

Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project
Interview with Willie Davis by Justice Madden
Conducted on June 29th, 2024 in Farmville, NC

[00:00:00] **Justice Madden:** This is Justice Madden with the Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project. It is Saturday, June 29th, and I am at in Farmville, North Carolina at the library. Can you please introduce yourself and tell me some things about yourself that you feel are important?

[00:00:23] **Willie Davis:** My name is Willie Davis. I was born and raised here in Farmville, North Carolina.

I'm the youngest of 16. I'm a father of seven and a grandfather of 14.

I've spent majority of my life, I've been garden since I was seven years old and I do it every day and I do it from from my heart and everything I grow I give away. I don't sell anything and that's that's my life.

[00:00:54] **Justice Madden:** And what are some places that you call home? And you can tell me more about where your family comes from.

[00:01:00] **Willie Davis:** My, my father, mother and father. My father was raised in a place called Scranton, North Carolina, out on the coast in Hyde County. My mother's from Fountain, North Carolina. My grandfather, my father moved from Hyde County to Pitt County in the 1920s.

And my daddy was born in the 1919. When he moved here, my dad was born. And they've been here ever since until they all passed away. I was born here in 1963. I live, I live now currently within a mile from where I was born. I was born and raised from kindergarten to high school within two miles of where I actually live now and with the school.

[00:01:45] **Justice Madden:** And can you tell me some of your memories and what that was like growing up?

[00:01:49] **Willie Davis:** It might get deep cause I got, I can tell you more about my early life than I can about my late years. Cause I was born in 1963. I started school here at H. P. Sugg here in Farmville in 1969. My parents, we live out on Stansbury Road, about a mile from here from '63 to '69.

We move away to Greene County in '69, '70. Come back to Pike County '71. I continue to school and I've been here ever since. And and as I was young for 16 and I had, I had the best parents in the world. I had the best sibling in the world. And Growing up, I had, I mean, we grew up on a farm sharecropping. I didn't know I was poor until I got to be a grown.

I had left, got grown, left the home. But I feel that I have, I grew up poor because my parents, my dad farmed and he raised his own. He had animals. We had hog, chick, chicken, um, pheasant, quail, all kinds of wild animals raised and raised our own food. So he was able to not only feed his, his, uh, 16 kids. He would still have food left to share with the neighbors.

Matter of fact, my wife, we didn't know growing up but my wife and um my, my wife, grandfather and my father was good friends. That we didn't know, we didn't know how close they were until you know, she didn't know I knew, but she didn't know till we gotten, had gotten married. But the whole neighborhood was like a village and nobody went hungry because they would always say it took a village to raise a child.

And my dad would take, he would, he would kill hogs. And I don't, he'd kill as many as 16 hogs. But all the farmers in the area, his friends, and they would come and help kill hogs. And whenever all the meat was done, he would fill his smokehouse, and he'd share the food with all the friends and stuff. And ain't nobody would be hungry.

And the same way as farming. When the farm work was done, because he had so many kids, even though I was the youngest one, he could get his work done and he didn't have no, had to pay anybody. So, we would then go, well they would go. I was too young. They would go and help other families and they would get paid.

So, there was always money coming in the house. And we were dirt poor. I didn't know it because we had, we were sleeping at that time, five to a bedroom, sometimes six to a bedroom. But it wasn't, it wasn't a cry because there was so much love in the house. It, it was, I grew up, I had an amazing life growing up.

Uh, I remember, uh, doing, um, the summertime after everybody had left home. Every August, they would all come home and, uh, my dad would kill a pig. He would dig a hole in the ground and he'd find a piece of fencing wire. He'd put that piece of wire over the hole and he'd cook that pig all day and he'd give it away.

And, uh, it, it was the most fun. And then they would go, we'd do that, that was a process every year. And then, later on in my, as I got older, it became not just him and his kids, it became a family reunion. And he started, and he, and, and to me, I carry on that same thing now. I had a wonderful life, but I was poor.

But I didn't know it. I did not know, because my parents never told us we were poor. They never told us we were poor. Yeah. Never told us that.

[00:05:26] **Justice Madden:** I know you mentioned that, um, some of your younger memories or some of your most memorable. Can you walk me through um, maybe like meals in your house from sunrise to sunset and what that was like?

[00:05:39] **Willie Davis:** My mom, to us and to most people, was the best cook in Pitt County. On an average day, we had a table similar to the table I'm sitting in front of. My daddy made the table. He made a table. He made a bench. One side of the bench table had chairs where adults sit and the other side was a long bench for the kids to sit.

And my mom cooked almost three meals almost every day. And I can remember in the morning time she would cook biscuits. We love and she would buy molasses in a five gallon can and she would cook biscuits. She would put a pan of biscuits on the table. It would have the big, the plate would have about sometimes as much as 100 biscuits in it.

And at the end of the breakfast, there would be no biscuits on the table. Somehow, we ate everything. She did it sometimes three times, most times three times a day. And the food, it tasted, smelled and tasted, because we killed our own chicken. We killed, my dad made his own bacon. And it was always, it was never short, food was never short.

I have no, I have no bad memories of my childhood. Even the things that should have been bad to me, my parents made it understandable and made it pleasant and told me it ain't always gonna be that way. Because I was born in the in early '60s when it was all the civil rights and all the other stuff going on and they made it

made it easy for me and made it explained to me. And so there will be no hatred in the way they raise, raise their kids.

[00:07:07] **Justice Madden:** Can you talk to me about some of the things that you grew and did any of the things you grow, were they used to feed the livestock?

[00:07:17] **Willie Davis:** Yes, we grew. My dad started out. We grew peanuts. We grew corn.

He grew tobacco, we grew tobacco for to make money. And we grew some cotton and soybeans. And during the year, say, if we pick the corn or before the corn turn brown, we go out and he have a certain amount of it put aside and we'll cut that down, the green part, and we feed the hogs with that during the year and feed the cows with that during the year. And anything that, after he didn't sell, he will make a way for it.

Nothing went to waste. If we didn't sell it, he would put it in storage to feed the animals during the off season. Like, mostly, most of the money made on the farm, you got paid most of that during the fall. So you had to make due from like November to the following spring. So you had to make due, you had to make, uh, everything last. That's why they, they took the tobacco stuff, made the money, took the corn, made money with half of the money with that but stored most of it, and the soybeans, and a lot of that is for, he saved all of it, but never sold the peanuts. All the peanuts were for family and for the animal use.

And as far as vegetables, we raised tomatoes, cotton, some tomatoes, uh, sweet corn. It was different from the farm corn, sweet corn, uh, string beans, butter beans, collard, cabbage, onion. I was in, sweet potatoes. I was in. They can go in and into a general store and buy my father raised, most of it, my father raised it and they stored it up and gave it away.

All they didn't have, once they had enough for themselves.

[00:08:55] **Justice Madden:** And out of

the things that you grew, do you have any memories of saving seeds or, um, any specific seeds that you remember?

[00:09:05] **Willie Davis:** My dad,

he used to

save cottonseeds. He saved corn seeds. And he, he had, I don't know how he did it, but the peanuts had to be treated.

