

**University of Maryland
Oral History Project
Interview with Russell Williams
Conducted on June 1, 2022 by Annabelle Smith**

AS: All right. My name is Annabelle Smith and I'm an oral historian at History Associates, Inc. in Rockville, Maryland. Today's date is Wednesday, June 1, 2022. And I am speaking with Russell Williams, II for the Special Collections in Media and Culture, a unit within the Special Collections and University Archives at R. Lee Hornbake Special Collections Library at the University of Maryland. This interview is part of a larger donation to the Special Collections in Media and Culture centered on the contributions of Joseph "Tex" Gathings III to radio and television broadcasting. So Mr. Williams, can you please state your name and spell it?

RW: Yes. Russell Williams II. So that would be R-U-S-S-E-L-L then capital W-I-L-L-I-A-M-S, comma the second, two capital Is.

AS: All right. Thank you. How were you introduced to Mr. Gathings?

RW: So I was going over that with one of Tex's long-time mentees, Tommy Childs. And we came to the conclusion that I met Tex through one of his former students, a Mr. James Gary Featherstone, who I think had come out of the navy in the mid '70s and was taking classes at Federal City/UDC. And I believe he's the one that introduced me to Tex formally. Of course, he had a reputation in the city from Teenarama and also just being one of those people that, so there were so few Black men and women that had significant

roles in the DC media. So we pretty much knew, if we didn't know them we'd know who they were. Or were told hey, if you ever meet so and so, this person is XYZ and, you know, they should know who you are and what you're trying to do, either as a student or as a budding professional. So that would have been easily in the mid '70s. So somewhere between '71 and '75.

I moved to Los Angeles in 1979 to pursue a career in the movie industry. And times that I would come back to DC to see family and friends, by that time I was staying in touch with Tex and also had been invited on more than one occasion to come to any of his classes and just kind of give them an idea of what the motion picture industry criteria were, what the job looked like on a day to day basis depending on what you wanted to do compared to what it was like working, at the time I left Washington, I'd worked for Channel 4, Channel 5, Channel 7. Somehow I skipped over Channel 9. And I also was co-founder of a radio workshop at WAMU FM [Spirits Known and Unknown Urban Communications Workshop], which at the time, those studios were actually still on American University's campus. So you know, I was fairly busy in the DC media scene. So I could give students a fairly good kind of template as to what it would take for you to break into broadcasting locally. And if you wanted to be, as I referred to it, to get into big show business, you know, what my onramp was. It doesn't mean that that onramp is going to work for everybody, because it also depends on what you want to do. And as I would make the students keenly aware that this as in most any highly competitive field is a relationship business. So basically who you know is important. But more important is who knows you. And at the time they're looking for someone to take over a slot or

they're looking for new blood, that's generally the more direct route to get into that media, as opposed to you put in an application to a station or to a company.

AS: Right.

04:53

RW: And so I also learned from Tex in terms of what he had been doing in the earlier days of DC media and what was the breakthrough. And any time you were around him, you realized that he was expecting you to meet certain standards. And if he saw that you were kind of falling shy of those standards, he'd let you know. He'd pull your coat he'd used to say.

AS: Well that kind of goes into my next question. To the best of your ability, what kind of a person was Mr. Gathings?

RW: Okay. My impressions of Tex right from the very beginning was even he had a very imposing presence physically, but he had a really great sense of humor. And if you were just sitting around and this conversation had nothing to do with DC media, he was a very interesting person because he was well traveled. He was very well read. And he was interested in things on a broad scale. You know, between music and the arts and things like that. Because he had been exposed to a lot of things growing up. And I think he had lived in New York for a while. And of course they called him Tex because he was born in Texas. But you know, I didn't meet him obviously until he was in the DC area. So he was a person that really, even if it was humorously, would remind you of the shoulders that

we were all standing on. And he would include himself in that. And that we had a responsibility, especially if you were pursuing anything [glitch]

06:51

AS: Oh, one second, Mr. Williams. I think you went on mute.

