen Gilbert: [22:05] There were a number of votes.

Lance Liverman: [22:06] Oh, a long time.

Ellen Gilbert: [22:08] Why was that?

Lance Liverman: [22:08] Yes, I think, I think, I think this was the third time. I think it was.

Lance Liverman: [22:12] But why was there so much resistance?

Lance Liverman: [22:14] Because no one wanted to give up home ground. For instance, the Township didn't want the Borough to take over the Township. The Township didn't want Princeton Borough, the Township, to take over them. No one want—no one wanted to. You know, when you have people in power, when you have the Borough Council, Township Committee, Borough's Mayor, Township's Mayor, it's not that easy to say, "Okay, I'm going to give up my power so you can take over." It wasn't that easy to make it work, but it, after a while, we came around and said that was the best thing for us to do. Yeah.

Ellen Gilbert: [22:52] On a related note, getting things done in Princeton can be a challenge. People were very reluctant to endorse plans for a new swimming pool, and they didn't want to see the old library go and now, of course, both are unqualified successes. Talk about that. Talk about the resistance.

Lance Liverman: [23:16] I was caught in the middle of both those projects, and I can tell you it was, it was a living nightmare. I mean, a living nightmare. Let's start with the library. First, we were going to move the library from this location, we meaning the officials at another location, because we wanted more access, and we wanted more parking ability, and we wanted it to expand, so we looked at various spots around, and at that time, most land was in the Township, not in the Borough. We formed a Committee. We met, discussed things, and we decided it was better to keep it where it was. One thing we demanded at the time was that the Township residents have two-hour parking in the parking garage, because we felt if we're not going to move it, then we can't put that undue burden on those folks. So we came up with that plan to do a two-hour parking for folks that visited the library, which was a win, win for all. And we also worked with the library, helped them out, whatever they needed, help them with the campaign, they had a gigantic capital campaign. Whatever we could do, we were there, the town. And we

realized that the library was like our and they call it the living room of Princeton. It's the social fabric of the community. It does a lot of stuff. I mean, I was reading somewhere where there are libraries now that even that have washers and dryers in them, so that community members can wash their clothes, dry their clothes. That was unheard of, unheard of coming up, but that's what it means to be a library. So this was a great location for library. We kept hearing it. It works out fine. We love the library. The swimming pool, because the cost of the swimming pool, which was millions and millions, the town did not want to take that on. Did not want to do it at all, but the swimming pool, like the library, is also a place that folks need, and they need and they they love it. They need it. It's great. It's great for the children. It's great for the adults, and it brings us together, all as one at an affordable rate. People can afford it, and if you can't afford it, there's tons of scholarships at the pool for anyone that wants to join. So we were being beat up by—God—all sides. Everyone was coming at us, swinging, "Don't spend the money. It's too much. This is ridiculous." And then you had another group. They're saying, "Please build this pool. Build this complex, we have to have it." And the that the town, at the time went along and said, "We're going to make this happen," and we did it. And I'm telling you, I haven't met one person, not one, that said that that was a bad decision. There was like so grateful that we did that. So both projects, the library and the pool, have turned out to be Princeton's jewels. I mean, it's, you can't find these things in most any other community.

Ellen Gilbert: [26:33] Switch gears for a minute. How did Princeton respond to Covid?

Lance Liverman: [26:37] That was a very, very, um, tough time, and we're still, I know churches, especially, places of gathering, are still suffering losses from Covid, because folks just haven't really come back, bounced back like they did. We've started doing on stream, you know, livestream. And we, in our church, we have a phone that we hook up every Sunday

morning. A lot of older people don't even have internet service, and they can call into a phone line and listen to their service. So we've done all that to try to bring people together. But Princeton's overall response was great during Covid considerably, considering what we had to go through. These are great jobs. As you may or may not know, I'm the new president of Center for Modern Aging. So—

Ellen Gilbert: [27:34] Congratulations!

Lance Liverman: [27:36] Gerber's place this month of July. This is my first full month and and we are—we jumped up when we could. We provided navigators for folks. You know, we did everything we could for everyone when Covid started, because at that time was hitting older people rougher than other folks. Yeah, so—

Ellen Gilbert: [27:59] You've talked about dwindling attendance in church elsewhere, talk about the repercussions and what your hopes are.

Lance Liverman: [28:09] Well, we, I know just from my personal experience in my church, we just hired a new minister, Reverend Maureen Gerald. She's a female, second female ever, and she's on a bang up job, and she's trying to relate to younger folks. Because, like everything else, our church is full of seasoned, I won't say old people, seasoned individuals. I think that's a better word. We don't have to redact that seasoned individuals. So we need to bring in younger folks. And younger folks aren't really interested in church as we know it today. So we have to look at changing what we do, how we do it, to attract them, which is a feat in itself.