He would, he would save the seeds. He would send them off to be treated. Cause they would come back with stuff on them, we couldn't eat them. I don't know what they put on them, but they would, they would store the seeds. And he would keep his he let his mustard green seed out and keep your mustard green seed.

He would have his collard seed and keep his collard seeds and watermelons. And he would save, you know, save the watermelon seeds and cantaloupe seed. He basically save, almost anything that he grew to have a seed, he was able to save save most of the seeds. And rarely had to buy any.

[00:09:46] **Justice Madden:** Where did he store the seed?

[00:09:47] **Willie Davis:** We had a, we had a, in a, in a smokehouse where we kept all the meat and stuff in it. It was like a cooler area. He had a, he had a room with an area back in there. He kept it, had kept them in a jar. And it's funny that I can sit here now and I can see those seeds sitting in that smokehouse just about two miles from here over in the corner where he kept his seed stuff at.

And it, it way more clearer to me than some of the stuff I did last week. Yeah, but he kept all of it in a cool spot and from year to year, sometime, you know, sometime, some of them make it sometime they don't. But he always had enough seeds. He rarely bought seeds.

[00:10:26] **Justice Madden:** And you mentioned sharing food with your neighbors.

Did you all also swap seeds and share seeds as

well?

[00:10:34] **Willie Davis:** I'm not sure, because I was so young. During this time, I'm thinking back. I'm talking like '68, '69, when I'm like 5 and 6 years old, I saw stuff and I remember stuff, they told me stuff, and a lot of stuff he told me, but I don't remember any particular time, cause he did, with all his friends, he was the majority of, did the majority of the farming, and he taught them.

My dad was so good at farming that a lot of the other farmers would come get my dad and get information from him about how to run their crop. The man that we, we had, the man was called George Moore Farm. We lived on out here on

Stanton Road when I was a kid and it was a [inaudible] family. It was the oldest white family lived across the road from us.

He, he owned most of the land in the area and he would get my dad to help him when his crop went bad. And he would get him, my dad to help him with his crop and stuff and my older brothers and sisters.

[00:11:32] **Justice Madden:** And you mentioned that you grew up two miles up the road. Um, do you, can you share, um, the story about how your family came to be there and how many acres it was?

[00:11:47] **Willie Davis:** We. I have to go, I'll go back to '70, '71. We moved from Green County. We lived in Green County for a year and a half and my parents bought a house out in Stamford Road and And that's how we got, I got back to Pitt County and they, they had moved around back in the day. So you, you live according to how you farm

He was sharecropper. My dad had an advantage from most of the other farmers' kids people cause he had such a large family. It's like we're going to apply for a farm, they count your children's. You stand a much better chance of getting, getting, getting that farm. And so out here on Stedman Road, he farmed in the '60s, he farmed about about 12 acres, I think about 12 acres and half a depth of tobacco, part of the rest of the corn, soybeans, and other things that he grew.

[00:12:37] **Justice Madden:** And what was that process like taking the harvest and, um, I guess taking it to market?

[00:12:45] **Willie Davis:** It

It sounds like work to people, but back when we were doing, everything was done as a family, it was like fun. I remember in the, I was like six, seven years old, I was in kindergarten, and early morning before we would go to school, we would, we would go out in the morning, tobacco would get too dry sometimes, we'd take it out, we'd lay it out in the tobacco, in the mule pasture, and let it get damp.

And then before we'd go to school, go back out and pick it up before the bus come and put it back on the truck so it'd be damp so when they take it off the stick, it would be, um, be soft and stuff. And we were, we were raised, raised through that. And during the early spring, it was like, we were , the press was like, we get out of school in June.

First thing we do, we clean up tobacco, like while we're out of school. We got tobacco already in the field and growing. Usually around July, end of June, or maybe after July 4th, we'll start a process of priming tobacco, putting it in the barn. When we first started, we used, we had just, we had two mules, three mules.

And we used mules to, to farm. And we would, we would spend, we had no working hours. We worked, well they worked. I was, I, I was like the little small kids getting in the way. And they would work from time to day. They'd tell them it was time to go home. But being, being the type of parents I had, we would, they would never like overwork.

No, never like, no, really pushed to a limit. Just, it sounds crazy for a sharecropper's son to say that farming was good, but it for my dad and considering what his friends went through, life, life was, life was good because back then you could take, you could, you could spend all summer long, it happened, you spend all summer long raising tobacco, you take it to the market and they would take it from you and ain't nothing you could do about it.

It happened to my dad one time, and he went through the process of what he had to do. He walked back home, did what he had to do, he came back, he took his tobacco back. But that, that was the last crop of the year. And see when you share cropping, the majority, the landowner gets the majority of the money all year long.

So if they take what, what the part he gave me, I have nothing to feed my kids with. So he fought and got his stuff back. But the farming process for us, it was fun. It was just, you know, my oldest son might tell, have some terrible stories to tell you about farming, but we talk about it all the time. And the brother I talk with about it the most, we don't, we don't have, we don't have those horrible stories.

It was a lot of work, but being done as a family, it was just, it was a lot easier. And having the type of parents I had made it easier. I didn't know what sharecropping was, so I was out of high school. Sharecropping, being poor, meant nothing to me because I didn't know as a child.

[00:15:47] **Justice Madden:** Um, can you share a memory of how your dad got to the land and land ownership?

[00:15:55] **Willie Davis:** My dad, originally my dad was born in 1916. So, like I said, he was born and raised in Hyde County, came here, they live in Virginia.

And he, while he worked at the shipyard in Virginia, he made extra money. So, he originally bought a house on Railroad Street here and farmed with his parents. Once he got them settled and got himself going, he started, he needed to make money while he was here, so he started farming.

And the first farm he farmed on was farmed outside of a farm called the Raspberry Farm. Um, out near, uh, the little store here in town. It was his first farm, and he, the man there taught him how to farm. And he went from farming at that farm, he moved to a farm in Greene County called the Doughton Farm, a bigger farm.

At this time, he had a majority of his kids are in middle school or elementary school. I think my brother's, so elementary school and up. And so now he has older kids so he can get bigger and better farm. So Doughton Farm was a big farm in Greene County. So he farmed there for years. After he left there,

he moved to a house in, on Standler Road. I don't know the name of the farm where I was born. It, it was owned by, um, I forgot folks name now I know, I know the names. But they, they owned all the, all the land in that area in '60, from like '59 to '63, we stayed there. Then in '64 we moved on the old man, George Moore Farm, out on Stanbury Road.

That's when he did, he really started farming then, and he, he learned, he had, he had learned the craft and he, he was really good at it. And he, he farmed there and he, he raised tobacco there and, and, and worked there until about '69, moved to Greene County and made good money. And then he bought, he moved out of the farm, bought land.

He stopped farming. My senior year, my junior year in high school, which is 19 like '80, '81, something like that, he stopped farming that year. But he had made enough money by then from the farm where we lived in Greene County, he was able to buy land. But prior prior to 1970, he had worked. He worked harder, though, you know, previous year, but he wasn't making any money because the sharecropping rules and laws didn't allow it or the people on the land just didn't allow it.