RW: Oh, there we go. Okay. Yeah, I hit a button because that arrow was sitting there on top, I hit the mouse. Okay, I would say broadly if you were interested in mass communication, his real hope was that you would A, understand that if you got anything that even smelled like an opportunity to take it. But also be ready for it. To understand that it's important if you're not serious, or you maybe said you got a taste of it and it looked like it was going to be too much work, too many hours, or not what you expected it to be looking at it from the outside, to please do not spoil that door or that opportunity or that relationship for the next person that came along with a permanent tan. Because he was of a generation, and I'm of that generation, and try to impose this on younger people as well, that the double standard is still in play. So unfortunately, if you come through the door and you don't do well, then that's going to generally speaking negatively impact the next person to come through the door with a permanent tan. Now you could have fifty-five white people come through the door and not deliver. That doesn't mean that company's going to stop screening new white people for a particular job. Okay? But because there were so few of us in the mass media on television, fewer of us at that time especially in the mid '70s that were in management positions, or had the power to hire and fire or you know, were even further up the so-called food chain, that meant that every door that opened to someone who had a permanent tan was a door that that person had to look at as a sacred

opportunity and make sure that they left that door open for the next people to come along. Because you had to prove like going back to World War Two, like the Tuskegee airmen. Like yeah, we can fly planes. And yeah, we can stay on mission. And yeah, we can make sure that our pilots get back home. If that plane is flyable, we'll escort them back home. And all of the stuff that had been built up through the Jim Crow era about what we couldn't accomplish because we weren't smart enough, we weren't brave enough, we weren't disciplined enough, all of those sort of attitudes, we were at the time and still to this day fighting against a lot of that attitude and a lot of those social expectations.

So Tex was the one, getting back to your question, that even though he had a great sense of humor but at almost all times he was deadly serious about what it meant to ply your trade in these fields that are highly competitive. Because in DC of course, you could easily get a federal government job and just consider yourself just rolling through that arena to retirement. And of course we're not talking about the people who ended up as political hires or the people who ended up being heads of departments and things like that. We're talking about the basic clerical jobs that would have been the onramp for us at the time. So your folding, your filing. Myself, I had worked a little bit at the Library of Congress. And I would have been one of the people to go get your books based on your request slips and things like that. Those kind of jobs. Well you could basically sit in those kinds of jobs until retirement almost without having to do any work, unfortunately. But the jobs we were pursuing, there was a work ethic, there was an expectation and there was a short and very steep learning curve. And if you indicated or you demonstrated you didn't have the capacity to keep up with that pressure, then you were a memory, okay?

And the whole point was that you shouldn't leave that door closed to the next person who came along with a permanent tan. I'll stop there.

AS: Well, thank you. Very understandable. What do you remember about Mr. Gathings' radio shows?

11:46

RW: Okay, now back when he was on WOOK radio, he was just a voice to me. Because that would have been, I want to say in the mid to late '60s. And even though I was listening to radio, of course there was WOL-AM "Soul Radio", there were a couple of other stations around that were playing say European concert music. I wasn't really for the most part following what you would call deejays at the time. I was kind of one of those people who would jump around the band to hear different music and to kind of see what fit the mood I was in at the time. And for the people who will be listening to this oral history, radio in those days was a lot different. Even though it was beginning to be more sort of targeted, you know, R&B on this station, gospel on this station, symphonic or European concert music on this station, country on that station, growing up in the '50s, a lot of the radio stations just played whatever was popular. So I didn't really grow up initially listening to a radio station that only played one stream or one genre. So I really can't speak much to remembering him being on air as much as I knew him as a professor and as a mentor.

AS: All right. Do you have any recollection of his television shows?

RW: Well for sure, Teenarama was very popular. (laughs) And I don't know if this is also important, I'll also leave you another name, a former classmate of mine. I just happened to see a week or so ago in a *Washington Post* article that she was one of the people that snuck out of school for some reason or the other so that she could be on Teenarama. I said, "I didn't know that. You cut class! Does your mom know that?" (laughs) But yeah, I mean, the dance shows were of course all the rage. And to try to actually get on one of those shows so that you could mug for the camera, I mean, was every young person's goal. And of course the big Magilla at the time nationally was American Bandstand. And at the time, you really weren't going to see too many people who looked like us on American Bandstand. It wasn't that you would see none. But you really couldn't blink too many times while that show was on. You would see people with a permanent tan that were the acts. But the dancers, not so much. So Teenarama certainly was a local draw and a topic of conversation. So for me, that would have been the kids who were already in high school. For me that would have been while I was still in what we called junior high school.

