

## **Edited Speech to Text**

**AR:** This is Alexis Rivers interviewing Patrick Heery, for the Auburn oral history project that is being conducted through the Seymour library and the Cayuga Museum in collaboration with the New York Heritage Sites. So, where and when were you born?

**PH:** Oh, first Alexis, thanks for having me here. I was born in 1984 in Cincinnati, Ohio.

**AR:** What was life like growing up for you? Can you describe your family, your house?

**PH:** Sure. So I was born to two public school teachers. My mom mostly taught Elementary, and mostly first grade, during my life, and my dad taught science, both in Junior High and High School. We lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, in the city proper but in more of a neighborhood area, and we had lots of sidewalks and trees and some parks nearby, and well, I should say we started out in a smaller home elsewhere in Cincinnati. Lived there for the first four or five years of my life, and then my parents moved and for a year, year and a half, I lived with my grandmother along with the rest of my family. Then we moved into the house where my dad still lives. My mom died earlier this year, but he still lives there. We grew up with lots of neighbors and nature, and neighborhood kids, lots of kids around and playing and getting up to no good like kids often do.

**AR:** Do you have any siblings?

**PH:** I do. So I have one younger sister. She's four years younger than I, name's Megan, and she's now married and has two children of her own. She actually is an event planner for a nonprofit organization that raises money and awareness for breast cancer and she's wonderful. We're very close.

**AR:** What was school like for you growing up.

**PH:** So I went to public schools in Cincinnati, Ohio and my elementary school from Kindergarten through sixth grade was a new school, it was just opening. My mom taught there as well, so I went to the same school where my mother taught, which was both a good and interesting experience. It was a new sort of philosophy of education at the time in Cincinnati called the Paideia program. Paideia is the Greek word for education, and my mom and other teachers had gone through a special certification for it, and it emphasized critical thinking, and sort of each student, each young person accessing their own imagination, their own thoughts, their own questions, to determine their own ideas about the world. So we had seminars, that would be getting around, I guess, first grade through sixth grade where we would sit in a circle, and we would talk about something that we read or whatever we were learning. The emphasis was on the idea that there wasn't any one particular right answer. The question was, "Could you back up what you were saying?" So your interpretation. Could you substantiate it with evidence and have a reasonable argument? And that definitely shaped me in profound ways.

It was also a bilingual school, so beginning in kindergarten, we all were learning Spanish and communicating in both English and Spanish. One of the beautiful things was that it was a public school, but it had this rich new philosophy of education, so it drew people from families from a wide swath of the community. So we were very racially diverse, economically diverse. But then over the years, by third or fourth grade, there were tax levies that failed, and people weren't willing to, as is often the case, were not willing to fund public education. As that happened, cuts were made to schools all around, including ours. As those cuts were made, the people who could afford to left the school and the people who couldn't stayed. I stayed because my mom was teaching there. That became the trajectory of public education in Cincinnati as well as in many communities.

I had also the experience there of often being one of very few, or sometimes the only white child in the classroom and so most of my teachers were African-American, most of my classmates were African-American, my crushes were African-American, my bullies were African-American, it was a very transformative experience for me, and shaped me in important ways: my own understanding of race and diversity, my own appreciation of the culture and the history and the voices of people of color in our country.

Then I went on to High School, well Junior High and High School, they were one and the same, sort of a unique experience where it was a public school but you had to take a test to get into it. So again, it drew from a wide swath of the community, it wasn't money or economics or where you lived that determines your access to the school it was your own desire to learn and your own intellect. So that school was about 50% African-American and then some percentages of other racial ethnic groups, and then white, also a large Jewish population as well. Again, that shaped me in some very profound ways and gave me access to wonderful teachers and wonderful educational opportunities that helped prepare me for college and beyond.

**AR:** Continuing that train of thought, what was college like? Yeah,

**PH:** So I went to Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. So it's in South Eastern Ohio, I went there to study. I became a double major in both English literature and Classics, studying purely Greek and Roman culture and Greek and Latin language, and did that for five years because of the double major and some study abroad in Greece. That was a great experience. It was a real opening for me, for me in my life.