He found across some good people that that really, really help him make his money and gave him more money.

[00:18:22] **Justice Madden:** And how many acres of that and was for the acres maintained throughout the time that he owned the

land?

[00:18:29] **Willie Davis:** He never owned a lot of acres. He just , the only land he owned was the house. The house that he Bowielt up the land he bought, the house was about an acre of land.

He never owned like a lot of land. The land, the land he actually, we actually had when he, they moved from, um, down on the coast. When, back then, my grandfather was given, um, his share of, of the land from when they were doing, I guess, I don't know, I guess gave it to land during slavery. It was the forty acre and a mule promise.

My grandfather and his brother own land down there in Swan's Quarters. And they still, my family still own that land down there. They still own the land. But my parents moved up here.

[00:19:14] **Justice Madden:** And you mentioned some of the things that you all grew to go out to market as well as vegetables and things that you grew.

Um, on for your family to eat. Do you have any varieties or types of vegetables that are special within your family or that you can describe that you just noticed were different than other folks?

[00:19:35] **Willie Davis:** To this day, we only grow I grew collards, I grew cabbage collards. The only thing, if you brought anything other than cabbage collards to my mama's kitchen, she would not cook them, and you couldn't fool her.

My dad, he brought in some, he couldn't find her collards she wanted. He came out somewhere and brought her some Georgia collards. And they're greener than regular collards. And my mama knew. And she would not cook them. She would not cook Georgia collards. That, no, she would not. And I guess the other than that, no.

I guess I just got that favorite food. But for as far as variety, my mom, like this time of year, All the fruit trees producing like, uh, grapes, plum, uh, blackberries, pears, apples. My mom preserved all that stuff. Or she made it as a, as a breakfast food. We would go out and pick either peaches. We call them broadberries.

They call them, I guess, blackberries now. But they grew in a broadbush. And my, we, my mom, we would go out and pick them in the morning. Mom would

cook them. And they were my favorite breakfast. She would cook them and she would make biscuits. And we would eat that with some bacon. And it'd be like heaven.

I'm telling you, it'd be like eating and it was perfect. That's one of my favorite food. I don't eat it now, but it's one of my favorite memories. It's just like we would just go out and, and to a city person, seeing a bunch of kids walking down a, down a ditch bank with buckets in their hand, first thing in the morning with hats on their head.

Little, little bunch of dumb country kids while they sing. That's what, that's what we were known as. But it don't have been, we weren't stupid. We just like we live off the land. It was good living. I wouldn't trade for this. I tell everybody I'm straight country and I love it. I love, I'm one proud country guy.

Yeah.

[00:21:29] **Justice Madden:** Your mom's collards sound very special.

[00:21:32] **Willie Davis:** They are.

[00:21:32] **Justice Madden:** I can

imagine with the homegrown ham that it was delicious.

[00:21:37] **Willie Davis:** Yeah.

[00:21:37] **Justice Madden:** Can you, I know you were young, but can you walk

me through or do you remember what, how she would make her greens?

[00:21:44] **Willie Davis:** Mhm, because I, even though I was young, she would say, Willie, go out to the barn, get me two Tom Thumb, and, um, and probably, uh, Some, uh, dry sauces.

And we had the bone probably about, I would say about 10 , bout 12 bones and it would be full of meat and everything had it in certain areas. She had like, the meat that you're not gonna eat right now is hanging up. It's all starting to dry. The process start up high. As it cured, he brought it down low so it was edible.

So she may see much of the bone and get Tom Thumb. And she would Tom Thumb. She would get that. She would, ham hock, stuff like that. Knuckle bone, dry knuckle bone. My dad did it all himself. We didn't buy it and she would cook that down and, and my wife cooks it the same way. Cooks it the same way now. But that, that was the best food.

And, and she'd like, she'd send me on chores, like she'd say, Well, I need for you to go out there and go to the freezer and get me. Well, say we was going to cook, uh, green beans. Like she would send me, I would do errands like that for her. I was too small to actually work on the farm. So I stayed around the house, helped her around the house.

And cause I had nieces and nephews there. So I would like a, like, help around the house, do the babysitting, help with the babysitting, help with her getting the food and stuff. Even though I didn't cook anything, I would go and get it and stuff like that. But my mom in the kitchen, I, I can, I can hear her sometimes because she loved Mahalia Jackson.

And she'll receive, and she'll get in there, she'll start cooking and singing. Every now and then you'll hear her shouting through the room, shouting. My, my, you'll hear my dad say, Go get Louise! You know, and she, the food would be so special. And, um, like a Sunday meal, she will start Saturday, she'll cook.

Maybe three cakes cooked. She specialized in pineapple, chocolate, and coconut cake. And she would cook them on Saturdays and put them in this glass case that we had. And then Sunday, we may, maybe, maybe the Saturday evening, we'd go out. We'd run down maybe four chickens. And we'd, you know, we'd kill the chickens and clean and dress them.

And, um, she'd let them sit overnight and, and, uh, and, uh, I guess marinate. Then she'd fry them. So we'd have chicken, collards, uh, potato salad. Probably string beans and cake and then Sunday after church, everybody come to our house and the preacher would come, he would bring his family and we couldn't eat until after the preacher ate and they would eat all the breast and all the wing, the best part of the chicken and uh, but it was fun though, but they would, the preacher would eat, his family, my uncles and stuff would come and eat and after they had eaten, we had plenty of food left, then we would go in and we would enjoy the rest of the day.

That, that was a Sunday meal. It happened often, almost every Sunday because she, she did most of the cooking between all her siblings, so they would come to our house and eat, eat most time.

[00:24:45] **Justice Madden:** How did your mother learn to cook?

[00:24:49] **Willie Davis:** My mom learned from her mom because my mom just happened to be the one that was closer to her mama when it come to cooking and I think, lemme see.

Mom was, I think it was seven of, of them. And out of them, she was the only one that really could cook. My other aunts didn't do a lot of cooking. Now one of them didn't cook at all. My aunt, my oldest aunt, she didn't cook at all. Oldest two didn't cook at all. My mom did the majority of the cooking. And I think her, her youngest cook something, she was a good cake maker, but my mom, she just happened to be, she was like, she's the one that got me cooking because I hung around her in the kitchen because she could cook.

And plus my mom, she worked. Somehow she found time, somehow she found time after taking care of her family, she would come here in town, and she would cook and clean for some of the families who were in town, here on Main Street. She had like three families up there on Main Street that she cooked and cleaned for.

Back in the sixties.

[00:25:46] **Justice Madden:** No, I'm not super familiar with the landscape and the dynamic of, um, the city here and the town here. What was the process like? I know you said two miles. Did you have to, how did she get to Main Street?

[00:26:02] **Willie Davis:** My dad, my dad, my dad had a car and he would drop her off after she did what she had to do at the house.

He would drop her off here up town. And I said, It's everything that I'm talking about hasn't happened within less than five miles apart from from the school. I went to, to the house I grew up in, all this within within five miles of where we're sitting right now. Maybe closer than that.