Ellen Gilbert: [28:57] Why do you think they're less interested?



Lance Liverman: [28:59] You know, I think it's a lot. I think it's a lot. I think one—unlike me, where my mother said, if I go to church, you're going to church with me. You know, you don't have a choice. You don't have a choice. You went to church. It was I never thought on Sunday morning I could stay home. I just never thought of that when my kids said it more, I don't, I don't have to push to push them up to church at that time. So they will go sometimes, sometimes they wouldn't. Now that they're older, believe it or not, now that my kids are older, they all go to church. Where they live. Where they live. They all go to church. So it's, I always say, plant the seed. Plant the seed and then see what happens. And I must have plant a great seed, because, like I said, they go to church on their own.

Ellen Gilbert: [29:45] Where do your daughters live?

Lance Liverman: [29:46] My oldest is getting married. Lives in Glassboro, New Jersey, and she's her second year residency at Inspira Health. She's going to be a foot doctor, so she went to Temple Medical. Podiatry School. My middle one graduates in two weeks from Johns Hopkins, a Master's in nursing, and she was already offered a job at Johns Hopkins Hospital. So she'll be staying in Baltimore. And the baby, she turns 20, the 28th of August, and she's a junior at Rutgers Douglas Campus, a major in public health.

Ellen Gilbert: [30:25] What are your hopes for them?

Lance Liverman: [30:26] Oh, I, you know. I'm gonna tell you something. And this is God's honest truth. You might even know her. Lynn Nosker, who was a teacher Richard—Dick Nosker's wife for forty some odd years in Princeton, taught at Community Park School, and every year she asked all the kids, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Johnny said, "I want to be a fireman." Sally said, "I want to be a nurse." Jennifer said, "I'm gonna be a doctor."

She got to Kelsey. Kelsey said, "I want to be a good person" From that day on, that's all I want for my kids: to be good, good people, whatever they do.

Ellen Gilbert: [31:13] And what are you proudest of, Lance?

Lance Liverman: [31:15] Oh, my God, my kids, my wife, my friends. I mean, I just haven't quit. I just have, you know, if you had to, if someone said, can you go back and change your life and do something else? And what would you do? I wouldn't do it. I would continue. I would ask them to say, my life, I had—honest, God's truth—it's been a blessing.

Ellen Gilbert: [31:37] Okay.

Lance Liverman: [31:37] Yeah.

Ellen Gilbert: [31:38] Any regrets?

Lance Liverman: [31:39] Not major. I mean, I made bad decisions like everyone else. I'm not perfect. God knows, I made bad decisions like everybody else. So I'm not perfect, but, uh, but they were learning, learning curves for me.

Ellen Gilbert: [31:42] Do you have a favorite memory of Princeton?

Lance Liverman: [31:57] Favorite memory of Princeton. When I was a child, years ago. You know, you're talking probably middle, maybe late 60s, maybe around '67 maybe, maybe about '67, I think, '66—Martin Luther King came to town, and I was a little, little, little kid, but I was outside. He was on a mule. They had a mule, a wagon and a mule, and he came up to church. He wasn't feeling well. He wasn't feeling too well that day, so he didn't—he didn't really do a lot, but he came through and I was looking at him with all the other people and, and I can

remember as a little kid saying, "Boy, what a powerful man!" Because I would see him on TV like everyone else you know, and, man—so that was one of the memories that sticks in my head. Another memory: I saved a person's life in Carnegie Lake who was drowning.

Ellen Gilbert: [32:56] Tell us.

Lance Liverman: [32:57] His name was John. John Watson was in Carnegie Lake drowning. Folks thought that he was playing, going bobbing up and down. And I said, this does not look like somebody that's playing. And I jumped into my clothes and saved his life. I went out to the lake and pulled him in and started rotating, the hold nine yards. He was drowning. And—

Ellen Gilbert: [33:17] Had you had lifeguard training?

Lance Liverman: [33:19] No, I'm just a good swimmer. My mother made all of us swim. My mother lost two brothers—drowned. Two of my mother's brothers drowned, and she made sure when we were able to say, "Hi," all of us are great swimmers. Our whole family all great swimmers. So obviously we got there and I pulled him back, but he thanked me all his life. He keeps thanking me for saving his life. But I, and I was thinking, I said, you know, because the people, they just didn't know he was drowning, they thought, and I'm like this man, you know, I know the difference between playing and drowning. He was drowning. So that was probably one of the highlights of my life to do that. You know, I was no hero. I was just there at the time and I could swim.