Prior to college, well, really, prior to my senior year of High School, I had been a very quiet, shy, child. I grew up with a speech impediment, so I went to speech therapy from kindergarten through sixth grade intensely, several days a week. It was classified as a disability and, unfortunately, I did have other kids who made fun of me for that, and when people look at you weird or laugh at you, well quickly you learn not to open your mouth and I became very withdrawn. That bullying escalated through Elementary School and in High School, including physical violence and some depression. But in the senior year of High School, I began to come out of my shell and join some organizations, got involved the school newspaper, got involved with our chapter of Amnesty International, got involved with our advocacy for LGBTQ equality, I

got involved as a tutor with some inner city children in Cincinnati and then that continued in college. I really set out to try to make something different in my life in college, still continued to struggle with depression and a lot of social anxiety but tried to dive in and get really involved in our Student Senate and in Amnesty International again, and a variety of social justice organizations. Got involved with the local church there, and then as well as my education experience my Classics degree was through honors tutorial college, which was based off of an Oxford, England model, where we had one-on-one. (My) Professor was basically my tutor and we would meet one-on-one and do independent research and theses, writing through that program.

I spent a semester in Greece, reading Greek on Homer and Plato on some Greek beaches and Athens to do some archaeology. It was an experience. College overall really helped me discover my passions and what I was capable of and I discovered some, maybe some courage and some identity in ways that I didn't know were there prior.

**AR:** Did you have any hobbies or special interests as a child?

**PH:** I did. Well I loved nature. I've always loved nature. It's been important to me. When I was a child and I felt like I didn't really belong, and felt sometimes where other spaces in my life were not safe, I would go into the woods and for whatever reason, I felt safe there. I felt a sense of belonging, really, nature has been where I experience God, and the sacred, and probably the most personal and profound sense, a sense of interconnectedness and being part of something bigger than myself. I'm small in the face of the interconnected matrix of existence. But I'm also big and precious to that, and so is each person, and so nature was very important. I became a Boy Scout and eventually an Eagle Scout, and nature hiking, camping, was a retreat for me, a sanctuary of a kind.

That connected also with my social justice passions. So I also felt because I love nature so much, and I love animals so much, I've loved animals since I was very young. My parents knew from very early on that they were not allowed to kill anything in our house, they had to capture any bugs, and let them loose outside because I would not stand for anything to be killed. I remember, we had a squirrel or something stuck in a pipe, and I stood by the contractor who is there to get this squirrel out, and this little kid bugging him constantly, "You're not going to kill it, you're not going to hurt it are you?" So that was a passion of mine. And you know, when animals and nature are something you connect with and who are at home there, you of course want to protect them. And I did too.

I was very passionate about protecting nature, particularly the rainforest. I remember as a kid going around, and I created these posters, where one side of the poster had this beautiful imagery of a rainforest sort of idyllic. The other imagery, the other side, had the same rainforest, but it was engulfed in smoke and flame, and bulldozers, and I went around and nailed them or taped them to the light posts and the telephone posts around our neighborhood. That's just one example of some of my early activism as a child. At that time, I wouldn't say I had much consciousness of social inequities, but by Junior High and High School, that was something

very much on my mind as well. Something that I experienced among my peers I saw, especially in High School, we had some of the richest families going to our school because of its educational assets and we had some of the poorest. We would go in sports games, and we would go and visit other schools, and racial epithets would be spoken to our teams. When I was in High School, when I was a junior in High School, this will sound very familiar, a young, unarmed African-American man was shot in the back by a white police officer and it brought to the fore tension and injustice that had been there for a very long time, beneath the surface, and the city sort of exploded in protests and riots and dialogue. I volunteered for a woman who was running for city council for the first time and part of dialogues and forums to try to create change, to really address racial injustice in our community, and, and so that among many other ways made social justice a real passion of mine.

I also loved art. We even made a lot of trips to the art museum, and history and natural history. Also as a kid, I really loved imaginative play and just going out and playing in my backyard and playing with other kids and making up stories in our heads. You know, all the wonders that even just a stick that you find in your yard can turn into.

**AR:** Was there any sort of popular books, toys, games, movies that you remember growing up?

**PH:** Oh, well, I mean, as a young child I remember at least for me, I know I was super into Ninja Turtles and that was big for me. Before that, I remember Care Bears. I remember particularly a lot of TV shows that, this is typical of the late 80s and early 90s, that did also encourage and shape some of my environmental and social justice awareness, like Captain Planet and shows like that.

I know that the first book that I really fell in love with was *The Giver*. It had been written earlier than that time, but that was a book that really awoke my love of reading. My family, we were really into *Star Trek Next Generation*, at the time. Getting a little older, *Lord of the Rings* movies were big. *Harry Potter* was just beginning to come out. Yeah.

**AR:** You mentioned being closer with God while you spent time in the woods. Did your family follow a particular religion? And do you still follow it growing up today?