[00:26:32] **Justice Madden:** And so everything that you shared about your early memories sound like a really foundational and generative way that you look at food and growing and being with family.

Can, in reflecting on that, can you talk about some of your experiences now and growing and where you grow and what you grow and

cook?

[00:26:53] **Willie Davis:** Right. Well, a lot of things that I do, I copy my parents. My wife and I copy what my parents did. and she when she first married me, she thought I was crazy. Got always cooking and feeding people and I just enjoyed doing it.

Now she enjoy doing the

same thing. And so I, I grow my garden. I got all the things I need -collards, cabbage, string, everything you can think of. I raised it now and we'll get together and just cook. I learned how to cook from my mom. I took a class while I was in high school. And I've just been cooking all my life.

And so I turned all that and started doing it for myself. And having kids growing up, I fed, I would cook for the kids. My kids played sports. My son played football. My daughter played basketball. So I would have their kid, their friends would come over. I would cook for them. We have family gatherings now.

Every time we have a family gathering, my wife, and we do all the cooking. We rarely have anybody bring anything from outside. And most of the stuff we cook, like all the vegetables come out out of the garden that I raised.

[00:27:57] **Justice Madden:** And the things that you're growing and raising now, are those any of the same seeds that, um, from, that your dad had in store?

[00:28:06] **Willie Davis:** No. I, my dad was good at it, I was terrible at it 'cause I didn't save any seed. I, I remember seeing as, as late as probably late eighties where he had stuff, had a barn behind his house. He had some of the old stuff. But being. I could tell my, my, my siblings being just happy to be off the farm. All that stuff got thrown away, thrown, thrown away.

We had no value at the time cause we was getting away, they were getting away from the farm. They were running from the farm. I didn't know enough about the farm to run from it. So, so I ran, I ran to work when my dad was gone. And so we, I didn't save any of those things, those seeds. But I was able, at one time, I was trying, trying to do it myself.

But I, I got away from doing it. And every now, I got to have seeds. Most of my, most of my older seeds I have now are maybe five years old. And I, they just sitting there and I haven't even used them yet.

[00:28:57] **Justice Madden:** And what was that memory like or that moment like when you realized you had to get back to it?

[00:29:06] **Willie Davis:** When, when you go out to the store, and me knowing how, I go to the store, I can buy a pack of seeds, a pack of collard seeds for \$1.25. I could plant almost an acre of collards for, for about \$20. And then you go out and buy collards, and you, for like, say for a big family gathering we had, you spend \$75 on a bag of collards, and I, I looked at this collard plant and I said, you know, it's way too much money, I don't know what they've done. I know, anything come out of my garden, I know what has happened to it, I know what, what, what they've been, been done to it, except for the seeds themselves, and so I, I thought it was way more important to raise my own.

I told my wife , as long as I'm able to, I'm gonna raise my own stuff cause they tell you one thing And they may do something else. I got a friend do the same thing. He'll, he'll do anything to make a dollar. I ain't can't call no name, but he'll do it. He will. He'll spray stuff, do this and do that just to make a dollar.

I won't do it. I won't tell somebody. So I won't raise. If I got spray sevin dust on my collards. I'm gonna tell you, I put sevin dust on my collards to keep the worms out. But that's about it. I'm not gonna have, not gonna put chemicals on my collards and then go out and give it to give it to you today. I won't do it.

Cause everything I raise, I eat. And anything I won't feed my family, I won't feed anybody else. If I can't eat, I won't, I won't give it to anybody. If you eat from my garden, it's something I'll eat also.

[00:30:38] **Justice Madden:** And what was the year that you decided to go back and kind of start growing and farming, um, for yourself and your community?

[00:30:48] **Willie Davis:** I started at age 7. And it, all this happened recently, about, about a year ago. I, I had gotten tired. I was frustrated. I told my wife, I ain't never gonna grow in the garden again, right. I went out and planted trees where I was gardening at, and we went, went over to Green County and bought it, bought a bag of \$75 bag of collards

that didn't pan out to nothing. I got collards planted everywhere now. I learned my lesson cause it, I was just tired because I, I haven't missed a year haul. Even when I was, I was in, in services, I was, I was a, a reserve, so I would still have time. I always, I always had a garden. And I always raised food. I always give them away. I never sold.

I, out of probably 40, 50 years of farming, I probably sold \$15 worth of collards. That's about it. Maybe \$20. Yeah, sure it is. But I never, I never made money. And that's at one time. Probably about a year ago. Maybe two years ago. I said, I'm going to stop raising gardening. That lady sold me them collards and all I got was stems.

I said, I'll raise my own stuff from now on. Won't happen again.

[00:31:57] **Justice Madden:** And I guess kind of thinking back to your childhood. Right. Um, you mentioned what it was like growing up, being outside. Um, I have a question about what would your parents do if you all were sick?

[00:32:11] **Willie Davis:** If there's a, there's a story lady called Emma Dupree.

That was my mother's aunt. So my, my, my mother was way back into like, Healing, using the earth to heal. And my mom did until we really had to go. When we went to the doctor back in the day, you really was sick. And cause like we would get out in the yard, you cut your feet on a piece of metal and you hadn't had your tetnus shot.

What my mom would do, they would take a piece of fat meat and put it on top of that. So that cut put a penny on it, wrap it up till about About the next day, and take it off, and that thing be closed up. Then she bandaged it up, and that was your, that was your womb healing. My brother had a, had a, he needed, the doctor said he should have gotten like, 20 or something stitches on the back of his arm, where a nail from a tobacco truck ripped through, through the back of his arm.

And my mama fixed it without, without a stitch. Couldn't really have no, had no insurance, stuff like that. So everything that needed, unless you were dying, you didn't go to the doctor. I had a month when I was like six years old and my mama made us this stuff She put around my neck, she, it was garlic. I can still smell the terrible stuff.

But she, it was, she put garlic around, around my neck and some, uh, she tied, wrapped like balls of garlic, some, some type of rag soaked in, I think turpentine or some stuff they had. I don't know what it was, but it was some awful stuff. And she tied it around my neck and I wore it for like five or six days.

And that's what, that was my cure for the month, whatever she gave me for the month. And what they did for like common colds. Every year in September,

back then in September, it would get cold. We would be burning wood in September and my mom would send either one of the kids or dad went out to the tobacco barn and we cured tobacco with kerosene. And she could take that kerosene, she had a mix of kerosene, butter, sugar and something else and that's what we had for cold. And everybody took one, whether you were sick or not and that's what you took and We hardly ever got a cold.

It'll probably kill us now, but it was kerosene. It's probably child abuse. We didn't know it, but that's what it gave us. What it gave us for for for cold and it worked. And majority of us grew up pretty healthy, pretty healthy. Like you only you only went to the doctor when you really was sick. Broken bones, stuff like that.

[00:34:45] **Justice Madden:** And it sounds like a lot of that was, sounds very self-sufficient in every which way. Um, and I'm curious, you mentioned the spices for the meat. Was that also, um, something that you all grew and made, um, at the house?

