EPISODE 156

> *“**DW:** It was a case I had in Otago County. I'm sitting there with my client. In those days, it wasn't that many. I think I was number nine. I was the ninth black lawyer licensed by the state, so it wasn't a lot of black lawyers, and I still had my big afro and stuff, so you could tell I was black. I'm sitting there, and then the clerk calls out, “Judge, I think the nigger lawyer from Montgomery is here, and I think he wants to do his case.” I look around, because I can't believe somebody's calling me the nigger lawyer, right? I knew I didn't have a name. At least he called me the nigger lawyer. Was just barking my name. For the first three years, there were only three judges who would call me by name. Everybody else is, “Hey you,” or they'd bark out something, or I was the nigger lawyer from Montgomery.*
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> *I came back. I was upset the first time that happened to me, because I was blind sad about it, right? I thought that I would have some respect in a official court proceeding, and I come back and I tell Solomon Seay, “You're not going to bleed with Fred Posey. Just call me. He called me the nigger lawyer from Montgomery.” Solomon, Solomon started laughing and he said, “Don, I'm sorry. I forgot to brief you. I forgot to brief you on that.” Then he said, “I hope it didn't upset you too much, but you did kill the weakness involved, like we provided you.” I say, I did. “You did win, didn't you?” I said I did. “What you worried about? The other thing that counts is results. You don't care about them folks. You ain't trying to live with them, or banning me home and nothing like that.”*

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:01:47] LW: Hello friends, and welcome back to the Light Watkins Show, where I interview ordinary folks just like you and me, who've taken extraordinary leaps of faith in the direction of their path, their purpose, or what they've identified with as their mission. In doing so, they've been able to positively impact and inspire the lives of many other people who've either heard about their story, or who've witnessed them in action, or people who've directly benefited from their work.

I could not be more excited for this conversation, because this week on the show, I'm interviewing none other than my own father, Donald V. Watkins. This has been a long time coming, because I'm a huge fan of my dad and his work. Of course, I'm biased. But I'm just super excited to have this opportunity of introducing him to you, my podcast listeners. This is not a situation where I ran out of guests and I needed someone to fill the space quickly, so I called on a family member. No, my dad has legit been out in the world making it a better place in his own unique way, and he's been one of my personal heroes for a very long time.

Not to mention, he's got one of the craziest backstories that I've ever heard out of all of the interviews that I've conducted. In fact, we had so much ground to cover that we ended up making this interview a two-parter, which is the first time I've had to do that on this podcast. This is part one of two, and then we're going to release part two next week. Long story short, my dad grew up in the south during the Jim Crow era and the civil rights movement, and there was all this heavy racism and segregation and just crazy things happening all the time.

His pastor was a guy by the name of Martin Luther King, Jr. Not sure if you've heard of him before. My dad's mom, who's obviously my grandmother, was best friends with a woman named Rosa Parks. Not sure if you've ever heard of her before. His dad, my grandfather, served as the president of a school called Alabama State College, which later became Alabama State University.

My dad grew up in a very interesting environment with very unique challenges, and originally he thought he was going to be an architect, but that changed after he read a book on the Scottsboro Boys case while in college. The Scottsboro Boys were these nine young black teenagers who were falsely accused of raping two white women in Alabama back in 1931. That book, which was about the Scottsboro Boys court case and how their lawyer was able to save their lives literally three times, it inspired my dad to want to become a civil rights attorney.

Then he was selected to be one of a handful of black students to integrate the University of Alabama Law School in the early 1970s, which he described as the hardest three years of his life, even harder than being imprisoned for nearly three years, which is also a fascinating part of his recent story. From there, he began what became a stellar law practice, where his very first case, get this, was to get a pardon for the last living Scottsboro boy. From there, he learned how

to litigate under the harshest of conditions, including being openly referred to by several judges in court as that nigger lawyer from Montgomery, Alabama.

Anyway, he went on to win one of the biggest white-collar cases in history, and then he found himself on the other side with his own wire fraud case that he was being convicted of in 2019, a case that he lost and he ended up being sentenced to five years in federal prison. That's when he said he experienced his finest hour as an attorney, because he was able to use all of his legal prowess to help free four dozen inmates who either had bad legal representation, or no legal representation and somehow ended up in the system.

My dad also ended up being prominently featured in the 2020 Netflix documentary called *Trial by Media*. He was in episode four, which is called 'King Richard.' I recommend checking that out in between this part one and then part two. As you'll see, he's got a very colorful personality. He's got this distinct southern accent, and he's just an awesome storyteller. It was a joy to be able to have my dad on the podcast and to ask him these questions about his backstory. You'll hear me laughing during a lot of the interview, because my dad has always made me laugh so much with his stories, and I hope he has that same effect on you.

Without further ado, let us get to part one of my two-part interview with my father, attorney and businessman, Donald V. Watkins, here on The Light Show.

[INTERVIEW]]

[0:06:49] LW: Donald V. Watkins. Welcome to my podcast. It's been a long time coming.

[0:06:54] DW: It's been a long time coming, and it feels good to be on your show.

[0:06:58] LW: Oh, thank you. All right, so I have done some research on your formative years, and I've come across some facts that I did not know, so I'm really interested in diving in and unpacking how you became the person you are.

[0:07:19] DW: I thought you knew everything about my life?

[0:07:22] LW: No, not everything. I knew a lot. I knew some broad strokes, but I didn't know everything. I like to start off my conversations talking about childhood. You were born in Kansas, but you guys moved around a bit to Memphis and then eventually, to Montgomery, Alabama. You are the fifth of six children. This is back in the generation where people were having lots and lots of kids. Talk to me a little bit about your home life as a young person. What do you remember? What were some of your favorite activities as a child? What were some of the ideologies that your parents would echo to you and your siblings?

[0:07:59] DW: My earliest memories center around a lot of home activities. We had a house full of children. We had a two-parent home. Even though I was born in '48, we lived in Kansas, as you said. We moved first to Montgomery for a while, and then we moved to Memphis, and then we came back to Montgomery, because my father was an educator, and he had jobs in education, at colleges.

We were close, a lot of kids, and most of our activities were home-based, or backyard. The socialization was not just in-home, but it was with close neighbors. I mean, the neighborhood, you knew the neighbors. The neighbor could punish you or discipline you, just like your parent could punish you and discipline you. You didn't want that, because you getting spanked by the neighbor for foolishness and mischievous conduct, and then when you got home, it was reported to your parents and you get another spanking. You would hope that both parents were at home, so you'd only get one spanking at home, because sometimes, if the conduct was egregious enough, you get spanked by the mama.

My mom didn't work outside the home. She raised up. Then you get spanked by your dad when he got home, too. You literally, for the same offense, could get spanked by three different people, depending on how bad it was. If you were throwing a rock, and it went through somebody else's window, just throwing rocks at another kid, and that kid's mama saw you, you're going to get the spanking. Then she's going to call your mama, and you're going to get another spanking when you get home. Then my mama was going to tell my dad. When he gets off his job, working his behind off all day, he comes home and finds out that I was a fool at four or five-years-old, throwing rocks and stuff and one broke over and knowing first, you got to pay for the window, right?

Well, you don't have extra money. You got to pay for the window, and then you were a disrespect in the family name. We knew early on that we came from a family that valued its name, and you did not disrespect the family name, and you were supposed to be a role model in your neighborhood, in your community, in your church, and in your school. That's my family's situation, but it was a loving home. I mean, we could tell we were loved, and the validation, any validation and every validation we need came in our home first. We really didn't need somebody else's validation. We knew we were special. We knew we were loved and we knew we were being groomed to do something positive and decide. That was my childhood. Great childhood. Great childhood.

[0:10:44] LW: Was that because your father, or mother, or both were telling you all you were special, or how did you know you were groomed for some things?

[0:10:52] DW: No. It was more how they showed us that we were special. They made an effort to have breakfast, at the breakfast table every morning. I mean, that was a ritual. They made an effort to have dinner, at the dinner table every evening. The dinner table, the question was, what did you do today? It was an individual question. It wasn't just a group question, and then we went to school, what did you learn today that you did not know the day before? Everybody gets quiet, and they're waiting on your answer. You get accustomed there, and you know that that question is coming at dinner, so you know you've got to recite something that you learned today that you didn't do before.

That's just an expectation that was set that, hey, you're not just floating through life. You're being groomed to be a successful person and productive members of society. That was every day. It wasn't so much words. It was kind of. Then they would talk about what they did that day. I didn't really know what a college president did when I was young, but my father would talk to us about, “I met this student today. He came from this place.” Then he would describe where that county was. He would describe what the student was like. He was talking about him like he's another sibling of ours.

Occasionally, they would bring students home to sit at the dinner table with us. Some students had something and some had nothing. We all engaged that person, and we all made that

person feel special. Just love. It's how to create a loving environment, how to nurture it, and how to share it with others who are less fortunate than you.

[0:12:37] LW: Your formative years occurred during the civil rights movement. On Sundays, your pastor was a young man, who's becoming internationally known. Talk to a little bit about that.