15:15

By the time I got to high school, I was more seriously interested in what we might call Black power, what we might call, you know, just sort of raising the stakes and the goals of what Black students should be doing in their classrooms and how and where and how often they should be active in what's going on in say community groups or political demonstrations going on in DC at the time. So there was no shortage of that going on.

Also at a certain point I'll go on record, which of course I've already signed a release that this is on the record and I can't make any modifications, but I'm going to go on the record as being somewhat of a snob when it came to music. So of course I enjoyed and had a lot of 45s in my collection and was up to speed on all the popular dance tunes and those artists. But I was really more interested in jazz. Because I was also a music student, I had a pretty good ear for European concert music as well, and international music, mostly from Brazil. And that was something else that later on in conversations as I got to talk with Tex about different things, I found out that he was chummy with this person, had been at this concert, had heard this group. I was really amazed with how well versed he was in many areas of the arts. So I may not be the best source for what it was like watching Teenarama. because I probably had that on and I was probably more looking for people I knew on the show more so than wondering about the production aspect of it and where it was done. Of course, we knew where the studios were. But I was trying to figure out in those year, who was this guy named John Coltrane and why did Wes Montgomery pass away so soon, and how could I play piano like McCoy Tyner, Ahmad Jamal and on down that road. So I'm going to leave it at that, that particular question.

17:48

AS: Well, thank you. Kind of building off that just a little bit, to the best of your ability, looking back on Teenarama, how do you feel that the show impacted or reflected DC culture at the time?

RW: Well, I would say that the one thing that you would very rarely see in Washington, DC at that time, were people of color on TV. And if you did, if they didn't occupy an official

position somewhere or were, say, important ministers or important community faces and influences, if you did see Black people on the news or on television, it was generally speaking, it meant the news. It was either we were protesting or we were being put in handcuffs. So the nice thing about Teenarama, especially if you were trying to figure out what your own personal wardrobe should look like, just tune in to that show to see whether you were still wearing penny loafers, or were the girls still wearing what we used to call slingshots. Were pleated skirts still in? Were the guys wearing turtlenecks? Had they moved into the Italian knit stage yet? It was really kind of seeing what—because if you got on Teenarama, you were considered hip. (laughs) You know, so if you were like me, kind of like well, I had IQ above room temperature, but socially I was kind of still in the formative years. So I would always try to key in on okay, so what would be considered the cool guys and what were they wearing. And then you know, oh, she's fairly attractive, and she kind of looks like somebody I know over at Kramer Junior High, or maybe somebody I knew from church. So I would try to see who those girls were paired up with in terms of dance partners. And maybe I could go to Sears and find a shirt that looked something like that. Because we're well before designer names, you know. I grew up in the era where you get your tires, your home furnishings, your tools and your clothes all from one store. (laughs) You know, so it would have been a few years later before we were shopping only this place for shoes and only this place for suits and only at this place for belts and so on and so on. So I would say for me, Teenarama, in addition to hear some R&B, was really more how to keep pace with the style-conscious young people that were in most cases a little bit older than I was at that time. So I would know

how to dress and how to act if I ever did meet a very attractive young lady at some point in my life.

AS: (laughs) Okay. So a little broader of a question, how, in your opinion, did Mr. Gathings change the face or voice of public television and radio?

21:12

RW: Well, that is a really good question now. By this time, you're talking about WOOK TV? Or what specific public outlet are you speaking of?

AS: Just more in general, over the course of his career.