[00:35:01] **Willie Davis:** Most of the stuff she, like, she used the basic ingredients. She bought, she would buy the molasses and she would get salt.

She'd buy salt and pepper and rest of the stuff she would grow like, she would have like, um, she used, I know she used, she would use rabbit grass, um, different herbs that she knew, and, and seasoning, and she would buy a lot of the other seasonings, but the majority of the seasonings, it was just basic. Like to cure meat, she would just use salt, pepper, molasses, and she would, um, sit the meat out, let it, let it dry out, then you put it, soak it in salt, and then the process, then roll it in molasses, and over time, it would be seasoned with salt, pepper, molasses.

Oh, oh about a year or longer, he would let it stay in there.

[00:35:46] **Justice Madden:** And where would a lot of those things be stored?

[00:35:48] **Willie Davis:** We had a, what was called a pack house, a smokehouse, out right outside, about less than, less than 50 feet from the, from the house and all the, all the meat stuff was stored in there. And then she had a, she had a liquid freezer that she used to put all the vegetables in.

She had a, we had a freezer. It was, it was like, it was so long, a six foot tall person could lay down in it and stretch out. This is how big the freezer was.

And she had one side with frozen vegetables, and the other half with frozen meat. And that was the fresh meat, the chicken, the quail, stuff that they grew.

[00:36:22] **Justice Madden:** Would you be able to talk about why you would rather share your food than sell it?

[00:36:27] **Willie Davis:** I'll give you a short history of me and the reason I got there. I was a police officer in Cedar Green, about 10 miles east of here. And I was injured several times in a car accident. And I broke my neck and I hurt, injured my back the third time I was in the wreck.

And the doctor told me, he said, by the time you turn 55, you probably won't be walking and you're going to have to have many more surgeries. Well, I've had maybe more surgeries. But, and I was, I was so sick at one time, I would walk around, I would actually fall down, pass out from migraine headaches and stuff.

I still get a lot of migraine headaches. So, I was So, was born and raised. I don't go to church every Sunday, but I was born and raised in the church, and my mom told me to never forget where you come from, and I had a prayer said, I said, if I'm blessed, I'll bless somebody else. I said, bless me so I can bless somebody else. So I wasn't blessed to have a lot of money, but I was blessed to have a talent to grow stuff, and so as long as I can grow my vegetables and feed somebody else, I'm blessing somebody where I don't have money to give.

I'm, everything I give is from my heart. It's like you come to my garden. People come to my garden all the time. They'll sit there because it's a peaceful place to be. No, I don't, I wasn't like, we don't have a lot of money, but I'm filled with love and joy for people in general. And when I say bless people, I don't, I don't have a particular person that I won't bless because there's no person too bad or too good

that don't need blessings at some point in their life. And so that's, it's just me saying that I will, I will bless, I'm still able to be here. Be with my family. I'm walking around. Nobody has to take care of me. And that was just my prayer. If you get me, keep me upright, and, and, and bless me and I'll bless somebody else.

And that's how, my food, my garden, when we have a cookout, you know, sometimes, people realize, at one time, we didn't have money for the cookout. We spend the money anyway. And didn't worry about anything else. But we, somehow, we would spend all that money doing cookouts and still have our bills still getting paid.

And so, if, if, if my prayer been answered, it has been answered because it has blessed me to bless other people. I'm going, I'm going to die gardening and doing what we do.

[00:39:01] **Justice Madden:** And I guess maybe as far as you're saying you're gardening and growing now, I'm not there but can you, can you help me visualize what your garden looks like?

[00:39:13] **Willie Davis:** To me,

it's more like it's, my garden is my own little piece of heaven. I'm literally sitting there most mornings at 5:30 waiting for the sun to come up. I'll go in my garden at early, sometimes as early as six o'clock out there. And my wife will bring me food because I don't come back to the house. It's, I got about, it's probably, I got about 25, maybe 30, 50 foot rows.

I got, uh, watermelons. I got, um, collards. I have cabbage, um, beans. And I got, outside those rows, I turned my whole garden, my yard, into, uh, what used to be a flower bed. I got cucumbers, I got vegetables. You go in my garden, you walk in my front yard, right now, and you can stop in my yard, and you can be full before you get to the front door because I got peaches out there ready to eat.

I got, right by my, by the driveway, I got peaches, honest, a pecan tree. There, there are cucumbers, there are, um, tomatoes, there's, uh, squash, there are, uh, pumpkins. Right there, going from my front door, my driveway to the door, and around my, go up my, go up my steps, on my, on my deck, you got, you're going to find more peaches, you're going to find more watermelon, you're going to find cucumbers, peppers, onions, and grapes.

It's just, you could, you could literally not go in the house back in my yard and not go hungry in my yard at this moment.

[00:40:47] **Justice Madden:** And who do you share um your harvests with? Are they neighbors?

[00:40:52] **Willie Davis:** Anybody. I, I try to, I have, I, the reason I almost stopped farming was because my frustration was I raised it for people.

I tell them to come and get it, and they won't come get it. I have people that want stuff, ride by the house, won't stop and pick it up. I don't know what I need to do. And I just got frustrated with it. Cause I, I was like, I, I poured my heart,

it's not for me. It's the garden ain't, it's not even for me. I'll give to anybody to come and get it.

I don't care. Only thing I dislike is that people come and get it and try and sell it. I had one person do that, it really upset me. I gave him stuff, he sold. And it happened to be sold back to one of my family members until I found out about it. But, it's, when you, when you're trying to do stuff from your mind and from your heart what's right, I can't say, well, I can't, I'm not going to share with him or her.

Any, any person that come to that garden. Now, one thing I won't do, I will not pick veggie for an able bodied man. Now, if a woman show up, I'll help them. But any able bodied man that can come out there, I'll help them. But they won't stand, I don't. But I'll, anybody. If they stop by, say, do you have any carrots today?

Do you have any tomatoes? Anything. I don't care. I'll give it away. And I give away with a smile. You know, my wife, we, we, we cook maybe 50 pounds of collards and we just give the stuff away. And it, it, it's done from the heart and we enjoy it. We enjoy it. We have a cookout. We don't say, we say, we say come, but bring a friend.

Don't come by yourself. Bring a friend. We had never run out of food and everybody comes to the cookout, always leaving with something. So that's why I know, I don't know, but I do know that we're doing something right because regardless of what we do, we have over 100 people in the yard and everybody leave with two or three plates.

And we never run out of food. We encourage people, before you leave make sure the food leaves too. That's our motto. Take the food with you. We cook, but take it with you.

[00:43:04] **Justice Madden:** Can

you talk more about what you do to prepare for the cookout?

[00:43:09] **Willie Davis:** To us, it started out, it was real stressful. We did it, but we didn't, we wasn't organized at it.

But we've done it so much now, we can do it with our eyes closed. So, on, I'll go back to the last Father's Day cookout, my Father's Day cookout. My wife, we have, we have like, we say we have collards, we have potato salad, we have

fried fish, we have smoked ribs, uh, smoked chicken, sometimes turkey, grilled turkey, uh, sometimes do a whole pig.

We do, um, last time we had, we did a whole alligator. We do alligator steaks. We do, uh, we've done rabbit. We've done goat.