[0:12:52] DW: Yeah, we got through Montgomery first, as I told you. We left Parsons, Kansas. My father got a job at Alabama State. It was called Alabama State College at the time. It's called Alabama State University now. We went to Dexter. We actually went to two churches, but we spent more time at Dexter. We became members of the Dexter. At the time, Dexter was led by a little young guy. His name was Martin Luther King, Jr. He wasn't famous, and he was my Sunday school teacher. He was my pastor. He was my BTU instructor. BTU stands for Baptist Training Union. We had to go to church.

We all gathered. That was not an option. Every Sunday, we all had to go to church, starting at Sunday school. In the summers, we included vacation Bible school, two weeks of that. King was my Sunday school teacher. We were there, because we were made to be there. It wasn't because we had some religious conversion and stuff.

We sat in the little chairs, and he sat in the little chairs with us. We didn't know the guy was famous, or controversial. All we knew is he was teaching us the beatitudes. We always ended the Sunday school with Jesus loves me. This I know, for the Bible tells me so. We'd form a little circle around the table, he'd hold out a hand, and then he'd go upstairs to get ready for his sermon. I never knew he was like beads, until after we had left Montgomery to go to Memphis, because my father became a president of junior college day at Memphis.

That's when the movement, that was in the 50s. That was about ’54 or 5. ’55, I think it was. That's when the movement really started. There was a bus boycott had going on and had been successful, and the sit-ins at the lunch counters and school desegregation was happening and massive resistance was happening. What I did learn from him, that I didn't really learn from my parents, so they didn't talk about, it was a different kind of love.

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See, the parental love was family blood. We look out for our own kind of a stuff. You need anything in this house, we make it happen amongst ourselves. If we can't make it happen amongst ourselves, we reach out to our neighbors. We reach out to our school. We reach out to our church. What I learned from him was that everybody is God's child and we should love everybody.

Now, after I left him with the Memphis, that wasn't making sense to me, because I could see I was older now, and I could see that we weren't treated right. We couldn't go to the movie theaters, except on colored day. Then when we went, we had to go upstairs to the metal leaning level. We couldn't go to the state fair, except on colored day. That was one day a week. I think it was on Thursday. I didn't understand that we were supposed to be loving everybody, because it was two, four, six, eight, we don't want to integrate, nigger go home, nigger go home. It was all in your faith.

I wasn't feeling the love program. In the back of my mind, I always remember the guys, you got to love everybody. Everybody's a human being. Some human beings don't know that they have the capacity to love humanity, because nobody's ever liberated that inside of them. I learned from that that you don't just judge people and write them off right away. You may dislike their conduct, but there's a constant effort to find and to liberate their soul and their spirit, so they can go on to reach the greatness that last within them. We don't write people off.

That was reinforced at home and home and home with all these students that we met throughout my childhood. The whole Dexter Avenue Baptist Church experience was a wonderful compliment to what I had already learned in the home. The only lesson that I really did not accept well, and I just couldn't process it. My little brain, as small as it was wouldn't process. I didn't get that part of the book of Matthew where Jesus said, somebody slaps you, turn the other cheek, so he can slap the other cheek. That part I didn't get. Now, I'm not going to go out and hit you, but I'm not turning the other cheek guy.

Before he got assassinated, I saw King when he was really over at Atlanta doing this thing from the Atlanta Fair point. I told him, I reminisced about my Sunday school days, but I told him the part that I really needed greater help with and greater instruction on was the turning the other cheek, because to this day, I have not been able to turn the other cheek. I'm not going to hit you

first, but if you hit me, I'm going to try to take your arm off. That's just my – It's not that I'm worried about you hitting me again, I don't want you to hit anybody. I know if I take that arm off, you can't.

I'm not bragging about that and I'm not proud of that, but I can't stand to watch people abuse other people. I just cannot. One that I get my credit, my parents credit by one thing. They taught us all that, we were little too, you never allow anybody to disrespect another human being in your presence for any reason. If nobody stands up for the right thing, or the protection of a innocent person, or a defenseless person, you better be the one that stands up, even if you've got to stand up by yourself. Now I got that from my parents. There's no exception to that rule. You better be the one to stand up If I find out you didn't stand up and that happened, then you're going to get a whooping when you got home. You're going to get that whooping.

[0:18:55] LW: Speaking of standing up, or rather sitting down in this case, Rosa Parks is one of your mother's best friends. She would come by the house?

[0:19:02] DW: All the time. All the time. We didn't know she was famous either, because in that day, the parents puts you out in the yard. Y'all go and say like, "Me and Ms. Parks we'll be in the kitchen talking." She had to speak to Ms. Parks and she would stop you and, "How you doing? What's going on in school?" And all that stuff. Everybody was connected. There was connectivity in the black community when I was growing up at a level that doesn't exist today.

We didn't know she was famous. We just knew that Ms. Parks and mama were good friends. They were good friends until Ms. Parks died. Whenever Ms. Parks was in Montgomery, even to the time she died, she stopped by the house, they'd sit in the same light around the kitchen table talking and tell me about the kids, what's going on kind of stuff. I was very fortunate to meet two of the icons and grow up in their presence and I knew King, Jr. and Rosa Parks.

It's so weird to watch people on TV, or the family programs talking about them, who never met them and talking about what King would have done and what Ms. Parks would have done, who never met them. It's a surreal feeling to know that they were a part of my childhood and adulthood, until both of them died.

[0:20:20] LW: It was interesting and you've been to Israel before. When you go to Israel and Jerusalem and you tour around the city, you can see a lot of the places that are referenced in the Bible. It turns out, it was a very small little community that they were basically just talking about their neighborhood. I feel like, the same thing is true in Montgomery, Alabama. Back in those days, a lot of the Fred Shuttlesworth and a lot of the people that Fred Gray, a lot of the people whose names, if you're a student of history and of that period of history, so small community, right? All of you guys knew each other.

[0:20:51] DW: Yes, very small. It's very small. I went on to law school and a lot of stuff. When I came on law school, if you wanted to be a private practice, if you wanted to do civil rights in the Montgomery area, Montgomery, Tuskegee, what we call the middle part of the state, Fred Gray was the only place that you could go get a job. That was Rosa Parks' lawyer, that was King's lawyer. Fred had so many landmark civil rights cases, I can't even count them all. He did the Tuskegee syphilis study case and he is the first guy to bring dollar, monetary value to the life of a black person in Alabama with the Tuskegee syphilis study.

[0:21:33] LW: Before we get to that though, we're going to talk about that later. We're going to talk about – I want to talk about one more incident from your teenage years. This is something you and I talked about in a private conversation. Something happened to you at a McDonald's. You were driving your mom's car.

[0:21:48] DW: Yeah. I went over to pick up a McDonald's on Fairview Avenue. I had my windows down. I was driving my mom's car. I was 16. When you first get your license, you're always trying to take your parents' car somewhere, so you can be seen driving a car, right? I went over to McDonald's. At that time, McDonald's was close to Lanier High School, where you went to school, but Lanier High School was all white, except for a couple of black students. That's where the Lanier high school students hung out after school. They'd be hanging out in the McDonald's parking lot.

I went in and I came back out with my thing and there was all this trash and food and tomatoes and lettuce and stuff that had been thrown into the car, because I left the windows down. Then white kids who were sitting outside in their cars, they want to know that I have a problem. "Nigger, do you got a problem? Is something wrong with you?" I had to clean out all of the

garbage in the driver's side and the passenger's side. It was hurtful. It was just bad. It was a bad situation.

[0:22:52] LW: Was that your first egregious run-in with a pack of racists in Montgomery?

[0:22:59] DW: That was the first direct –

[0:23:00] LW: When you're by yourself?

[0:23:01] DW: Yes, I was by myself. It was the first direct negative racial experience I had that was aimed at me personally. It was horrible. It was horrible.

[0:23:12] LW: How did that affect your mental state in that moment?

[0:23:16] DW: In that moment, I knew I had crossed a threshold. Now, I have to be careful with everything I do all of the time. I'm not going to get the little boy exception to racist. This is the real deal now. The real deal.

[0:23:30] LW: Okay, so you went to laboratory high school, which is located –

[0:23:33] DW: I did.

[0:23:34] LW: Was it still ASU then? I mean, is it ASC then, or is it ASU at that point?

[0:23:37] DW: It was ASC. It was on the campus of Alabama State College. Yes.

[0:23:41] LW: Okay. Now you mentioned in one of the articles as you wrote about this, that your teachers prepared you to be resilient to racism, to go around it, above it, below it, however you could get through it.

[0:23:52] DW: All teachers, if I could characterize Alabama State College laboratory high school, number one, it was small. There was only one class for each grade. It was about 30 people in the class. You had college teachers coming to do their educational preparation on us,

but you also had the permanent teachers, too, that they were training under. The focus there was on advancing you educationally. There was no coddling you, or babysitting you. It was all preparation. It's almost a nice academic boot camp.

To this day, I look back on it, we had the best teachers any kid could ever hope to have. We went all black, little tiny school, but those people, I don't know if they traveled anywhere, but those people were so great at motivation, number one, preparation, number two, and they made you think that there was nothing you could not do. You felt like you would walk through a wall if you had to. The constant thing is you will be successful.

Now you're going to encounter these obstacles. What you do, just like you said, you either go around it, you go under it, you go over it, but you are getting to the other side. They tell us, nobody's going to ever go be opening the door for you, just so you can just walk through it, but you will get to the other side. There's no doubt in your mind you're going to do this. It's not a matter of copying off with somebody else's paper. You got to know it yourself. You got to know it yourself.