**PH:** I sure hope I do. I'm a pastor, so yes, I do. And yeah, our family was both progressive and religious, deeply on both sides. For us there is no contradiction between those two identities, nor do I think there is to this day. So my great-grandfather, who died long before I was born, was a Presbyterian pastor, so there's a long history of Presbyterianism, which is a denomination of Protestantism Christianity on my mother's side. My dad is sort of a mixture of Quakerism and Baptist, but he became a Presbyterian when he married my mom. So we went to a Presbyterian Church, we actually went to the same church that my mom had grown up in, same church that she had been baptized into, the church that my grandmother, my mom's mom had sung, she sang in the choir for more than 50 years. That's the church I was baptized in, grew up in, went to from the day I was born till I went off to college. That was a Presbyterian Church, and it was a large church, several thousand members, and very active children's program. Every Wednesday

night, we had something called Super Wednesday, and we'd go and there would be everything from choir practice, to kind of Sunday school Bible study, to a dinner where we all rotated servant roles of Alpha and Omega: Alphas served and Omegas cleaned up, an egalitarian principle. And then also just fun classes, everything from my dad volunteering to do science classes that teach kids how to make slime to playing dodgeball. Church was big for me, it was sort of one of the other places of community for me. I didn't really connect as much as the other kids a whole lot because they went to different schools. Because I didn't see them a whole lot outside of church, plus, I was just, as I said, shy at that time, but it was very important to me. And then, you know, I went and worshipped every Sunday.

Eventually as we got older. Well, I should say first, you know, my parents without knowing it may have helped program that need to become a pastor. When I was young, they were like, "You know what, we should really pray before dinner", but neither of them really wanted to be the one to do it. So they're like, "You know what, we have this little child, we could ask him to pray." Little did they know what they were getting into, because they asked me to pray and, well, going back to my love of animals, and I'm probably you know what, four, five at this time, and they had no idea what they created because I would sit there and I would pray for every single animal that I could think of, for I don't know, like 15 minutes these prayers would go on "God, please let's pray for cheetahs and tigers and lions and giraffes", and then reheat the food afterwards.

I had a sense of, I guess you could say piety as a child, probably to the annoying degree. I remember one time, my dad burping and I said, "Oh, please say, excuse me" and he was like, "Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know he was here" and I said, "Well God's always here." So yeah, I was a very annoying child.

That faith continued to stay with me...very active in church. And then later when I was a teenager, I was often the one getting our family to go to church. In ninth grade, so what we do in Presbyterians and they do in a lot of denominations, we went through a confirmation class, which is really an opportunity to learn and discuss what it means to be a Christian and Presbyterian and see if that's right for you or not. And one of the reasons I decided to continue to be a Presbyterian, to be confirmed as a Presbyterian in that church, was because of that class, because we talked in that class about things like evolution, and the relationship between science and faith. We talked about gender, and it was a space for all different ideas and doubts and questions and perspectives we put forward. There wasn't one right answer, a way to be. It was a faith that was compatible with science, and intellectual thought, and the equality of people.

What really hit it home, I think, for me: confirmation had this requirement that you had to go and worship with different communities. So we we went to a Catholic mass, we went to a Jewish synagogue, we went to an historic African-American church, we went to an evangelical, nondenominational kind of church. The idea that was communicated to me was that these folks in my church, they cared more about me and my discovery of an authentic worldview, and spirituality, than me simply becoming another member. They would have rather had me become

Catholic or Jewish or nothing at all if that was right for me, if that was my relationship with God, rather than me to mindlessly become Presbyterian, and just add another person to their roles. And I thought, "Well, you know, that's the kind of community that I want to belong to where independent thought and the individual and the individual's relationship to God is prioritized."

I actually did get confirmed and I became an elected elder on our church's session, which is sort of a governing body of the church, in 10th grade and continued to be active and then I was active in college and I entered the ordination process, which is a lengthy process in our denomination. After college, I went to Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey, and did that for three years: it's a masters of divinity program. Then after that, I was ordained as a Presbyterian pastor, and I pastor a Presbyterian Church in Auburn to this day.

**AR:** Other than being a pastor currently, what were some of the other jobs that you had growing up?

**PH:** So as a kid and as a teenager, I never had any formal jobs. I had various odds and ends like mowing lawns and babysitting, and I had a number of volunteer jobs. As I mentioned, I did tutoring. I also, as a Boy Scout and an Eagle Scout, did lots of service projects in the community. In college, my parents were able to help me, as well as scholarships and some jobs, were able to get me through college. So I had several jobs during college. I worked for one of the colleges within the university running their newspaper, their newsletter, and did their communications. So I gathered stories and interviews, edited them, wrote them, and put them all together to design for their communications.