RW: Okay. Well, I would say my main interest at the time was how do we get young African Americans or even seasoned, but at the time, of course, I was in that category of people who were looking to move up into mass communications. And so I would say one of his, I would say probably for me the most important part of his legacy are people that he mentored and those mentees went on to work in various stations in the DC area and some beyond. You know, the young lady named Tommi Childs that I worked with at WRC. And during conversations back and forth, I found out that Tex Gathings was an important influence in her career and basically stayed on her to pursue, you know, the media at large. So that meant that he was influential to people who wanted to be on the air in front of the camera or, you know, behind the microphone, as the case may be, if it were radio. And also people like myself who more gravitated toward the technical jobs in television and/or radio. And I would say that as an early producer of content in DC, it was very, it

was just good to know that there were people with a permanent tan that were making those decisions. Because as far as we could tell from looking at the screen, that didn't exist. And since they didn't really do too many behind the scenes videos like that, you know, all this is common on YouTube and in other places where you see who's in the background actually making the decisions, and deciding on the set and deciding, you know, on what the budgetary outlay is going to be, you know, each season. We only knew from kind of like whispers and conversations about people like Tex—this is, of course, before I met him—that there were people with a permanent tan making those decisions. So that meant that there was hope for us little people who were still knocking on the door hoping that one of those doors was going to open.

I would also say that it's very important in that time period that being successful, because of course there's always some controversy deciding to put A content on the air versus B content or C content. You know, being successful and being a strong personality also helped open the door for other people, which is, I would say, the most important, in my opinion, part of his legacy. Because I always kind of took issue with people who would say how lonely it was at the top. And my packaged response would be, well, it's only because you didn't bring anybody with you. All right? So, Tex brought people with him. So that's one of the parts of his legacy that hopefully will never be forgotten.

25:18

AS: And kind of building on that a little, but I know you touched on it earlier, in your opinion, how did Mr. Gathings open the field of public broadcasting to minorities?

RW: Okay, that one I'm probably not so, probably not the best person to ask specifically when it comes to public broadcasting. But I do know that James Gary Featherstone might have a better answer for that question than I would. Because at WAMU, we had a pretty unique workshop [Spirits Known and Unknown] at the time as well. But I would say that he sent more than one person, and in the later years of that workshop over to us. And some of those folks joined that workshop after I had already moved to Los Angeles in '79. I think that workshop went on to 1983. So I'm sure that between the two names that I'm putting in the chat, they would have more targeted answers for that question than I could provide.

AS: Well, that's perfectly fine. Aside from the Teenarama dance show and his radio shows, can you share any stories about Mr. Gathings' impact on the community of the DC Metro area?

26:58

RW: I do remember there was, and this would have been in the early '90s, I would say probably 1991, there was a media reunion that was put together. And pretty much all of the names and faces of the DC media. So that would have included print, radio and television. Many of those faces were there at the time. So names like Jim Vance. People like Carol Randolph, who was on the air at WTOP Channel 9 before it became WUSA years later. Marilyn Robinson, who was an on-air reporter at WRC NBC. Cameramen, sound people, writers, producers who worked in, you know, anyplace from like WETA, which is public. I was one of the representatives who had a foot in two or three different stations. But I mean, the room was packed. And it was almost impossible

to find somebody in that room who did not know Tex or who did not have some contact with him, who Tex had written a letter for or made a phone call on their behalf or put a foot in their behind to get certain things done. (laughs) It was just amazing how many people were so happy to put arms around him at that particular event. And that's when I really kind of saw just beyond my just personal contact with him how important a figure he was in the DC area when it came to the media. Because it was kind of like he had his own receiving line, you know, with all those people who were there who were famous faces and making high salaries and had high visibility and name recognition. But almost no one did not know Tex. You know? Including one of my favorite people from that era who was a media attorney named Bill Wright, who had an organization, as I recall, it was Black Efforts for Soul and Television. And one of the things that made him so important is I believe because his organization's lawsuit of four, five, seven and nine, if I recall, was the only reason that we ended up getting Black anchor people and later on Black street reporters on the air. Based on the federal communications guidelines on what a station licensee's responsibilities were to the city of license.

30:09

And I remember he and Tex had a very, I would say, a spirited conversation when they were kind of reunited at this particular event. I do have like a photograph or two from that event that a young lady who ended up becoming a White House photographer under Bill Clinton named Sharon Farmer took. And I don't know whether this is something that U of Maryland would be interested in. But I do have some digital copies of these. Because I think they were all Polaroids. And I know there's one in particular of Tex looking

resplendent in his tuxedo. But he was as big a presence in that room as anybody else there. And that's when it really hit me how important he was to the DC media sphere.