Actually, we were in the ninth grade, or eighth grade, I was taking Latin, I was taking French, I was taking Spanish. I was wondering, "Why the hell am I taking these? I ain't never going to be these places. I'll be lucky if I can make it from Montgomery to Birmingham, right?" That's a 100-miles to the football class of game in Birmingham. We took it, I learned all that stuff. You lose foreign languages if you don't use them. There were no Hispanics of any significance in numbers in Montgomery, so I lost Spanish, but I still retain the ability to read the Latin, Spanish, the French, I can read it, but I'm struggling to speak it. Even though I work in countries now, where all of those languages are used fluently routinely.

Yeah, it was a great school. It was great preparation. I don't know how they did it. Everybody graduated. Everybody went to college. For those of community college, or four-year college, you didn't even think about you not going to college. The only question is where are you going? What kind of school do you want? You're going in state, you're going out of state, you're going to private school, you went to Morehouse, Howard, Alabama State, where are you going? There was a beautiful experience looking back on it.

The school closed in ’68. It was a victim of desegregation. It was a wonderful thing. To this day, I know of no school like it anywhere in the United States. Its impact on America has been phenomenal. The people that came out of that school have invented so many things that we just take advantage of in our ordinary lives. We don't even think about it. Just, oh, yeah, we got this. Yeah, we got algorithms now for transporting electronic digital stuff around the world. We don't even think about medicine, business, inventions. There's so many inventions, I can’t name them all, doctors, everything. It was a beautiful experience. The one thing I really hate about young people today is they'll never have that experience that I have. Very blessed. They have had that growing up and coming through that.

[0:27:45] LW: Your father was able to take ASC to accreditation in record time. Is that a process that he spoke about, or did you understand what he was trying to do? How did he do that while he was raising a family and fighting racism?

[0:28:02] DW: He got the presidency of Alabama State in 1962. It was unaccredited. Had been unaccredited for a long time.

[0:28:08] LW: What does that mean exactly for people listening?

[0:28:11] DW: It's a status of academic preparation that is recognized by professional educational associations. It means that your diploma has value to it. If you don't have accreditation, all that means is you attended a college for four years, or six years, or whatever the time period you’re there. You may have a degree, but the degree is not deemed to be worth much, but it was an accredited institution, because you don't have a black and white presence that you just got in the accreditation association and you either meet those standards, or you don't.

For example, in Alabama, the level six is the highest level of accreditation you can get. Well, there are only four schools at that in Alabama. That's University of Alabama, Auburn University, Alabama State University, Alabama Ann Emmett University. Out of the 32, only four are at level six. There's the one standard. All of them have PhD program. All of them have the highest level of goal setting and standard setting. That's why it's important. Anyway, Alabama State College was unaccredited in 1966.

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The good thing about it, my father had accredited, they founded and accredited a little college, it was a junior college called Owen Junior College in Memphis. That's why we went to Memphis. The folks that had that college big name would come up there, take it over, be president, get it accredited. After he got it accredited, he came back to Alabama State, because he was a good friend and his mentor was at Alabama State, H. Councill Trenholm. Great guy. Great guy. He probably is the greatest president that ever served at Alabama State University, H. Council Trenholm. It's a miracle at what he was able to do.

We have so few resources for so many people in the state of Alabama at the worst time you could be a college president. We all respected him and we all admired him. Anyway, my old man came back to help him, because he's aging, he was sick, and he was being disrespected by the white political establishment that was cracking down on the civil rights movement. When my father got the presidency, my father succeeded him. There was an interim guy, but my father succeeded Dr. Trenholm.

It does no good to have an education if it ain't coming from an accredited school. He knew right away, we got to – it's a four-year process. The quickest you can do there is four years. He told us all of us in the house got to pull together and we got to make this happen. We say, well, I think we're the students, how are we going to make it happen? He said, we can't have distractions. In other words, you guys got to be on your best behavior. We can't have in-house distractions. We got to all be focused on making this happen. Everything you do, your actions have consequences. You can't just be following a crowd somewhere. If anything, you got to lead a crowd and tell them what we're working on. You got to explain why this is important to everybody. Not just the students, the school, but the community as a whole. Because if we can get accredited, then the next move is we can go from a college to a university. Then the next move is we can get a graduate degree granting program. Hopefully, we can get PhD programs.

It was great on going to a blackboard and diagram, everything out. This is what we got to do. This is where we are right now and this is how we got to get there. Even when we didn't want to even – we were little boards, we were on – when you're getting your teenage years, you ain't interested in that stuff. But you did know, we live in a fish bowl. Don't get in trouble. If you get in trouble, that makes daddy's job hard. He's got to hit this target in four years like he did at

Memphis. We all pitched in in our own way, giving our limited ability to do it. That's where I learned goal setting from. You stake out a goal and you start marching, man. You're the strategist, start marching. You don't accept failure.

Failure means, to us means, well, I didn't make as much progress today as I wanted to, but I made some progress. That's how we process what most people will take as failure. Tomorrow is not promising nobody, but you do the best you can.

[0:32:37] LW: You went on to study at Southern Illinois University. I believe you were a fan of Buckminster Fuller and you wanted to become an architect.

[0:32:45] DW: I went on to be an architect. Yeah.

[0:32:47] LW: Was it part of that about getting out of the south, or did that not matter, because –

[0:32:51] DW: Actually, I took in high school, they had an industrial arts department at Alabama State College, so I took an industrial arts classes, college classes for four years. They were building houses, laying out the systems, plumbing, electrical, mechanical. I got into that. I really got into it. When I graduated, I wanted to be a residential architect. Then the most advanced guy, well-known guy was Buckminster Fuller. He was located at Southern Illinois University. I said, I need to get my butt up to Southern Illinois University.

Some of it was getting out of the south, but it just happened that's where he was, and that's why I got to Southern Illinois University. I wanted to be an architect. I couldn't wait to get there. I would say, getting out of the south, maybe an ancillary benefit, but I wanted to go where he was. I wanted to be an architect.

[0:33:44] LW: You didn't want to go to ASC.

[0:33:46] DW: They didn't have an architecture program. SAU did. Then Levi was up at Tennessee State. He was familiar with – Levi is my brother. He was familiar with Southern Illinois University. He told me it was a great place. You ought to go check it out. I went up there with my mama during the spring. I applied for it, got accepted. Went up there with my mama

during the spring. Then I was there, I was all in. Once I saw it, I was all in, man. I couldn't wait to get there in September. I couldn't wait to get there. It was weird, because it was the first time I stepped with white students. Everywhere. They were everywhere. It was 25,000 of them everywhere.

[0:34:23] LW: Were they welcoming for you? Or they're still –

[0:34:26] DW: Yeah, nobody cared. I mean, it was like, you're just another student. It was nobody. None of that two, four, six, eight, we don't want to integrate stuff. It was cool. It was just, you speak to somebody, they speak back to you and stuff. You sit by where you want to in the dining hall.

[0:34:41] LW: Oh, that was brand new for you.

[0:34:43] DW: It was brand new. I was 18-years-old. That was the first time I got that experience, man. The only thing that worried me was, can I compete against these guys? Because the first 18 years of my life was all confined to black. A whole black environment. But within my school part of the black environment, I was with the cream of the crop of the black students, man. If I could be outstanding, well, this was reinforced in the home. When a Watkins kid walks into a classroom, the only question is, who's coming in second? The first place is already claimed. That was the standard we were raised with. Nobody remembers the name of the second place, third place, fourth place kid. All teachers remember the name of the first place kid. That was the standard. That's why we had to do homework.

They went over our homework. My mama she was an educator by profession. They went over everybody's homework. You didn't come home telling, "We got no homework in school." If you did that, they knew you were lying, right? Oh, you better say I did it at school or something. No, they were on that, man. They were on that. The standard was when you walk in the classroom, first place is taken, period. No matter where you are.

When I get to Southern Illinois, I'm looking at all these white kids, because I would be the only black kid. Maybe another one would show up in a big class. Then I'm wondering, can I meet the

standard here? Because I got to blow out everybody in the room. After the first quarter, we were on the quarter, I knew, yeah, I can do this here, too. Yeah, that's no problem, no problem.

[0:36:21] LW: You shifted from residential architecture to wanting to go to Howard University law school. What happened there? Why did you change your mind?

[0:36:28] DW: Well, what happened, after my first year, I was in the library at SAU. A book had come out about the Scottsboro Boys case. Then I remember when we were young, me, Levi, James, we were young boys in Montgomery, our parents set us down and they talked to us about two cases. One was Emmett Till and how he was basically tortured and killed. The other was the Scottsboro Boys case, the non-black teenagers who were accused of raping two white girls. They explained both of those cases stuff. They showed us the Emmett Till's pictures and stuff.

I remembered the case, but I didn't know all of the details about the case. I only knew the synopsis that my parents would give us. I read this book. Back in the day, they just put the book cover out there on the bulletin board. You knew the new books for here. I read that book in one night, because I knew what it was about. Then I said, "Damn." It talked about the lawyer from – I can't remember his name now. I said, I want to be like him, because he saved them at the last minute from death three times. I thought that was – Leibowitz. That's his name. Sam Leibowitz.