Ellen Gilbert: [34:06] Do you want to talk about discrimination in Princeton?

Lance Liverman: [34:12] Yeah. So I was a bus student. I was, I live on Witherspoon Street and right across from Community Park School. And what they did, we had to integrate the school

system. So I was—all Birch Avenue, and then they made a left to come down with this one—all of those kids had to go to Littlebrook School. So I went to school three miles from my house. All my friends on the block went to Community Park. So it was the weirdest thing as a kid, you know, to do that. I was sitting I was sitting in class and a lot of times I was the only African American person because, you know, only so many classes, only so many people, but I didn't mind, and I did not know at the time at all that I was part of a bussing system, that they were integrating the school with me. I had no clue. I just thought Community Park was full and this school had room. No clue. At all! No clue. And I got along with everyone. I got along with everyone. I had no problems, then, at the school. I then noticed after I left there, they turned John Witherspoon School, which was an elementary school, into a middle school—

Ellen Gilbert: [35:39] Right.

Lance Liverman: [35:39] —sixth, seventh and eighth. And I did notice when I got to sixth grade that a lot of folks that looked like me were what they called classified. Put into special programs, because of reading or math or different things. And I didn't—I did notice that then at sixth grade, I did notice that. And I said, that's kind of odd, because I was fine, because I came from Littlebrook, and I whatever I had to learn, I learned and did what I had to do. So then I noticed, then going to high school, it was the same thing. A lot of folks were given these classifications. So I would take classes they wouldn't be able to take the classes that I took. So I don't know if that was a form of discriminating, or if that was a form of not educating everyone the same way, or taking the time with people the same way, but I noticed that that was occurring more and more. I think we're doing a better job at it now.

Ellen Gilbert: [36:45] Okay.

Lance Liverman: [36:46] I hope, well, they have a minority achievement gap that was taking place at Princeton High. And I've answered many questions. They've asked me about the same situation.

Ellen Gilbert: [36:57] Okay. And are they addressing that?

Lance Liverman: [36:59] They're addressing that.

Ellen Gilbert: [37:01] And how?

Lance Liverman: [37:01] They're addressing that.

Ellen Gilbert: [37:02] What about as an adult discrimination?

Lance Liverman: [37:07] I went into a store. It's called, can I just say the store, the store's name? Kitchen Capers. I was on Palmer Square, and I was in Kitchen Capers, I bought a few things, I was in line. There was a gentleman in front of me. He was staying at Nassau Inn, which was across the street at the time, and he was from Texas, because he told the guy that he was from Texas, and he asked the guy, he wrote a check and for the items gave the guy to check and walked out. There was no driver's license, there was no credit card, there was nothing. Gave him a check and walked out. I'm next in line with two pans and a rod to hang my pots and pans on, and the cashier said—I gave her a credit card—cashier said, "Do you have ID?" And I said, "Do I have ID?" I said, "I'm giving a credit card. Why would I need to give you ID?" And I thought about that, and I said, Wait a minute. I said, "You just let this man who was" oh my God, "give you a credit card from Arlington, Texas," wherever, wherever it was, "who doesn't live here," nowhere and cost way more than what I was buying. And that's why I said, Something's wrong. So I went and filed a civil rights complaint in Princeton that that was

just—that was clearly discrimination, and I think that they spoke to Kitchen Capers, and that policy stopped. Also, when I was on Civil Rights Committee, we had McCaffrey's at the time—God knows, Jim McCaffrey is one of the best people in the world—but at the time, they were, had an unspoken policy of following certain people around the store, and one of the people came to us and filed a complaint. We met with them, and Jim McCaffrey spent over \$75,000 training every store he has employee—"This is not acceptable in my store." So I have seen discrimination up front. I walked into Macy's one time, and I walked in and they have store security, and the guy started following me. I went to perfume for my wife. He stand in the corner. I went to bought something else for me. And of course, same, same guy, in the corner. I just got I see, you know what? Let me just go and talk this man. I said, "Sir, listen, I don't plan on stealing. I don't plan on this. But it looks odd. Everywhere I go, you're following me. Just it really puts me—it makes me look bad, you know?" And I said, "The people that are probably stealing probably walk by you with everything, because you're staring at me the whole time. It seems they could probably take what they wanted because you're just too busy worrying about me. So, discrimination, discrimination comes different ways. But yeah, I've I've seen it, I've seen it. I've experienced it, yeah, I have. But you push through and sometimes you blame it on more of an ignorance that the person has than them trying to be mean or mad at you. I think it's a fear and ignorance that they have, that the other stuff comes out of. I think a lot of it too is also—I hate to say this—I think a lot of it is how they're brought up at home. I grew up with people like Adam Abrams. I had the same white Jewish everyone grew up as one. We had no—Italian—I mean, we had no idea that there was an issue, until somebody told me. My mother came here and was here from North Carolina for years, ten years here, at least, and she told me she she told me she never knew she was poor in North Carolina until somebody told her. She