That's, you know, frog, frog leg. And you'd be amazed that at one time, years ago, I did, I did bear and goat, but people are so squeamish about certain foods. We had 10 pounds of frog legs this past, um, Father's Day weekend and not one frog leg left. And there were maybe five. We, I had, we had about, about 30 pounds of alligator steaks.

And all the food got eaten. I don't fool, tell them what they're eating. I take it, they taste it. And then they start liking to eat it. And you realize that lots of times, it's the thought, we were born and raised eating chicken, pork, and beef. But it's, it's no, it's just as clean as eating, you know, eating alligator, frog.

I tell them if you eat a chicken, you should eat anything if you eat chicken. You should eat anything. But those are food, and we, we just, the food is made with love. We'll spend all night, my wife and I, we'll spend all night, she cooking cakes. And, and you think that the way we doing like we gonna sell it, but we ain't.

We give it away. And we again that night then everybody gone. We'll sit down, laugh, fall asleep on the couch, you know, sleep on the couch and I get clean, clean, clean up the next day and and look forward to doing it again before the summer is out.

[00:45:18] **Justice Madden:** Now were frog legs something that you grew up eating as

well?

[00:45:23] **Willie Davis:** Yeah, I can remember probably later back in the , In the sixties, when we lived on the Moore farm, there was a big canal that ran past our house. My dad would go out there, he was usually, he had a 22 rifle, he would shoot the frogs at night with his rifle. Oh he had a, he'd make a gig. And that was the first time I ate frog legs, back in the sixties.

We, my dad, we ate stuff like frog legs, we ate turtle out of that dish. You know, he'd catch a turtle, we'd eat the turtle. We ate everything. We, we, yeah, it was good food too. It sound bad, but it's good.

[00:45:59] **Justice Madden:** And how were the frog legs and turtle prepared?

[00:46:03] **Willie Davis:** If you fry, the turtle, when you fry it, when you cook it, she do it like a stew, like a beef stew.

It look like a stew beef that was really cooked, cooked to pieces. Because meat, it's real lean meat. It's good meat. And the frog legs look like small chicken legs. Because you cut the foot part off, and you got legs about four inches long with a big muscle part and it's seasoned well and it's real tasty.

A lot of people that come there that frown on it and they end up tasting it. They done come out eating more, asking for it. Like now. Every time I have a cookout now, everybody asking me, am I gonna have a frog leg? Am I gonna have alligator? They asking about it now.

[00:46:42] **Justice Madden:** How did alligator get um added to the menu?

[00:46:46] **Willie Davis:** I'm always looking for something new and I guess I have talked about, I seen on TV and I talked about it. And me and my son, I said, well, look, I said, bye bye. You're going to eat it. He said, don't worry about it pop, we'll eat it. And I grilled, first of all, I had, I had a whole alligator and I grilled it and seasoned it. I watched it on YouTube, watched how they cooked it and seasoned it.

And I grilled it and they ate the whole thing. Yeah.

[00:47:11] **Justice Madden:** And so how do folks kind of find out about these cookouts?

[00:47:14] **Willie Davis:** Well, I don't advertise. I say like, I got a huge family. I got, it's so many of us. I got probably got about 50 nieces and nephews. I tell people about it. Uh, my wife, she, her friends at work. People that come to the house.

I just tell them about it. You know somebody? I'm having to cook out. And they'll show up.

[00:47:33] **Justice Madden:** And um, is there anyone in your family or anyone who you're sharing some, like who's watching you in the kitchen? Like you were watching folks when you were a kid?

[00:47:43] **Willie Davis:** No, because my kids, my kids, they don't really cook a lot. None of my, my youngest daughter, she um, she cooks. My son, he can grill. My, my, uh, my oldest son can grill, but none of them really cooks a lot.

It just Me, me and Jen in the kitchen bar our ourself at night because when we cook most times, we in our own little zone. We don't wanna nobody in our way. We just, we got, got our own system. We, I can, we done so much. Now I know when she's using the stove, when using the oven. I know, well, when you finish, let me know.

Because when she finish cooking her cakes, the oven already hot. I turned a little bit higher, then I put my meat in. So it, it, it is like a perfect system that we, that we got going. We stay out each other way. Certain things that she do that, in the kitchen that, I don't care if I do it for her, I can't do it the way she want it, so I don't even mess with it.

Certain things like I like, something simple like cutting up a potato for potato salad. She'd like it to look a certain way. I can't cut it the way she wants it to look so I don't mess with that. I don't mess with it.

[00:48:46] **Justice Madden:** I have a lingering question thinking back to the hogs and the livestock. Um, at what age did you start helping with the processing of the livestock?

And what is kind of like the process that you saw it growing in?

[00:49:03] **Willie Davis:** My first job I can say was to clean the tail. Yeah, but we'll do. Lemme say, go back. My father, he would say doing it early, early, late fall, early winter before Christmas, between Christmas and Thanksgiving when it was getting cold, he would have a what I call a call killing where he would pick out so many hogs.

He would separate them from other hogs because those are the ones he's going to kill. And on a certain date, He would start killing hogs and the process was you have to feed them corn for a couple of days. And I remember I shot my first pig at age, I was like six, seven years old. He gave me a rifle and the pig eating corn and I put a gun to his head and pulled the trigger.

See, that, that would be child abuse now. But I shot the pig. He jump in his stall. And raise the pig leg up and stick a knife in and cut it, cut the neck open and so it could bleed out. And then the older kids would grab the pig, pick it up over the fence and dip down in the hot water and scrape it.

And my job will just get on the tail end and keep the tail end clean. And we sort of process that after he get all the hair off it, then the next step will be to hang it up and clean the innards out of it. And for that process, we would clean it up and no part of the heart was thrown away except the heart.

Not even, except the hair. Everything else was eaten. My mom, my mom, they would dig a big hole in the ground and she would take a stick and turn the chitlin, intestine inside out with it's own stick. And you wash your stick off and make chitlins. And use some of the, some of the intestine you would use when you cut the meat up to make homemade sausage.

You would use cut the meat up and make the sausage, stuff the intestines with sausage and make the meat. And then the heart, the lungs, all the other stuff, they would be full of hash, all the things we chopped up, eat. And so nothing was thrown away except, except the hair, the hair, that's it.

[00:51:06] **Justice Madden:** And what were the bones used for?

[00:51:09] **Willie Davis:** My mom, my mom used to like to eat bone marrow. And she like to eat the pig feet. And for some reason, my daddy would split them open or she'd have them split. But especially the foot, the foot bone. She would, she would split it open. And the chicken, she would just chew the bones up and, and, and spit whatever was inside of it.

Because she, she said it was something in the marrow that she liked. You know. The part of it, you see it in a restaurant. Now we'd have to take a shank and split it and cut it open and you, and you serve it. It's like butter.

[00:51:38] **Justice Madden:** And speaking of butter, did y'all make butter at the house or did how was lard used at the house?