I said, I want to do stuff like that. I wondered them being in civil rights work left because I have to have to finish up here. That would be 1970. I'd have to go to three years of it. Three years a long time. By the time I get through, if I abandon this architecture, by the time I get through it, there may not be no civil rights stuff left. But I like this stuff. I like what he did, man. He faced the death threats. He did all of the stuffy, but he saved nine kids from death three times. I changed my major while I was at South. I said, okay, I want to leave the architecture stuff. I'm going to law school.

[0:38:23] LW: Who were you bouncing this off of? Were you to call your dad and tell him, or you –

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[0:38:27] DW: In 1967, I met your mama, DeAndre Johnson, right? We fell in love. We caught it for a long time. Then we said, we're going to married in 1968. We're just best buds, right? I bounced it off of her. I said, "Look, I don't think I want to be no architect no more. I think I want to be a lawyer. I read this book. I think this is some cool stuff. I think I can do this stuff." She was supportive. I changed my major and graduated. Then I said, I'm tired of – I want to be in DC. All of the folks, the hip stuff was in DC. Blacks were getting jobs then. They could get jobs in government. Real jobs. Not janitorial jobs.

We had actually moved to Washington. I was set up to go to Howard University, was looking forward to it, hanging out down there in Georgetown area, being cool, DuPont Circle, being a little hippie and stuff, wearing my little hippie clothes, my big afro. We were happy. Then I got this call from my father to come home. I thought something was wrong. I get home. He flew me down. That's the first time I've been on an airplane. He flew me down there from Washington to Montgomery. I get home and there was this guy there with him. That time we were in the new president's mansion. I didn't know the guy. His name was Dr. Clyde Lee. He was president of Miles College.

[0:40:00] LW: I thought that was Dr. Pitts, or Dr. Williams.

[0:40:02] DW: Yeah, that's right. Lucius Pitts. Clyde came after him. That's correct. He was president of Miles. He and my old man were good friends, but I didn't know this that they were good friends.

[0:40:13] LW: He had got Miles accredited in record time.

[0:40:15] DW: Yeah. He got Miles accredited. That's how they developed their friendship. Yeah. They told me they sent for me, because Dr. Pitts had been working on the desegregation of the University of Alabama's professional school, the law school. He had picked three students the year before me. He had a student there named George Jones who wanted to go, but he didn't want him to be alone. They wanted me to switch from Howard to the University of Alabama. He had arranged for a scholarship with the Herbert Lehman Fund up in New York. That's for students who were from Alabama, who would come back to the state, desegregate the law school, and then work in civil rights in the state, well, I think 10 years ago of your time.

I say, “Well, are there going to be any civil rights work left?” Both of them laughed. Both of them laughed at how stupid I was. That was funny. It was funny. Both of them laughed at how stupid I was. Dr. Pitts laid it out. He just laid it out, why it's important. He had handpicked these folks, because you cannot be able to complete it. You've got to be mentally tough. He knew how my father had raised us. George Jones was the SGA president over there. That Ron Jackson was mentally tough. Michael, figures came from Stillman. He's the SGA president. All these guys were handpicked for this mission. It's almost like a Navy SEAL mission, right? He said, “It's going to be hell. They're going to treat you like shit, but I think you guys can do this.”

I said, “Okay. My old man told me it was important that we do this.” My old man had never asked me to do nothing professionally, or educational-wise, but I could tell that this is something they wanted done. I left Howard. I went back up there, me and DeAndre packed up our stuff. I don't know how I got into Alabama. I had to grade some stuff.

[0:42:19] LW: Were you scared when you got that, the probability?

[0:42:22] DW: I get out of the car to go to the – there was Fair Hall. Fair hall, the back of Fair Hall faces the entrance to auditorium. That's what George Wallace did in the door. The block, Vivian Malone and Jane’s hood. I mean, only thing separating the two is the parking lot, where the students parked their car. I go in there and I'm all – I'm used to Southern Illinois that where you speak to everybody and white folks speak to you and all that stuff, ain't nobody speaking to me.

I see the black guys, they look like they have been in prison, the three black guys. When you look at their pictures from when you look at their pictures, I just saw this couple of months ago. You could see the sadness, the agony in each one of them's faces and eyes. They had survived their first year. Me and George was there. I didn't meet George right away, because he came from Birmingham and I came from Montgomery. They divided us up. George was in section one, because 150 students came. I was in section two, because my name is Watkins. George Jones, section one, Watkins in section two.

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I got money now. I got scholarship money, so I'm going to go buy the books, because you can look and see what books – go out in the bulletin board and see what classes you're saying to in one of the books. I go in there, I got all these brand-new books, because they got money and stuff. Then this guy taps me on the shoulder. I look around and he's the janitor, he's the custodian, Mr. Raymond Rhodes. That's how I met him. He said, “May I speak to you for a moment?” I was taught to be respectful to everybody. Yeah, come on out the land. I think this must be important. He's tapping me on the shoulder, right? I didn't know if I had dropped some garbage, or something back there. I didn't know what.

Then that's when he talked to me. “Candidly son, you know around here, they study in groups.” He's looking around, make sure nobody's listening to our conversation. “I don't think anybody is going to be studying with you. If I was you, I'd put all those new books back and go out there to the bulletin board and the same classes with the same instructions for the year before you, write down the names of the eight students in each one of those classes. Then come back in here, look for their used books, because they were on the land stuff and they'll write in the margin.” He said, “Get their books, and that's your study group.”

He was so right on it. I did exactly what he said. That was our coach for the whole three years out there. That was our mentor, our coach, our friend. That's the guy that kept us from going crazy, from just giving up.

[0:45:02] LW: Talk about him, who he was, why he was there.

[0:45:06] DW: We didn't know. We didn't know that that guy, Mr. Rhodes, had gone to Stillman College, had graduated. His mother was a custodian. They're out of Tuscaloosa. His mother was a custodian at the University of Alabama. He used to help out in the summer. That was his little thing. When he graduated from Stillman, I think it was back in the 40s and 50s. 50s, I think, he couldn't get a job, because they were not hiring teachers for the colored school. He had a family himself and he had to work, and so his mama got him on as a janitor. He was the janitor when I got there in Fair Hall and he was the only black adult, other than the students, the five of us in that building.

He was smart as hell. He made it his mission to make sure that we got through all of the rigors, all of the hatred, all of the everything. Looking back on it, he was a godsend. But he wasn't a godsend. I didn't realize this until later on, that Dr. Pitts had met with him. Dr. Pitts knew who he was and Dr. Pitts got him to where he would be our private mentor within that building, but he had to do it discreetly. I mean, he even teach me how to use the law library, how to jeopardize cases. The guy was brilliant. He was brilliant.

His little office was in a mop closet, where you hang the mop and the buckets and stuff. He had a chair and a lamp and a little tiny deck. Say, on the days you couldn't take it anymore. I mean, you got tired of people, nigger this, nigger that. “Oh, here comes the nigger, let’s move,” kind of stuff. Because nobody sat next to me for three years. You sat in a bench and 75 students in my section, 75 over there with George, nobody sat next to me for three years. I had extra room for my books, I guess. That was one day I really couldn't take it anymore. I thought, I had made a huge mistake. I left Howard University, where I would have been a rock star and I'm down here, you can just – you hear the word nigger so much it just – you numb to it. You're just numb to it.

Nobody speaks to you unless you say something to them. Then it's only the smallest level of conversation. Anyway, I went into his office one day. This is the best advice I ever got from him. I was just pouring my heart out, how hard it was. I don't know if I can take this no more. I don't even had that conversation with him and my old man. He didn't say anything. He just let me just pour on, pour on. I had to sit on the floor. Ain't no another chair. Sitting in the chair and venting. Looking back on it, I was venting, right? I was cursing. I was cursing my fellow students.

Then when I finished, he said, “If you’re through feeling sorry for yourself, let me tell you what you need to do.” He said, “Look, number one, you are going to graduate. When you do graduate, none of them folks been doing good to you are going to be on the same side as you all, okay?” What I would do instead of feeling sorry for myself, I'd go get a seating chart and put the same names in it the way the professor has for each grade. He said, you need to profile each one of those students and each one of those subjects, so you'll know who's good and writing who's good at speaking, who has mastered the content, then you need to look at that person and figure out, how am I going to beat this guy? Just figure out how am I going to beat him. Where is he weak? Where can I take advantage of?

I did that. That was second semester, the first year and the next two years, I saw and did a profile my fellow students and stuff. I didn't feel sorry for myself no more. I was busy profiling. That's what I did. They're not going to know you. He's coming, they're not going to know you. They're not going to help you, but you'll know each one of them and everything about them. In sports, it will be scouting the guy that's at the position you got to cover. You'll know everything. I think looking back on it, he got all of us through. All of us. He was good. The guy was good.

[0:49:27] LW: Talk about the last conversation you had with him working on.

[0:49:29] DW: Last conversation. Last conversation was actually on the front steps of the thing I had passed all my – taking my exams. I knew I had passed them. I knew I was blowing people out. He came out to congratulate. Then he shook my hand and then he didn't let it go. He was shaking it. You could feel the calluses. He's a tall guy, too. He was telling me, he was there when Autherine Lucy tried to desegregate the place in ’57, I believe it was. 1957. They wrapped it and they had to take her out, off the campus and school expelled her and blamed the ride to know her. He was there when Wallace stood in the door in 1963. He watched it from the back of Fair Hall and all of the stuff.