AS: Well that sounds amazing. I can definitely ask to see if we can accept those photographs. That sounds really lovely.

RW: Okay. All right.

AS: You touched on notable figures a little. Do you remember any notable guests featured on any of Mr. Gathings' shows?

31:26

RW: Off the top of my head, no. No, I do not.

AS: That's okay. (laughter) What do you feel are some of the lasting impacts that Mr. Gathings has had on public television or radio?

RW: Okay. I would say that being the pioneer that he was that A, he was an inspiration, for sure, for those of us who were trying to get our foot in the door. And then kind of like I would say the way people talk about Spike Lee and how he helped so many folks get into the movie business who would have just basically seen doors close in their face, Joseph Tex Gathings was that person, especially for the DC area. And so his legacy still lives on. And those of us who were mentored by him and then went on to use the phrase from our workshop over at WAMU, each one teach one. Which of course a lot of people have used

that phraseology. But that was something that he made sure we knew. We were responsible for bringing along the next generation. And they would be responsible for bringing on the next generation. And that's how we would grow this family of people who were very conscious, very cognizant of how important it was A, to have access to what was then called the mass media. And if you're going to be on the air, you know, for goodness sake, put something worth hearing or viewing on the air. Doesn't mean it had to always be serious. But it had to at least have some level of integrity and cultural significance. So to me, I would say that would be part of his lasting legacy. Because I think hopefully doing these oral histories you all will be able to connect the dots of just how wide and broad his reach was in terms of other individuals who were either mentored, taught or were coworkers of him. You couldn't be around Tex and be neutral. I'll tell you that much. (laughs)

AS: Absolutely. And do you think his work in public broadcasting is being continued today? If so, how?

34:02

RW: Well, I could say that, I mean, especially in the DMV area, I do feel that like say ~~Vincent~~, some of the content that you may hear on WPFW-FM, some of the content that you may hear from time to time on WAMU, I'm not sure what's going on at WETA, since I haven't been in the area in quite a few years. But also even some of the folks who came out of some of these local stations and ended up at NPR, you know, I think that it's really interesting to see that some of these stories and packaging and focusing on community events and community stories, community-based reporting, I don't know if you could say

that was only and all Tex Gathings. But I know that's something that he innovated during his time in some of these early stations. And that particular time, I might not have even known, you know, what went on behind the scenes to put this particular person on the air or to get that particular story on the air. So in hindsight, I would say that there probably are a lot of people that he influenced or mentored that are still using some of those lessons and using some of that style or that template in creating and telling today's stories. But to be able to name these people specifically other than the ones I've already mentioned, I would be at a loss. Because for the most part, I've been away from the DC area realistically. Well, from '79 to 2002, I was back there teaching at American U from 2002 up until last August. And so even then, after Tex passed away, I hadn't really heard his name mentioned that many times other than the folks that I know personally that knew him closely. So in preparing for this particular oral history, I was really happy to reach out to people and find out oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes, yes, I remember. And kind of hearing some of the stories of how they knew Tex or what Tex's influence was on them. So if I can't give you a more targeted answer, I'm hopefully sending you two, or maybe even three people, who can fill in some of those blanks that I may not be able to fill in.

37:02

AS: Well, every answer is appreciated. But thank you very much. My last two questions are just general questions. Can you share any stories about Mr. Gathings' time at Federal City College?