said, "Honey, we ate every day. We went to school. We had everything until somebody told me, do you know you were poor?" She had no clothes for I had no clue. So it's the same thing, unless somebody tells you, you don't know. My mom said, "No, no clue. We had vegetables. We had animals with everything." I mean, I don't know what he said. "You know, you were poor, growing up," She said, "I was poor? Oh, I didn't—now, I know." [laughter] It's unbelievable.

Ellen Gilbert: [41:42] Do you want to say something about the role of media in Princeton, we have Town Topics. I think the Packet is sort of—

Lance Liverman: [42:01] Yeah.

Ellen Gilbert: [42:02] And online, we have Planet Princeton and Tap, TapInto, do you think they have a role and how effectively do you think they're fulfilling that?

Lance Liverman: [42:16] I do. I think they have a role: one, their role to report things in a accurate—you've got the other one, you've got Krystal Knapp—

Ellen Gilbert: [42:29] Yeah, I said that, Planet Princeton—

Lance Liverman: [42:32] [indistinct, agreeing]

Ellen Gilbert: [42:33] US1 and the Echo—

Lance Liverman: [42:35] Yes, yes. The Echo, so, so I think that there is a voice for all of those outlets, media outlets, I think they're very important, and I think they keep all of us aware to what things are happening in town, and especially the Town Topics. I mean, that's probably the biggest, I think, out of all of them. Online services are great. But the Town Topics, I, you know,

most times when somebody calls me is because they saw something in the Town Topics. That's where usually do, and that's where they always call me. "Oh, I saw it in the Town Topics."

Every now and then now they'll say they saw it on Tap now too, but, um, usually it's the Town Topics. So I think it's important to keep those media outlets going. I think they're a great, great force, a great way of getting information out, and they're something that we need.

Ellen Gilbert: [43:24] Yeah, what are your hopes for Princeton?

Lance Liverman: [43:29] You know, I said when I used to run for election, I used to say that, you know, Money Magazine and US World Report, I think it is, always have these best towns to live in, and they list best towns living and they tell you why: walkable communities, safety, lighting, open space. And I always said I always wanted Princeton to be number one as the best town to live in, and have all these things listed—how we get along with each other, you know? I mean, how we look after each other. I think all these things are so important. So my thing for Princeton is that we continue to do what we're doing, but even better, that we make the list.

Ellen Gilbert: [44:18] Okay.

Lance Liverman: [44:21] [Laughter.]

Ellen Gilbert: [44:22] So, the Senior Center, what are your plans for them? That's, well—

Lance Liverman: [44:28] We have a lot, you know—

Ellen Gilbert: [44:29] That's news!

Lance Liverman: [44:29] Oh, we have a lot, a lot, a lot planned. Some items I could, I could discuss. Some items I can't, because we're in a planning stage, but we're going to keep the



Evergreen Forums going. We're going to keep all of our planning. We do a lot of, um, we do a lot of online stuff now. Also, we do a lot of hybrid, hybrid information, so you can either be in person or come, we're still doing—we're still big on pickleball, still big. Big for us. he's

Ellen Gilbert: [44:29] Grand Pals.

Lance Liverman: [44:32] Grand Pals is big for us. We're actually expanding Grand Pals, we're going to do, start taking up the nursery school and other places we're going to do, we have. I mean, there's a gigantic amount of things that we are, we are putting ourselves into and think these are going well. We we have, we've tripled in size. We're doing very, very, very, very well. Yeah, yeah.

Ellen Gilbert: [45:23] What else would you like to tell us?

Lance Liverman: [45:24] Well, I think that this is a great, oral history is a great thing to do. We've had people to pass at our church that were 103, 104, 106 years old. And I always said, I wish that we could have done something similar with them, because once you lose that reservoir of information, once that's gone, it's hard to get it back. So I want to commend all of you for what you do. I really think it's something that is needed in town, and I appreciate you giving an opportunity to come and speak.

Ellen Gilbert: [46:09] Thank you very much.

Lance Liverman: [46:10] Thank you.

Cliff Robinson: [46:12] Thank you both again for your time. This is the end of the recording.

[END OF INTERVIEW]