He said that he never thought that God would let him see the day when we would come and graduate. Then he said, “I just have one thing I want to ask you.” He still wouldn't let my hand go. He's still shaking it. Then he starts crying and he said, “Please, do not forget about us.” I told him, “I'm not going to forget about you.” I knew the us that he was talking about was all the janitors, the ditch diggers, the cafeteria workers, the laundry folks, the yard people, all of the – what we would call invisible people that nobody gave a damn about on that thing. I knew who he was talking.

He wouldn't ask for anything for himself. Then I realized that, yeah. Because he thought I was going to go take some fancy job, right? I would say, “No, I'm not going to forget about you.” I knew I was going to work for Fred Gray. I knew I was going to work for Fred Gray. I need to make a little money at the University of Alabama for about a year, but I knew I was going for Fred Gray. Fred Gray knew it, too, because he came to personally recruit me. He came with Barbara Joy, who was a big-time black congresswoman out of Texas, is a big civil rights person. I knew I was going to join Fred Gray. I didn't need to pay off some student debt and all that stuff.

I went on and joined Fred Gray and it was the next godsend in my life. Because I was worried about, would there be enough civil rights work left? My first case out the gate, first case out the gate was the Scottsboro Boys case. The guys who got arrested in 1931, there was one still living. I couldn't believe it. Because I had read about them in law school. One was still living and that one, Clarence Norris was trying to get a pardon from the state of Alabama. That was my first case. The next case I had was working with Fred Gray on the Tuskegee syphilis study. That's where the United States government and state and local governments duped about 600 black men and making counting to believe it, that they were being treated for syphilis. When in fact, the penicillin was being withheld from them and they tracked them to their deaths, those who died over a 40-year period. It only stopped, because a news reporter broke the story and then Fred Gray did a class action on behalf of those folks.

I, right off the gate, I got my cream of the crop, to die for cases, right? Then my career just took off from that. It just took off from that. Yeah, that was plenty of civil rights work. Plenty of it was there.

[0:53:07] LW: At that time, Attorney Gray was very distinguished and seasoned as an attorney in the civil rights movement. What did you learn from him as a new, fresh off the boat attorney that ended up serving you well later in your career?

[0:53:23] DW: That’s a great question. I learned three things, three major things. Not just from Fred, but from his law partner, Solomon Seay, who did the bulk of the civil rights stuff at Montgomery, because I was based out of their Montgomery office. Fred was in Tuskegee. Charles Lanefoot, that was the third party. There was one more lawyer. There was one more lawyer that was instrumental in my development. His name is J.L. Chestnut. He was based in Selma, Alabama, where Bloody Sunday occurred.

What they taught me, number one, first thing he taught me, you cannot represent black people if you don't have courage. Because we are the ones who are seeking economic power, political power, educational equity and employment, fair employment, fair administration and justice. We're the outcasts trying to come into the halls of government. If you don't have courage, you don't need to be in this line of business. That's number one.

Number two, preparation is the key to everything. You prepare. That's why I learned that, number one, ain't nobody's studying our stuff. You got to go on there to the gladiator pit and you got to take down the gladiator on the other side, period. If that ain't your mindset, this ain't the work for you, right? Preparation is the key to taking down the other gladiator in the gladiator pit. They have this carnal rule for every one day of trial, you have to do seven days of preparation, so you knew every aspect of that case on that day. You weren't fumbling around looking for papers. You weren't trying to figure out what you were going to have for witness. You were down to, the third big thing I learned from them, flawless execution. Flawless execution.

Courage, preparation, flawless execution equals victory. We were using law for social and economic and political engineering. It was a tool. It wasn't just because we were bored and needed something to do. I was an intern doing wheels and trust and stuff for individuals, I was interested in class action generally. That's what I learned from those guys. Those were remarkable men. They were incredible. They'd actually taught you. I don't know if anybody's doing that today, but these guys grooming, now they didn't hold your hand. You went to the courtroom by yourself, but you were prepared.

[0:55:54] LW: You were also openly called the nigger lawyer from Montgomery in those early days.

[0:55:59] DW: I was. I was. I was.

[0:56:01] LW: Talk a little about that. Also, I want to hear about any rookie mistakes you made since you were in there by yourself, that you learned from later.

[0:56:08] DW: I did. Okay. The guys prepared us. We had to go by ourselves. I went to Otago County. It was a case I had in Otago County. I'm sitting there with my client. In those days, it wasn't that many. I think I was number nine. I was the main black lawyer licensed by the state. It wasn't a lot of black lawyers. I still had my big afro and stuff, so you could tell I was black. I'm sitting there and then the clerk calls out, "Judge, I think the nigger lawyer from Montgomery's here and I think he wants to do his case." I look around because I can't believe somebody's

calling me the nigger lawyer, right? I knew I didn't have a name. At least he called me the nigger lawyer. Was just barked my name.

For the first three years, there were only three judges who would call me by name in the courtroom. One was Sam Pona in Birmingham, federal judge in Birmingham. The other was Frank Johnson in Montgomery. The third one was Virgil Pittman in Mobile. They would call me Mr. Watkins. Everybody else is, “Hey, you, or they'd bark out some, well, I was the nigger lawyer from Montgomery.”

I came back. I was upset the first time that happened to me, because I was blindsided by that, right? I thought that I would have some respect in official court proceedings. I come back and I tell Solomon Seay, “You're not going to believe what Fred Posey just call me. He called me the nigger lawyer from Montgomery.” Solomon Seay is laughing and he said, “Don, I'm sorry. I forgot to brief you. I forgot to brief you on that.” He said, “I hope it didn't upset you too much, but you did kill the weaknesses off like we provided you, didn’t you?” I said, I did. “You did win, didn't you?” I said, I did. “What you worried about? The only thing that counts is results. You don't care about them folks. You ain't trying to live with them, or dying in their home and nothing like that.”

They had a great attitude about all of it. Yes, that went on. Then finally, I was in Dauphin, Alabama. This judge, his name is Jerry White. He called the name of my case. Then he said, “Mr. Watkins, are you here?” He was the first state court judge that was professional with me. That was about three years after I got out of law school. I almost died. I couldn't believe it. That's why I never forget the names of these judges. Virgil Pittman's son is a great lawyer in Birmingham. When I met him, I told him, “I want you to know how I know your family.” I said, “I don't think you know how great a man your dad is, but this is how I met him. This is why he's great. Because he was giving respect to me when nobody else would, except for two people in the States.” I said, “I hope he's doing okay. Will you tell him that I never forgot that? I never forgot that he called me Mr. Watkins.” The guy was proud. The guy was proud, too.

[0:59:19] LW: Talk about a day in the life as a civil rights attorney in Montgomery, Alabama in the 1970s. Are people lining up to give grievances about things? Or, how does it work? How do you make money? Is it profitable to be a civil rights attorney?

[0:59:33] DW: It was not profitable. It was not profitable. There was never a shortage of work. I got the cream of the crop of a case, because all of my cases were what you call newsworthy. They were even on the national news, or statewide news. I was getting the cream of the crop. Then as I perfected my litigation skills, because all I did was mitigate it. I'm there to kill you. I'm not there to negotiate nothing with you. I'm there to go into the gladiator pit and kill you. That's what I'm there. Then I know I ain't got to deal with you no more. I mean, I'd get ready for the next one.

My clients would get relieved. That's what I love, the fact that I could give people who was suffering for years relief. Real time relief. All I got to do is take this guy out. Those people, those clients had courage doing that, because to be a civil rights litigate, I mean, the client, yeah, they have big balls, big balls. Because you knew that you would be resented. I had a great group of clients. I had many women of honor and there was no shortage of work. I didn't make a lot of money.

I made enough to raise the family. Eventually, I got into the types of cases that did have money. I enjoyed my civil rights chapter. I had a great time. I mean, desegregated most of the public school systems, all of 32 of the public colleges, all of the junior colleges, everything. I mean, it's everything. I could rap for mobile, all the way to Huntsville. I would be passing through counties. I had desegregated their school system. I would remember who was the lead plaintiff there. I had to meet him, how I had to meet him in somebody's home. We couldn't meet in public places. I couldn't stay in the hotel. I had to stay in somebody's home, just for safety reasons. It was a great experience. I met a lot of great people, a lot of great people.

[1:01:32] LW: What inspired you to run for city council and what did you learn from that experience that was new to you, that you did not know as an attorney?

[1:01:41] DW: I thought that I could take my legal skill and that I could impact the quality of life in real time in the delivery of the seven basic city services. I said, let me go get on the city council. I ran and I got elected with an overwhelming vote. I get seven votes included, or incumbent. I knew I could impact garbage services, street paving and curbs and gutter, parks and recreation, library services, police services, fire services, I could do that in real-time. All I got

to do is raise pay along the city council and articulate the needs of my district members. I had 18,000 people. I had 5,000 projects. It was a good experience, too. Between my legal career and my city council stuff was good.