[00:51:47] **Willie Davis:** My mom would buy her lard. At one time she made butter, but she never made it on a big scale. It wasn't, what it cost her to make it. You waste too much milk. So it would be cheaper for her to buy, to buy the butter and lard. And lard was in everything. It was in the biscuit, the cake. Lard was a base when cooking it for baking and frying.

And especially the biscuits.

[00:52:11] **Justice Madden:** Just thinking because it's been really, just hearing the connection of, um, like your childhood and growing now and the things that you're still sharing and connecting with other folks, just your passion for

sharing. Um, you shared like one of your guiding principles of like, um, bless me so I can bless you.

I might have, I'm probably paraphrasing really poorly, but um, are there any other kind of like philosophies that kind of inspire you to continue growing and sharing?

[00:52:42] **Willie Davis:** My, my parents believe, and they would say, it, take a village to raise a child. And they use that same process when it comes to raising food and feeding.

They said he, my dad would say nobody in his circle goes hungry. If you were a friend of my father, you, your kid was guaranteed to eat because if, if he didn't have anything on his table or he has something on his table, he was split it with your family. Make sure you have something to eat. Nobody, nobody go hungry.

And I had the same thing with my kid. I said, and I was circling, nobody go without. Nobody go hungry. And that's what my dad lived by. Nobody went without. Even though like that we was poor. And, but at the same time it was so he had, it's amazing that they had so much to give other people because they would take the clothes at. We had, we had different levels and I would get my older brothers' clothes and a few during school time that they outgrew, I would get some of their clothes that they didn't wear out.

And they would buy me a few things. So it wouldn't, always has stuff, you always have stuff. Well, I wasn't exposed to that part of the sharecropping. So it was there, but I was just coming on the end of all ending. I came, I came in on a violent time. I was born on a violent time for all the all the civil rights and stuff being going all the killing and stuff.

I was born, just being born then on '63 and up until '69 and stuff like that. So all the time, I'm, I'm just a baby young in kindergarten and my siblings are going to school here. My, um, I have, uh, two brothers and a sister were some of the first, part of the first group of ten blacks that goes to the white school here in Farmer.

Four of them, my siblings, three of them. So, so I don't see, I don't see what they exposed. I didn't see that.

[00:54:50] **Justice Madden:** And did they share any, um, memories or any experiences with you as they were a part of that first group of students in the integrated space?

[00:55:03] **Willie Davis:** A lot of it. Now, a lot of it. I can remember a lot of it.

No, I can a whole lot. I mean, I could. They're, they're.. matter of fact, the spot up here, we're not far from where we like the white only water fountain of the separate water fountains up here in town, the separation of schools and stuff like that. I remember a lot of that stuff. Yeah, I remember a lot of that. yea.

[00:55:26] **Justice Madden:** So, um, you were sharing how you were young and you have memories, but the context wasn't quite there.

But you were, you remember some of the segregation and some of, um, the response and the violent responses to integration. Can you talk about, like, your perspective and I guess now thinking back on it with a little more context?

[00:55:49] **Willie Davis:** Right, I was, I was, my dad and my mom and my granddad, especially, we were exposed to it

but the way they present to us, they didn't present it to us as a disadvantage. They said, Don't run from it. Don't hide from it. See it, understand it and and and go move on and deal with it and don't ever forget it. The main thing they said, Don't ever forget it. And beside our house, there was about less than a hundred yards from the house,

the canal. Across the canal, is a firing range. And we would be like, sometime on Saturdays, Cause the house right down the side of the canal. Sometime on Saturday, we see all this fire going on over there, right? We crawl around in ditch and crawl, crawl, stand, watching this big fire burning. We didn't know what was going on.

My mama yell at us, get over here, what'cha all doing? We didn't know that there were some people out there who didn't really like us. They were burning fires over there. And I didn't know what the KKK was, you know? And My, my mom and my dad, so the house was way back in the field and it was, it was like a half moon, but the path came up in front of the house and it went around in front without, without the back side of the farm.

And they would always tell us when we're not home, or even when they're home, when we see a strange car come up the path, to come to the house. So, this is, because we moved from there, so this is like '68, '69. Because I'm, I'm, I'm in kindergarten. So when a strange car comes to the house, we all had to run to the house and stay.

And when they, then, if my dad ain't home, you know, uh, we don't go out. My mom, my mom would go out and talk to em and stuff like that, see who it was. But there, there were, there were times when something would happen here in town and they would go around looking for people. And they didn't particularly care who they looked for.

And then one day, this particular day stands out in August of like '69. My brother talking about the other night, something happened here in town and I don't know the whole story, but somehow they were looking for some young black guys. And that late that evening, this car came up to our house and it told my father to send Charles out.

Charles, my oldest brother, to send Charles out. They want to talk to him. He wasn't there. My father said no. They said, well, things ain't gonna go well. And just like, I remember it like it was yesterday. My daddy sent us to the back of the house. I got the gun since my dad walked to the front of the door. He pulled both barrels of his double barrel shotgun and fired it toward that car.

It backed down the path flying and whatever happened, happened. But that was an incident where something happened here in town involving a white girl at the school. My brother Charlie didn't even go to school. And they would come by and they would come by and get you. And this is '69. And my daddy, my daddy never ran from them.

And he wasn't afraid, but he taught us how, but he never taught us to hate. In spite of all he, all he endured, he, um, he never taught us to hate. The hardware store here in town right now, it back then was called, I think it was called Churney's store, I think. And they would get mad, this where you, this where the farmers and sharecroppers farm at, right. So if, if I can't trade, I said, I got, I need food, right? They would go there to the trade and the farmer said, well, let Rudolph get \$150 worth of stuff. That'll carry him through the winter. Now, if that guy go there and tell you that he can't get it, you go there, you can't get it. You have to go out and make it on your own.

Because where you trade at, you know, you can't go there. And stuff like that will happen. You know, my siblings, we live in Greene, they live in Greene County. They had to have black school and a white school and my brother told me the other day, they were going to school when the school buses come by. They had run the cornfields, run the woods, cause the kids would come by and spit on them,

throw stuff like that. And this. And when, when, when you see people talk about segregation, discrimination, stuff like that, you think it's a long time ago, but it's not. My grandfather was born in 1886. My father was born in 1916. I'm just a third generation of free black men in my family. My, my, my group said, so it's not that long ago.

And so it really, it bothers me to see people to take the history and try, like, try to hide it. Don't tell the truth. Tell the truth and let it be seen because Farmville, Farmville was a racist town back then. Was a racist town. And like I said, the school was separated. And, and then they, even though it was racist still, the people were able to get together because the family knew they needed one another.

And so they had to stay close to one another. That's why the village worked back then, because they had nowhere else to go. You know? And from that point, my father, selling tobacco, my father's tobacco, who always had a good grade of tobacco, because he would help other people grade tobacco, so he get, made a lot of money doing, helping other people. But he would, the same guy who had a lesser grade of tobacco, that was a white male, would get paid more for his tobacco than for my father's top grade of tobacco.

So what it did, it would beat the system. They had friends. They just switched the name tags and stuff. They had friends and they got, they would get one of the white guys to sell their tobacco so they'd get the right amount of money from it and just pay him a part of that. Mhm.