I also worked for a program called Difficult Dialogues, which was a synergy of our Classics and World Religions department, our African American Studies Department, and our Gender and Women's Studies Department, and it brought together freshmen to try to look at the intersections of these systems of thought and experiences, and to enter to have difficult dialogues where we don't shy away from hard stuff, but actually talk about it reasonably compassionately with curiosity. My role was to be sort of a community liaison where I connected young people, the students, with folks in the community. I arranged for public forums where we had representatives of different faith traditions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Quakerism, Christianity, Catholicism, and we would talk about hard stuff like reproductive rights, abortion, the environment, death penalty, war, economics, etc. So that was a very meaningful pursuit.

Then another job that I had was working for the College of Arts and Sciences, trying to build a campaign that fostered renewed interest and understanding of the liberal arts, and why it's so important, and it's not just about going to college to get a job and pursue a professional degree. But we're there to, whether you go to college or not, part of the point of life and part of the point of education, however you pursue it, is to be formed as a citizen, as a thoughtful, compassionate, engaged human being who is relishing the nature of existence and thinking and creating and is passionate. The liberal arts does that by exposing us to different ideas and art, music, and history, and perspectives. Those were my jobs.

Then (I) went to seminary. I worked in seminary, I did a number of internships. In seminary, you have to do some of what they call "field education," so I worked as a prison chaplain, I worked as a hospital chaplain, and trauma ward hospital, and I worked as an intern at a Presbyterian congregation. I also was trained formally in community organizing through PICO, and did community organizing in Trenton, New Jersey around mass incarceration and immigration. I also worked for a summer as a teaching assistant in Greek.

Then after seminary, I got a job working for the national headquarters of my denomination, the Presbyterian Church USA, where I was the managing editor and creator of what eventually became *Unbound*, which was an interactive social justice journal online. I also, at the time, worked in the social witness policy formation of our denomination. Then after that, I worked for three years as the editor of our denomination's national magazine *Presbyterians Today*, and stewarded that editing, writing, gathering stories. Then about four-and-a-half years ago, I was called to be the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church here in Auburn.

**AR:** Even though you haven't been here long. Have you noticed any sort of changes in Auburn since you got here?

**PH:** Yes, I think I have and, you know, I have had many members of my congregation, members of the community, share the history of Auburn and its cultural shifts over time with me. So I have some maybe abstract academic understanding of some of the other earlier iterations of Auburn, but I didn't know it intimately and really, how do you know a community except through personal experience? But even in my short time here, I have seen at least a generative energy trying to move in some new directions and some push back against that. We're a downtown church, Westminster is, and I'm told that, (if) you go back a decade or more ago, downtown was dead or not much happening there. Not much business, restaurants. Friday, Saturday night wouldn't see much going on. Now it's hopping...well, it was at least before COVID. And there's an activity there and our church is a part of that.

I've also seen a burgeoning, awakening or reawakening, or maybe I should say, remembering of Auburn's history and the work of liberation, and the work of empowering and partnering with and conspiring with the dignity and the beauty and the justice of all of God's people. So two years ago, I got invited, it was a great honor of mine, to serve on the city of Auburn's very first Planning Committee, for its very first LGBTQ+ Pride Week. Nothing like that had ever happened in the city of Auburn. You didn't see Pride rainbow flags flying, you didn't have Pride services, you didn't have a Pride parade. There were many for a very long time, of course, LGBTQ people living here, but many of them did not even feel safe holding hands, let alone being fully open with their identities in this community. And that's been changing over time, certainly preceding the last two years, but this represented, I think, a fundamental shift in the community. I got to be a part of that. I was the only pastor invited because we're one of the few open and affirming congregations. We have big rainbow flags fluttering outside of our church to talk about how God loves you, and you matter regardless of who you are, regardless of who you love, how you identify gender wise, and that's beautiful. We should celebrate it, not fear it.