Let me give you the standards, just a concrete example of how you can impact stuff. If you're not scared, when you got 5,000 projects in your district, that means people are living there on public assistance, right? They're getting discounted rent, they're getting food stamps, etc. If the power goes off the first week in the month, we knew that power company doesn't come into those areas until last. They go take out the white folks first. The rich white folks first, regular white folks next, upper class black people next and then poor black people last. That's the hierarchy in which they go turn power back on.

Well, the poor ones are the ones that buy food on food stamps. They can't wait two or three days, the food will be spoiled and they can't get any more food and they got little children and babies and all that stuff. My number was listed, unlike public officials today, my phone number was listed. There was no sale number. It was just listed. You call, either one of y'all would go answer, DeAndre was going to answer. Somebody's going to answer, they're going to write down the name and number. I got all calls whenever the power went out, right? Then the first, well, we going to get to it. You call all up there, we’re going to get to you. Call somebody in touch and we going to get to it.

Then I just said, “Hell, no. I'm going to call the president of the public service commission. He lives in Montgomery. I got his number. I'm going to call him and I'm going to wake him up at 2 in the morning.” I did that with Jim Folsom, when he was president of the public service commission. I woke him up, I said, “Jim, my people are calling me. The power trucks are not over there with generators or nothing. They're out there in the white neighborhood. I need you to call the CEO of Alabama Power Company and tell them to get the trucks over there in the housing project and get them there now.” “Why are you calling me at 2 in the morning?” I say, “My people are calling me at 2 in the morning. If the trucks don't get over there, the food will be bad by the time the sun comes up. The food will be bad. I know if you call them and tell them to bring the trucks over there, they'll do it. If I call them, they're not going to take the call.”

“This is not what I mean.” “Well, you regulate utilities, don't you?” “Yeah.” “You regulate the power company, don't you?” “Yeah.” “Well, this is a service and policy issue. You need to call them and I'm going to call you every hour until you call them.” He did it. They sent the truck. From that day forward, I don't know about other folks in the area. I know when my folks power went out, they come there first. You come there first. I'm going to be calling them. I don't even know if people do that anymore.

I knew I could impact the quality of life. All you got to do is be persistent, have any courage, and representation your folks without apology. I don't care. Then I knew that we don't have a lot of experience with government, local government, or any government, because we couldn't vote, right? When I was on the council, a lot of people were not literate enough and municipal fast to be able to say what they really were asking, or seeking. All I needed you to do — and the other council members, some of them, the white ones would be laughing at them and snickering at them when they didn't have the eloquence of diction that they thought folks should have. All I needed my constituents to do was to come forward.

You don't have to be on the, what do you call that? The agenda. You just come there. I'm not going to let them be in the jury if there's somebody who has something they want to say to the council. I don't care if you signed up or ain't signed up. All you got to do is raise your hand. If you can walk up there and maybe you can't talk, maybe you used the word ‘determinate’ to say for the word ‘terminate’, because you're not educated. If I can understand the gist of what you're saying, then I'm going to take it over. You don't have to speak no more.

Then I'm going to ram roll. I'm going to ram roll it through, because I'm going to make sure that you get the seven basic city services. I'm not going to apologize, because you're fantastic. If you don't have indoor plumbing in your home and you’re six blocks from the state capital in Montgomery, I'm going to make sure to find the money to put indoor plumbing in your home. If your street is not paved and you're inside the city's limits and you just got dirt rolls and gravel and the white folks got paving, you're going to have the same paving they get. If your bitches don't have concrete land and the white folks do, you're going to have that. You're not going to put up these little portable trailers for school classrooms, not in my district, when the construction of the white schools is brand-new, air-conditioned and got carpeted. No. We’re going to have exactly what they have. I'm going to raise hell until we have it. I don't look for

reasons to excuse why we don't have what everybody else have. That's why I got there. I knew I could make that case all day long.

[1:07:19] LW: What did you discover about police misconduct in Montgomery when you were a part of the city council?

[1:07:24] DW: It was out of control. It was out of control. It's what it is in many places in America today. It was out of control. What I knew was I had a badge, I had an ID, official city ID and under our city council statute, I could convene a committee of one and investigate anything I wanted that involved any city agency. I did that every time there was a police shooting and I wrote a report. I spread it across the minute. That curved police shooting in Montgomery while the four years I was there, it went from a lot of shootings to none. Everybody knew that's what I was going to do.

I go down to the police department, flip my badge and say, “I need to talk to this person, this person, this person.” I'm investigating as a committee of one. I just declared, I'm a committee of one. I'm investigating. Bring me the personnel files, bring me everything. I need to see everything. Now, I don't need to stop the city attorney, but I wrote reports. I don't think there's been a city council person in America who has written a report on police misconduct since I left the council in 1983.

By the way, the Republican mayor at the time came up to me at the last council meeting, told me this was the greatest day in the city of history, city of Montgomery’s history, since the Yankee troops went home in 1870, by departure from the council.

[1:08:46] LW: Why did you decide not to run again?

[1:08:48] DW: Because the night I got elected, Richard Arrington got elected as the first black mayor of Birmingham. I wanted to take my expertise to Birmingham to help him, because he was catching pure ale. He was in a shotgun marriage with the white community and particularly, the business community. They didn't want him and he had to tolerate them. It was a bad situation, man. I thought based on my legal skills, my political background, that I could be a service to him. I wanted to work with him. I knew him.

[1:09:23] LW: He was connected with Pitts as well.

[1:09:25] DW: He was connected with Pitts as well. He knew my dad. They were connected. My dad actually got me the interview with him. It turned out to be a 14-year run. A lot of stuff.

[1:09:37] LW: That took your profile to another level, almost a national level.

[1:09:41] DW: All different level, that's correct. It did take it to a national level and kept it on a national level. Yeah.

[1:09:47] LW: Just give us a montage of your legal career then from that point on, because you've been in this for almost 50 years. What was your win-loss record?

[1:09:58] DW: In Birmingham, which is where I had the longest stream, it was 154 straight victory. I had resources. I had the city's resources. I could crush you with no effort with their resources. I had the talent pool with me, specialists. It was a great run. The taxpayers went to the Alabama Supreme Court to try to get the city to cut me off. My whole work history there was reviewed by the Alabama Supreme Court, which ruled in my favor by the way. They said the city never should have hired me. It was unfair advantage on everybody else. All that stuff. It was a great experience.

I learned a lot. What I also learned while I was doing cases is the value of being in business. I'm looking at these guys who are doing business with the city, the mall developers, companies that come in and get all these economic incentive packages. I'm looking at the guys at the top, these guys are no smarter than we are. They just have been exposed to a different area of economic development. We can be doing these projects. We can be performing at this level. All we got to do is learn the language of business and have the capital to go along with it.

By 1998, I was ready to go. I told Arrington that I couldn't do any more time. I had a great run with him, but I got to go. I said, “You can keep running and getting elected, but I got to go.” I gave him a year's prior notice. Don't send me no new cases. I got to go.

[1:11:25] LW: Let me ask you, you used to tell us, I have three brothers, so there's four of us. You used to tell us, "Don't be an attorney." Why would you say that? It sounds like you were passionate about –

[1:11:35] DW: I'll perceive the system changing. I could see the judges that were coming on the bench. I could see these and it was turning into political hack. Judges were turning into political hack. It had nothing to do with legal precedent, facts of a case is who are you connected to? Can they raise me some money? Or can they give me a federal judgeship? That's how justice was being decided. I'll tell you guys, don't go into that profession. It's changed now. It's not a lot of an honorable profession. It really is not. I try not to do anything in it. I can look at it. I can look at the judge. I can look at the names on the case. See if it's a big corporation against a small person. See if it's black against white. I can tell you who's going to win that case. I don't even need to know what the facts are. You don't have any more great people sitting on the bench. You just don't.

[1:12:31] LW: Prior to that then, and your hundreds of victories, right? Yes, you had resources, but there are a lot of people with resources that still don't win cases. You have this Netflix documentary, *Trial by Media*, where it shows you in the court, it shows you talking about the case and how you engineered these victories. What was your unique advantage?

[1:12:51] DW: Don't forget the three things I told you from the beginning, the thread and –

[1:12:55] LW: Preparation.

[1:12:56] DW: At first, you got to have courage.

[1:12:59] LW: Courage?

[1:12:59] DW: If you don't have the courage, you can't represent anybody. Second is preparation, right? Third is flawless execution. If you're not doing those things, you're not going to win, even if you got resources.

[1:13:11] LW: What's an example of courage? What are you talking about when you say courage?

[1:13:15] DW: You're not afraid of the judge. You're going to go in there and make your record. Period. You don't care if they scold you, brow beat you. You don't care. You're in the pit now. You got to be prepared to give up blood, to get blood, don't you? If you're not prepared to give up blood, you don't need to come in the gladiator pit. You need to be up there in the stands, or you can do Monday morning quarterbacking and stuff. If you've been there in that pit, you won't make it.

[1:13:40] LW: A lot of attorneys won't say something, because they don't want to get stoned.

[1:13:43] DW: I would say, 90% of all attorneys don't have the courage necessary to go into the gladiator pit. They would prefer to be a talking head on TV, right? Ain't nobody going to beat you up on TV. You go in there when a judge is ram rolling your butt, right? What do you do, right? You get your point seen. You got to know all that stuff, because that's all that's out there now. There ain't no fair administration or justice. It's who you know and who are you connected to. That's how cases are decided, right?