[01:01:39] **Justice Madden:** And you mentioned, I mean, it sounds like your dad is a really strong and, strong and rooted individual, you know, not backing down.

The police officer knocked on the door, you know, also fighting to.

[01:01:54] **Willie Davis:** Oh, it wasn't a police officer come knock on the Ku Klux Klans knocking on the door. Wasn't the police officers. They were the Klans coming to get my father's son, my brother. That, that fire I was telling you about across the ditch, that was the Klansmen over there burning fires over there.

Well, I didn't make that clear, I'm sorry. That, that, that was the Klan. I didn't know until they made it clear when I got older. But those were the Klans or just a group of white guys who said, I'm going to get, get this guy who I think it is. That wasn't the police. Mhm.

[01:02:24] **Justice Madden:** Yeah. And even thank you for clarifying that.

[01:02:27] **Willie Davis:** Yeah, I'm sorry.

[01:02:28] **Justice Madden:** No, no, no, no. I appreciate that because, you know, I think that speaks more to like, um,

[01:02:33] **Willie Davis:** it makes more sense. Yeah.

[01:02:36] **Justice Madden:** The way that your father stood his ground. Um, and then even like all the different ways that he was very keen and aware of how to navigate that. Like, um, you mentioned about how he, um, they weren't trying to give him the money for the tobacco, but then he, uh, he bought it and got it.

That takes a lot of guts. How did, how, how did he get his money back?

[01:03:03] **Willie Davis:** When it got to good tobacco?

[01:03:04] **Justice Madden:** Yeah.

[01:03:04] **Willie Davis:** Well, I don't, we can't explain it because it doesn't make sense to us. My mom is. This is '68, '69. We're sitting on the front porch, my mom and I. My daddy walking up that same path angry. He comes in, he grabs, grabs a rifle.

He said, Louise, I'm gonna get my tobacco. I'm going to get my tobacco . He walks back and leaves. So my mom was crying. She sent my brother to go with my other brother visiting a friend, to go come to the farm and try to get my dad. We don't know why in the world happened. How he got up there but my dad walked, came to the farm.

The warehouse is about About a half a mile from here, went into the warehouse with that rifle, got his tobacco bag, and police didn't kill him, and we don't know how he did it. And he came, I got the rifle to this day. He came back home, he got his money, he sold the tobacco, he came back home, he didn't get arrested.

They didn't, somebody didn't, they didn't, somebody didn't kill him. I don't know why. But he walked, he walked through that crowd and got his tobacco bag with his rifle, and nobody bothered him. And no, I don't know. We can't explain that.

[01:04:15] **Justice Madden:** How do you see that kind of like that, that legacy of your father and that those stories of your father in your life or in like your family?

Um, you know, the folks that you have.

[01:04:29] **Willie Davis:** My, my father, he was, he's, my father was small. He was smaller than I am, but he was all hard and he, everything he did, he did it from his heart. And like I said, he, he raised us, he didn't teach us to hate, anything like that. He's a teacher. Taught us about making things better, making things, making things better for the next generation, do what you got to do, making things for the next generation to educate your kids and yourself and, and just, and just stay rooted, stay rooted to the family.

and be loyal. And that's I live in it. I live. My family, my family is everything to me. He told me thing that one thing I believe he told me, if as a man I wasn't willing to die for my family, I didn't deserve to live myself and I agree 100%. And to this day, in order get to my, my wife know that if somebody comes in the house on her and I'm there, they long as I'm alive,

she's alive. They got to kill me to get to her. That's how I am about my family. I walked through fire to get to where they at.

Huh? I guess I'm

[01:05:47] **Justice Madden:** You're gonna

make me cry.

[01:05:48] **Willie Davis:** Oh,

I better go.

[01:05:52] **Justice Madden:** So where is your garden now? And I'm looking for something new. How about snake to try to eat?

[01:06:02] **Willie Davis:** Know what? Uh, my garden is, um, if you go out on Main Street, we live about a mile straight up the road off Main Street. We live on Main Street. Um, just a mile up Main Street. It's behind my house. And when I was a police officer, my, my lieutenant has had a, had a, had a cookout.

Man, they cook all wild game. They cook rattlesnake. I consider it, but I can't find anybody willing. My son would try anything. If I can get somebody, it's probably going to be expensive. So I'm probably, if I get somebody other than my son, I'll eat it too. I'll try it too. If I get somebody other than my son to try it, I'll try it.

We talked about it. I'll try it. I won't say anything. I'm looking forward to some different stuff like snake. I never eaten a raccoon, stuff like that. I'm looking forward to it.

[01:06:52] **Justice Madden:** How about any elk?

[01:06:54] **Willie Davis:** I eaten, I eaten bison, never elk. But there's a place in, in um, Smithfield that sells elk. Me and my brother talked about it the other day.

[01:07:05] **Justice Madden:** I've been there.

[01:07:06] **Willie Davis:** Oh yeah, okay.

[01:07:07] **Justice Madden:** Um,

okay, well thank you

so much. I really appreciate everything that you shared. Um, it took me through a range of different emotions. But, I just, it's really such a blessing the way that how your, your family just created such a safe haven for you to also be able to show up for your, your family and for others.

And so I feel very blessed to be able to hear your story and I hope that I can pay it forward.

Do you have any closing remarks you'd like to?

[01:07:44] **Willie Davis:** No, I just include this. I wish that people learn what real love is again. We no longer know what love is. You can't, you can't love me on Snapchat. You can't love me on Facebook.

Touch me. I, I love my family. I love hearing from them, but please come by sometime and visit me. Let me touch you. My son and my oldest son, we, we like, we, we hug one another. We dab one another with our fists. And it's not

how a day go by that we don't talk. He'll say, he'll call just to say, hey Pop. You know, what's going on, pop?

He don't want anything. He don't need anything. But it's those things that mean way much more. Anything you can give me, I ask. When I ask one of my kids, I ask for any, I don't ask anything. I don't need a gift. I want my kids bring my, if you leave, come and bring my baby grand baby to me. You can leave, bring my, bring my babies to me.

Yeah. Just, just, I wish, wish the world would get back to loving one another. No, it, it's, I, I don't care what color of the skin I, I, I can't stand it. It hurts my heart sometimes. I'm a retired police officer, and I, when I first started police work, it was, it was big. Racism was big in the department when I worked there, but as I got through that, it was, it became much better.

I wish that we can get back to it and not be so, we can, we can be separate and disagree and still love one another. And, and we can agree that we're not going to agree on everything. That's just my take on life. You don't have to love me or dislike me. Just agree that we're going to disagree with some things and live.

And even though we disagree, if you broke down alongside the road, I'll come and get you. If you broke down alongside the road. I don't care whether you Republican, Democrat, Libertarian or whatever, Independent. If you break down alongside the road, I'll come and get you. That's it.

[01:09:43] **Justice Madden:** Are you

still about to cookout? You're still getting a plate?

[01:09:47] **Willie Davis:** You're still gonna eat. That's it. If you come to my house and leave hungry, it's on you. I'm gonna give you some food.