Westminster got to host our first interfaith Pride service of Auburn and we did that again this year, even though it looked very different. We actually did it at the drive-in theater, in order (for) people to distance during COVID. People sat in their cars and we had a beautiful service. I remember the year before, I got to host a panel at Auburn Public Theater of different LGBTQ people in Auburn and Cayuga County: large panel, fantastic discussion. I went in, I wore a red cardigan, and sort of adopted some of the personality of Mr. Rogers. I even did a horrible, horrible singing rendition of *Welcome to the Neighborhood*. Afterwards, when we were taking a Q&A from the audience, a gay couple stood up and they said, "We're new to this area, and we were considering whether it was safe to live here or not" and they said, "After this, we want to live here. We want to buy a home here, we want to be a part of this community." And that's really stuck with me.

Our church two years ago, or two and a half years ago or so, opened in partnership with the Q Center out of Syracuse, the very first drop-in center and support group for LGBTQ teens in Cayuga County. These are part of a shift of embracing people of all sexualities and gender identities and in turn, there has been counter force. We've had people who verbally attacked us for this and yet we're pushing forward.

In a similar vein, I think in this last year we're really seeing a shift in racial justice in Auburn, which of course Auburn has this great history, so does my church. I mean, Westminster was founded as an Abolitionist church to end slavery. Harriet Tubman was married in our church, Frederick Douglass lectured in our church. This is a community that was at one time dedicated to the liberation of all God's people, and then at some point, certain other cultural attitudes, forces, white privilege and white supremacy, really took stronghold in Auburn. I know from Black members of my church and Black members of this community, Black friends of mine and leaders, advocacy organizations, racism is alive and well in Auburn: from being discriminated against, followed in the store, to racial epithets being shouted in the street, to the fact that we have so few people of color represented among teachers, city council people, anyone working for city hall, police officers, firefighters, and on and on and on.

And yet, especially after the murder of Ahmaud Arbery and then George Floyd, there has been (just as there has been across the nation) a building of momentum. That counter force is also prevailing against it, but a building toward really trying to address systemic racism. The advocacy organizations in Auburn when I arrived, the NAACP, the Harriet Tubman Center for Justice and Peace, Human Rights Commission, Auburn Public Theater, Harriet Tubman Troupe, Celebrate Diverse Auburn, many other organizations at times work together, but often sort of work in silos on their own. They've been coming together to try to work together so that we can actually address big level high level issues, and some of the folks that you've been interviewing for this have been at the forefront of that, to create real change.

I was invited to host a three-part zoom series hosted by the Auburn Public Theater and the Harriet Tubman Troupe, organized by Black Mothers in Auburn, in response to the murder of Ahmaud Arbery and as a conversation between black men and white men. Then subsequent conversations have happened among youth in Auburn, we've had rallies, we've had

demonstrations, all peaceful, often in collaboration with our police department, and with our city leadership working together to try to create change. Our church has a big Black Lives Matter sign outside of our church. And yes, there has also been opposition. That banner has been vandalized twice: first it was stolen, then someone (in the) middle of night cut out the word "Black" from Black Lives Matter, literally removing "Black Lives" from the lives that matter. Actually this morning, I was talking to our office manager because she had received a phone call from a man, an Auburn resident, who was cursing at her, yelling at her, threatening her and threatening the church, and that's been frequent during this time. So there's a strong racist backlash in Auburn and Cayuga County.

Yet we are pushing forward and we are pushing towards systemic change and people are rising up and speaking out who haven't before. People are leaving the margins where they've sort of been silent: people who could rely on their privilege and their white privilege or their male privilege and now some of them are stepping up and that's to address Black Lives Matter. It's also to address immigration, to address our farm workers who are vital citizens of our community of Cayuga County, vital to our economy and to our food and to our beauty and the richness of our culture, recognizing their humanity defending them, talking about what citizenship means, immigration means and working with refugees. So there's a wide swath of justice, change, that is happening in Auburn, and it's not quick and there's a lot of backlash, but I'm hopeful for it. That's probably the most fundamental shift that I have seen just within the last four-and-a-half years that I've been here

**AR:** And is there anything else that you would like to expand on?

**PH:** When we first came to Auburn, you know, I moved. I lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, grew up there. I then went to school in Athens, Ohio, which is rural Appalachia, situated in one of the poorest parts of our nation, and then lived in Princeton, New Jersey, one of the very affluent, rich areas, but not far from Trenton. Other cities, that much like Auburn, Syracuse, once were thriving industrial cities, and they were gutted (in the) 50's, 60's, and 70's of jobs, and white flight, and became places of concentrated poverty and a deprivation of resources. Then (I) lived for five years in Louisville, Kentucky: big city, lots of lots of diversity, and then moved here. I was so excited to move here and apprehensive because, on the one hand, there's so much that we immediately fell in love with (in) Auburn. We fell in love with the nature and the Finger Lakes and the parks and the woods that are here; the art, the culture, the history, fell in love with the church, there's a strong culture of hospitality of kindness here. That resonated with my Midwestern roots, really appreciated that and I was excited to be here.