[1:14:14] LW: As far as your courtroom presence, your charisma and all of that, which you're also known for, where did you inherit that? Is that something that Chestnut –

[1:14:22] DW: J.L. Chestnut. Best I ever seen. When I wasn't trying cases, I used to go watch him try cases, so I could pick up his technique.

[1:14:30] LW: What were some of his techniques?

[1:14:32] DW: All right, if you know you got bad facts and the government witness is hurting you with their testimony, just push your chair back, get up and go over to a window and look down like it's a car wreck or something down there. Because everybody going to follow you and just act you don't pay attention to what the witness is saying. Then all the jurors going to stop looking at the witness, they going to look at you and try to figure out what's going on. It's just jump up and down, throw a book on the floor. Act like you don't understand this. You tell them, "I

don't understand this. I've been in the case two years. I still ain't figured out what they're complaining about." He was a great thespian. Is that what you call the actors now? Thespian. He's the best I've seen. Then he used to carry a little paper bag for lunches and stuff. Nothing would be in it, but an empty Styrofoam cup and he was picking up there everywhere.

He was filing the bag and stuff. What is this guy doing? He was great at taking your attention away from harmful evidence and stuff. He was just a good. He was good. He's the best I've seen. He could break down complex things and make them very simple with simple analogy. The other side had lawyers from New York and they would dress nice. He would talk about the way they would dress. They'd come down here with their $5,000 money suits, like that's going to impress y'all. Some guy who's wearing some Kmart clothes, right?

"Look at them, look at them over there. I know they looking down on y'all. I don't know nothing about the fact of the case. All I know is that my client is dead." Then he'd jump up and throw a book down on the floor and then he'd be on the table and, "They did it. They did it. I don't care how many lawyers you bring out of New York. They did it. The only question I got for you, ladies and gentlemen, y'all going to let them get away with it? Are you all going to let them take advantage of us again. Are you all going to let them laugh down their way back to New York? Look at them. I don't think you will. Hey, I told my wife I was going to be home for dinner at 5.00. It's 3.00 now. Y'all need to go on back there and do what you got to do. I'll be waiting on you." They don't teach that in law school. You can only pick that up. All the stuff worked. All of it worked.

[1:16:55] LW: They don't teach that in law school.

[1:16:57] DW: They don't teach that in law school. No, you have to go watch guys' back cases. I don't find the young guys coming out of that, I don't find them – They're not interested in trying an occasion. They come out, "I want to cut a deal. I want to sell something." What deal you're going to get if you can't kick nobody's butt? What settlement do you get if you can't fight? They don't have fighting skills, man. Looking back –

[1:17:21] LW: Yeah, talk about your biggest case, your biggest win.

[1:17:24] DW: I don't know if I had the biggest wis, but I've had very –

[1:17:27] LW: The 85 counts.

[1:17:30] DW: Objectively, people would call that the biggest win. I really thought the Scottsboro Boys case was the biggest case of my career. Yeah, so I had in 2003, Richard Scrushy, who at that time was the Chief Executive Officer of HealthSouth Rehabilitation Corporation. They had 2,000 hospitals around the world, working on athletes and rehabbing accident victims and all that stuff. They made a whole hospital chain around it.

Anyway, HealthSouth was accused of a 2.7-billion-dollar accounting fraud. About 18 people had plead guilty, all of the CFOs and chief financial officers and a bunch of executives. Then all of them were pointing the finger at Richard, saying, this guy made us do this 2.7-billion-dollar fraud. Well, in 2003, 2.7 billion dollars was a lot of – that was a big number. I represented Richard and the government had charged him with 85 felony counts. He was looking at 650 years in prison. He turned out to be a great plan, because he followed all my advice. When you're looking at 650, we never entertained him.

When you got 85 count and 650 years, nobody's entertaining no deal, or anything. You got to win, right? You got to win in the gladiator pit. That was probably the hardest case I had. That required more strategy, more thought, because you got to go from 85 to nothing. For those who don't know law, let me explain criminal stuff this way. A prosecutor only has to win on one count. You got to win on all 85 in Scrushy's case, all 85. Your task gets 85 times harder than a prosecutor. He only needs one. You convicted felony, you going to jail.

It took two years. I didn't work on anything else. We had to chop it down, because that's too much for in court. We chopped it down from 85 to 58, from 58 to 36 and from 36 to zero. If that tree was so big, it had to be chopped down in three sections. That's the way we did it. It's the first time any individual case. I ain't talking about cases with a 127, but you got six or 12 dependent. In an individual case with 85 felony counts, it's the first time that a person's gone from 85 to zero. It had never happened before. Scrushy's case and it hadn't happened since.

That's a record. I am proud of that record, because nobody thought it could be done. It went back to the same thing those my mentors taught me, you got to have courage. You got to go in there, because everybody hated Scrushy when he was going through his thing. The white community fled from him, like he had the plague or something. Then you got to figure out, you're down here in Birmingham and you could feel the hatred. You go out to a restaurant, everybody hated because you represent this guy. The one thing I got to give him credit on, he told me the truth about everything, so I was able to be very effective in representing him and to put the right detail.

I never had anything that he told me that turn out to not be true. That was a tremendous advantage. When a client tells you everything and you can build structure and strategy around that, that's how he won. Preparation, courage and execution. You can execute when a guy has told you everything has been truthful and everything he said, because there ain't no surprises. You can tell a guy, like one thing we did, they have to lead FBI agent. I understand that agent in charge. There's six million documents in this case that they turned over to us, and then we asked that agent. We had all those boxes. We brought them down to the court one day, stacked them on the wall. We're on cross-examination, lead FBI agent. Can you go to those boxes? Can you pull out one document, one posted note, one notepad scribbling where Richard Scrushy wrote something acknowledging that he participated in the fraud?

Then I say, "Before you answer, let me get to tell you something. I read all six million pages three times. I didn't see that. You've been on the case for two years. Maybe you know where it is in them six million pages. I want you to go over there and you pull out anything that documents his knowledge of a 2.7-billion-dollar fraud that has his name, scribble, anything, doodling, you're just writing on a note pad." I say, "You know what? I think that's unfair to ask you that at 4.00. I'm going to have to just recess it early. You got all night to go look for that one scrap of paper, that documents. Because I'm going to tell you now, I'm going to ask you first thing in the morning to show me that document." There ain't no surprise. We all won't wait for you to produce that document. I already knew there wasn't no document. Remember, preparation? I've been through it three times. Three times.

[1:22:37] LW: Who is the judge?

[1:22:39] DW: Judge was Karen Beaudry, the one that was the judge in my case. Yeah, she called help for them. She called help for that case, the Scrushy's case.

[1:22:48] LW: Was she amenable towards you, or what was her relationship like during that Scrushy case?

[1:22:54] DW: She was new in her judgeship, so she was trying to do the right thing. She was fair, straight down the middle. She was new. All of them when they're new – when they're new, they started out trying to do the right thing. Then it's only when they settle in that the special interests get their attention. They want to be comfortable in the community where they live and the church in which they worship. They don't want nobody walking up to them, cussing them out, why'd you do this and that and the other? All new judges try to at least pretend like they're decent, but she was decent in that case.

[1:23:40] LW: You won that case. Chestnut would have been proud of your performance in that case.

[1:23:47] DW: Yeah. I used everything. I used everything I learned from all of them.

[1:23:50] LW: Wrapping yourself in the flag.

[1:23:52] DW: I did. I did that, too. That was one of Chestnut's techniques that you got to make the flag mean something. You start by telling how you came from a group of outsiders and you only came within the flag protection, one case at a time, and it was 12 people who were strangers to each other, strangers to you, sat on a box just like you did, or your box like you did. They said, "You know what? I think Ms. Watkins' boy ought to be able to use any toilet that flushes. I think her boy ought to be able to eat at any restaurant that serves a hamburger, French fries, and Coke." I think he ought to be able to go to any public school that he can get into.

I think he ought to be able to go to any college that he can go to. I think he ought to be able to work any job that he wants, so he can make his little money to sit at the lunch counter and eat his hamburger, French fries, and a Coke. You know what? I think he ought to be able to go to

law school up there in Tuscaloosa. It's always 12 ordinary people. It ain't a mass movement. There's 12 people who sit in the box, and for that moment in time, they rise to the occasion. Just 12. It only takes 12 in a box to make things happen. I learned that from Chestnut, man. I learned it from Chestnut, man. You only got to motivate 12 people to rise to their inner strength and inner beauty in that moment in time. They may never rise again.

To me, I always call it their Iwo Jima movement. You remember the soldiers hoisting the flag on that island and five or six of them raising the flag? I tell them, that's your Iwo Jima movement. That's when you go down in history. That's when your name goes enameled of American jurisprudence, because you did something not for the flag, you did something for your country. You're not wearing the soldier’s uniform. I'm not asking you to dive on a grenade, or take a bullet in the head, or have your arm torn off. I'm just asking you to protect the flag. Then by the time you get through that speech, you all wrap and the flag is around me. It's an effective closing argument.

[1:25:55] LW: That sounds like a monologue that an actor would memorize.