RW: I would say a couple of times I had been invited just to sit in a class. A couple of times he invited me, actually more than a couple of times, to actually teach a class. But I would

say that some of my teaching style that I went on to use when I became a fulltime professor or maybe adjunct in different schools, I really liked the way Tex kind of owned the classroom. So he for the most part wasn't so much a sit behind the desk professor and kind of bark at you from one spot. He was, in my recollection, very peripatetic. So he was always moving around. And he wasn't shy about kind of making sure the students who kind of felt safe being quiet and sitting off to the side or maybe in the back of the classroom, he wasn't shy about getting them involved in a discussion. Or, you know, challenging them as to whether they had done their homework, had done the reading. And I don't know whether they appreciated that at the time. Because in my view, all he was doing was kind of getting them ready for the media world that was going to have high expectations that we're going to have very hard and fast deadlines. The pace was going to be a lot faster than what was going on in most classrooms. And that if you couldn't take this little bit of pressure that I'm going to apply to you in this classroom, how do you think you're going to successfully navigate these newsrooms or whatever else it is you want to do. If you wanted to edit film or if you wanted to write copy for radio broadcasts or television. You know, if you wanted to be on air, it's like you had to bring it and you had to bring it correctly the first time around. You also had to know when to stand your ground, and when to close your mouth and listen and learn and be a sponge, and just kind of say well okay, why did that person do this, and what's that person doing over there? And how can I learn from this particular failure of mine or this particular success of mine? So I wasn't shy about taking some of his teaching style and, you know, I mean, I don't know whether today that would be considered too assertive or making students uncomfortable. But I find that the sooner you can get a student to either

believe in themselves and feel comfortable expressing themselves, the better it will be for me as an instructor, because then I'll have a better idea of what you're actually thinking. And you know, who knows? You may actually have some ideas that you need to contribute to the discussion. But if you're sitting kind of as a wallflower and never open your mouth, who will know whether you have maybe the best idea that day or the best, you know, recollection of the reading. So I remember him more as a peripatetic professor.

41:10

Now as his health kind of slipped away, maybe he was a little bit more stationary in some of the later classes. But that imposing presence and that sense of humor was always there. So I always appreciate and try to always use humor as an instructor. Because I want kind of like Hitchcock, I want you to be relaxed before I pull the curtain and show the horror of the business that you're trying to get into. (laughs) I don't want you to be like led down the primrose path and think that it's going to be red carpets from the day you get into the business to the end. You may not ever see a red carpet, you know. And Tex was like that. He always wanted to make sure, now understand, it's not the first time that anybody's had this idea to try to go into TV or go into film or you know, whatever is going on today. If you want to be a social media influencer, it's not an original idea. So this is what you are up against.

I think, I don't know if he was the one that made me aware of this during a particular lecture, but I know that he had made some comments to students in different times that helped me form this particular thing that I try to share with people, especially students, is

that it's so important to appreciate the value of the naysayers that are in your presence. Be they in the classroom, sometimes they're family members, they could be just total strangers, they could be people in your place of work. And you know, he didn't phrase it the way I'm phrasing it. But I know that he had pointed out to different students that when you meet this resistance or when you hear that no, or when a family member says, "I don't know whether that's something, why do you want to move across country and pursue this particular field?" Or whatever. "You don't even know anyone out there." And he would make sure that the students understood that you're not going to get anything by not taking certain educated risks.

So I would say the way I phrase that to students now is the naysayers in your life are very important. And why is that? Now I'll tell them straight up, I didn't appreciate this when I was their age. Okay? But looking back I would say because if someone could simply talk you out of pursuing your dreams, then you probably weren't going to get there anyway. The naysayers really test whether or not you're serious. Now they may not see that as their role. Some of them may just be straight haters. Some of them may actually have your best interests at heart. Saying, "Well, you know, from what I've seen, you're a little weak on this aspect of that job, and maybe you need to bone up on that." And that might be an observant and a truthful statement. The question is, are you going to let someone, if they just talk you out of pursuing your dreams, then that means the least little resistance you encounter, you're ready to quit. Well then no, you probably do need to figure out something that's going to be less taxing and less stressful, and where less is expected of you. Because if you want to be in a highly competitive field and succeed, then the

naysayers are just folks that, okay, make that note. And if that's a note that's coming from a legitimate space, see what I can do to polish that up and keep it moving. Because when you do get the job, then your mission isn't over. Your challenge is just starting. So if you're a quitter, maybe you don't want to do this. So now you have to decide. And that was the way I would think Tex kind of challenged these students and let them decide for themselves whether they really were serious about this.