I also, other than college hadn't really ever...I'd always lived in big cities, or near big cities. This was a much smaller community than I had lived in and also much less diversity. I mean, a lot less racial diversity, ethnic diversity, religious diversity. There used to be a Jewish synagogue and a Muslim mosque here: there aren't anymore in Auburn. I was, you know, maybe I was apprehensive of that. I felt that loss still here. And yet, I have also found that, if you want it, you can still be a part of a diverse and active community here in Auburn, all you have to do is seek it

out and build relationships and trust and show up. I'm proud that our church has been doing that. I am grateful that I've had that opportunity, especially now.

So I have a two year old son named Emerson, who is the joy of my life, as well as the exhaustion of my life. He's a toddler and everything they tell you about two year olds: totally true. But I've never loved anyone as much as the way that I love him. He's adopted and he is biracial, African-American, and my wife and I had a journey to get to that place where we experienced four miscarriages, and then the stillbirth of our twin sons. Then we felt called to, to pursue adoption. We did an open adoption where the birth mother chose us and we still have a relationship with her and she spends time with her son and we talk to her on the phone and have a relationship there. He will always know the abundant love and the courage that she has for him. Now that I'm a dad and we have this wonderful, beautiful boy who's a part of our life, I want a community that cherishes him, that loves him as much as I do; protects him regardless particularly of the color of his skin, but also that celebrates and empowers his history as a black boy, eventually a black man, and that teaches him that history and the many perspectives and music and the social justice movement. The literature, the science, and the world history. And not just African-American, Indigenous and Asian-American, and Latinx, and everyone. That's been a hope we have for Auburn and that's why we're excited about some of the changes taking place in Auburn.

We're also excited about the history that's here in Auburn. A lot of his baby friends, many of them, they're diverse too. Some of them look like him and that's important, too. That he has a community that looks like him. But it's also a fear and a concern that we have about Auburn: is he going to receive the education? Is he going to have schools and teachers and police officers and businesses and city leaders and churches that love him and empower him as a person, as a black person and the fullness and the complexity of however he ends up identifying. As he discovers himself, and I don't know, there are many moments of hope here in Auburn, and so many good people and so much kindness and so much resilience here, despite lots of struggle.

We struggle with addiction here in Auburn, we struggle with poverty. Here in Auburn our church serves a lot of people with disabilities and mental illness. So often we rise, we rise and through that we stand together. And then there's also some real ugliness in this community: of racism, of people tearing each other down, of selfishness. You know, we've seen that with COVID, and all the people who just aren't willing to even wear a mask. I serve on the NAACP Human Rights Commission, a variety of organizations, and one of the things that the NAACP does every year is an annual school supply giveaway. By the way, this organization, you know, created for the advancement of people of color. Most of those children who receive school supplies \*(unclear)\*, and yet we will stand outside Walmart (this before COVID) we stand outside Walmart together to say, "When you go to Walmart, when you go to buy things, can you spend \$1 on some pencils, can you donate that notebook, et cetera, and give that to us?" Some people are incredibly generous. Other people, it's amazing, they'll be like, "Well, why should I help you? Why should I help these kids?" This is totally non-controversial, right? Giving school supplies to children. And yet the divisiveness, the rhetoric, the hate sometimes, or just selfishness that is

evident is disturbing. These are folks who could afford to because you see what they're coming out with of the store later.

And that's been my experience of Auburn. It may be trite, maybe, to say it this way but much as Dickens once said, "It is sort of a tale of two cities" and I guess the question for Auburn and Cayuga County, right now, especially as our nation and our city or county are so polarized, so divided. You've got one force of history trying to move one way and the other trying to regress trying to go back. Which is going to win? How are we going to move forward? And is there hope? Is there a chance to go forward together with people across that? I don't know.

But how do we love one another? How do we respect one another? How do we listen well and advocate for one another? We care about each other enough that we stand up for each other and recognize that when we stand up for each other that serves us as well. We all benefit from that. That's I guess my question for Auburn and Cayuga County is "Which way are we going to go?"

**AR:** Well, thank you very much for sharing your life history and your experiences and your stories.

**PH:** You're welcome. Thank you for the opportunity. I appreciate it, Alexis.