45:37

Because I think one of the things would pretty much tell the students at a certain point, well if you're not serious, then you're wasting my time. Because I need to take some of this knowledge and some of this mentoring and lay it on some students who are serious. So once you've made up your mind, come back and see me. Right? Because I can figure out a few things that you may need to work on. And then if you successfully navigate that hurdle, I'll make some phone calls on your behalf. I'll send a letter on your behalf. I'll come there and put you in so-and-so's face and say okay, this kid wants a job, and get them started, and make sure they deliver. So he was that direct. But only if you were serious. If you weren't serious, then, you know, the knitting class is down the hall to the right.

AS: (laughs) Understandable.

RW: Okay.

AS: And my last question is just can you share any personal stories, anecdotes, any light-hearted, fond memories you have about your interactions with Mr. Gathings?

46:48

RW: Specific things that he may have said, you know, I can't, I couldn't put anything in quotes. But I just remember that he had a sense of humor that—well, I'll put it this way. There's potty humor. And then there's humor that comes from a place of having an IQ that's pretty much stratospheric. And that's, I would say, for the most part, what I remember about Tex. He could turn anything into a joke. But then, his intelligence, and he was so conversant and had so many topics on the tip of his tongue, he basically could keep you in stitches. And I can't think of anything specific that he said. And if anything pops back into my head, I'll send you an email. But I'll guarantee you, you couldn't sit on the fence. And for the most part, you weren't going to be sitting around him long-faced and glum. Because he was full of energy. And just had an almost British sense of humor, you know, as I've learned to appreciate some of the writings and the wit from across the pond. I would say that he had that. And then of course it was all rooted in Black America. And some of it in the church. And some of it, he'd pick up things from wherever he's been and put it all into this very beautiful, intelligent mix.

48:38

And he was also, even though he was an imposing figure, he was also a charmer. So if you saw that side of him, you'd consider yourself fortunate. But when you were kind of like not pulling your weight, I had seen that side of him as well with students who were in a class or two, or couldn't come up with a real decent answer to a fairly straightforward question. And he could use humor there. But he'd also let them know no,

no. You're not hitting the mark that I was expecting you to. Work on it. And I think the students who really spent more time with him than I would have would have some specific quotes, specific things that he said to them that became life-changing. That is, if they heeded it. (laughs) You know, that old lead the horse to the water story.

But I guarantee you that one of the things that was important to me was just to see how Joseph Tex Gathings carried himself, be it in the classroom or in a room full of very important people. Or just out in the world, you know, like say up and down U Street or wherever. He was always at home wherever he was. And very rarely do I remember going anywhere I would bump into him where no one knew him. That was almost impossible in the DC area.

50:35

AS: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Williams. Do you have anything else you'd like to add, to share or anything about Mr. Gathings?

RW: Just reach out to these people whose names and numbers I put in the chat. And again, I'm going to send you some more people. And I'm just really honored to be asked to participate in this oral history. Because if we don't keep our histories going and make sure that we provide as many details as possible for the generations coming behind us, then they have really no compass and no rudder as to how they should conduct themselves and what they should be reaching for in the future. So understanding how people face the challenges of their day and rose above them. You know, that's an art form that we need to get better at. And not be just kind of like haphazardly, oh, every fifteenth

throw we actually threw a strike. No, we need to hit homeruns and throw strikes and make touchdowns and come up with the right answers more often. And I think this is one of the ways that we can really show the rest of the world that Black lives do matter.

AS: Of course.

RW: So I'm really honored to have the opportunity to share what little details I can remember. But just on the whole, Tex was one of those people that if it weren't for his influence and his strength, I wouldn't be worth interviewing.

AS: Well, thank you. And we greatly appreciate you taking the time to answer these questions for us. It definitely means a lot.

RW: My pleasure. And again, I probably have one more name I'm going to send you in an email. But I'm going to reach out to this person first, who really was on Teenarama. And these other two gentlemen were very close to Tex. One, the first gentleman, worked with him at WOOK TV. And the second gentleman was a student. And I think probably the person who introduced me to Tex one on one. So I assure you, they will have many stories for you. (laughs)

AS: Well, thank you.

RW: Okay.

AS: Just to let you know, I'm about to stop the recording.

RW: Okay.

53:15

[End Interview.]