[1:25:59] DW: Actually, you got to break things down to where ordinary people, the greeter at Walmart, understands what you're talking about. The guy who's hand painting your house on the outside knows what you're saying, or the truck driver, or the secretary. If you're talking above their heads, they’re not going to get it. They got to understand, they got to feel what you're saying. They got to know what it means.

The other thing, I like to – I always like to have a little copy of the Constitution, because I like to slam it on the desk and say, you're not doing this for my clan. You're not doing it for him, because I always thought that I'll do a trial. Government gets up, we get up. Government gets up, we get up. When you come to the final closing argument, right? Government gets up, I get up. I put on a beautiful closing argument. Government comes behind me, right? I always thought the whole time I was practicing, that's unfair. Why do they get two shots? Why do they get two shots at them? They come behind me.

I have to make jurors understand what I thought was unfair was actually the genius of the founding fathers. They knew when they put that system in like that, that the persons who are

supposed to stand up, not for my client, but for justice of the 12 people in that box. That's why I don't have to stand up again, because they knew you would stand up. Not for me. Then I picked the book up, again, the Constitution, walk over to them, hold it up. You're standing up for this. For what, 690,000 Americans died for, you're standing up for them. You're not standing up for me and my client. For them. They knew you wouldn't get some of them. They knew you would do the right thing, because you got all the power in that. The President of the United States can't tell you what to do. The judge can't tell you what to do. Nobody can tell you what to do right now. You'll never have this power again in your life.

God tapped you. God tapped you to take your rightful place in the annals of American judicial history. Now you can say, I don't want to be in history. You can be a crutch for the government. Say, “Well, I know they didn't include the case, so I'm just going to be a crutch for them, or wheelchair.” That ain't why those guys died on those grenades, took bullets in the head, had their bodies torn up by enemy path. That's not what they did. You're not going to diss on with them. I know you're not. I'm going to sit down. I know you're going to do the right thing.

[1:28:28] LW: Did you ever lose a case?

[1:28:30] DW: Early on, I did. I did. Early on. Then I learned. The beautiful thing about it when I did, because I was new, man. When I did learn, the lawyers on the other side, they all, without exception, came and told me why I lost. What that meant. They told me I was really good, but this is how I beat you. Whenever they did that, I remembered that. You're not going to beat me that way again. The next guy is not going to do that, but they wanted me to be good. That's why they did it. We were fierce in the courtroom, but the moment the trial is over with, “Hey, can we go have a beer and stuff? I want to just go over what you did right and what you missed out on.” After that, by the time I got to Birmingham, I wasn't losing. You couldn't beat me. No.

[1:29:16] LW: You were Chicago Bulls in the 1990s.

[1:29:18] DW: Well, you guys know it's just too much technique and resource, whatever. You'd have to cheat. You really would have to have a judge that's cheating. The judge would have to cheat for you. You can't beat me on skill. Then that's the same to this day. You can't beat me on skill, man. You can get a judge to cheat for you. Keep the evidence out. Charge the jury a

certain way. The judges have a wonderful ability to cheat for a client, for a party. They do. It's inherent in the process. A lot of them do that now.

[1:29:48] LW: After the Scrushy trial, which you won, and it's all documented on Netflix in a documentary called *Trial by Media*, what episode is it?

[1:29:58] DW: Episode four, 'King Richard'.

[1:30:00] LW: Okay. You can watch episode four, 'King Richard', to see the whole behind the scenes and all the details of that case. You graduated yourself from your legal career and you started to get more involved in economic empowerment in private industry.

[1:30:16] DW: That's right. That's right. I'd already started a bank. I'd already started a bank. Did that in 2000. Then my good friend from college, Darryl Harms was in the alternative energy business, waste, the garbage. I worked with him and then when he died, I took over the company. That's what I did. That's what I did. I still do that. In fact, I'm working with a group out on Brazil on a project in South Africa right now. Yeah. I started that. I took over in 2005.

[1:30:47] LW: Years down the line, you get indicted. You receive some news from federal prosecutors saying what?

[1:30:56] DW: Well, the first set of federal prosecutors looked at it for six months in New Jersey. Congratulated me on the success in business and then wished me well. Then two years later, a group of prosecutors in Birmingham, Alabama took the same allegation and announced that they were looking at me as a target of a criminal probe. It's the same fact, the same allegation, the prosecutors in New Jersey who did not know me, just looked at the information, the evidence and said, there's nothing here. Then wished me well in my career and then bye. Then the ones at Birmingham saw there's an opportunity to take me down.

[1:31:37] LW: One of those prosecutors was the son of somebody who was a head of some area that you integrated in Dothan, or something like that?

[1:31:48] DW: Yeah. One of my first school desegregation cases was down in Dothan. The lead prosecutor in my case's dad was against the public-school desegregation in favor of private schools and was basically a segregation and a well-known one. Well-known one in the area. I knew I had a problem with him. Plus, he went to Lee-Ann in Washington University, who was an editor of the newspaper and his editorial opinions were not favorable toward diversity for women, or black though. I mean, this is his published opinion.

Then I knew that this is not going to be good. Then the trial judge was the woman who had Scrushy's case. I think she was on a redemption initiative, so she could be comfortable in the white community in Birmingham. Because she was totally different in my case than she was in Scrushy's case. Totally different.

[1:32:41] LW: Talk a little bit about the strategy that a federal prosecutor would work in a situation like this in terms of getting witnesses you can't contact. What is the grand jury? For people who don't know anything about the legal system, how would the rail roadings begin in a situation like yours?

[1:32:57] DW: I'll tell you how. I'll tell you how you know when you started a railroad. In New Jersey, they sent me another saying, "Hey, we're looking into this. If you're interested in sending us a –"

[1:33:08] LW: It was a fraud claim that they were looking into.

[1:33:10] DW: Yes, the same claim is the same identical allegations in both places. I say, "Well, I'd like to send you a memo that sets out all the facts and evidence." This is in New Jersey. I did. It was a detailed thing, about 50-some pages with a bunch of exhibits. They took several months to go through it with law enforcement, people like that. Then they said, "Okay. Yeah, we understand it now. Yeah, you're good. You're good."

Two years later, I get the same letter, "Hey, we're looking at you again," but it's coming out of Birmingham prosecutors on the same stuff. I say, "Well, let me send you a memo." I adapted the memo and updated the memo, because I believe in giving people information before they make decisions. Then I said, "I would like to come and talk to the grand jury. I don't have anything I

need to add. Let me talk to the grand jury." I invited myself to the grand jury on two occasions in Birmingham. I could tell when I got in the grand jury room that they had pumped this grand jury. Nobody's in the grand jury room with them and who they want to bring in. I knew that was going to be a problem, because it's rare for a defendant to come and I'd say, "Well, you're not going to talk about my good name and reputation. I'm not going to be here to explain it to you."

[1:34:19] LW: A grand jury's a one-sided discussion. It's a one-sided discussion between –

[1:34:23] DW: It's a one-sided discussion. But I feel like, if you're going to bring my name up, you need to be able to ask me questions. Once I got in there, I looked and saw what it was and I could feel, "Okay, this is not going to be a good outcome," because these people already got their minds made up. Then I said, "Okay, I've given two pre-indictment memos, laid out everything I'm going to be doing." I've been to the grand jury twice. Then when the indictment came, I said, "Okay, I have to be a witness. I don't believe in this fearful amendment stuff. I'm going to be – I'll explain my conduct. I don't have anything." All my stuff is out there, it's reported. Everything I do is reported. Income, reported back with pay, everything.

All of the agreements, the business agreements between me and every partner, that's all in writing. These agreements that preceded my taking over, I took over when my partner died. I didn't think it was going to be a problem that the agreements, define everybody's relationship, what I can do and what I cannot do. Then I noticed the government wanted to keep the agreements out. It's just money changed hand, but no context. They didn't want no context for anything.

Then I noticed, they didn't have any documents, so they've rehearsed the witnesses to have new recollections from – even guys that were 10 and 12-years-old, right? Then I noticed the judge was keeping out all the everything. I say, well, okay, I'm going to get on the witness stand, because I already been in the grand jury. I did that, too. But I could tell, okay, this is a bad experience. I'm being railroaded. I knew why. It was payback for winning Scrushy's case and just being successful in Birmingham.

My goal at that point is, if you're in a bad situation, you make it go as quick as you can, so they can't pile on you. If you're stringing out a year or two, they're going to supersede the indictment,

they have more charges. That's a favorite prosecutorial technique. Let's go fast. I didn't wait any speedy trial. You got to come to trial in 90 days, which they did. I didn't file any motions. My real battle was, I could tell they wanted to find me guilty, but let me keep the time down. The government wanted me to serve 18 years in prison. I thought to get it down to like, I really wanted home confinement. I made that a whole separate fight.

The judge gave me five years. I knew that five years was three years. Really, it was less than three years. I viewed that as a – the government was mad. They were pissed. I viewed that as a victory. Because I know I can do – I knew from my law school days, I can do three years of anything. You can put me in a way, under any circumstances, I can do three years of anything. What I didn't realize is that when I went into the prison system, because I went into a camp, a prison camp in Talladega.

[1:37:19] LW: Wait. Wait, wait. Let's not talk about that yet. We're going to get to that in a second. We're going to take a little break in a moment. Then we're going to talk about the prison and all of that. I want to talk a little bit more about the case. You were convicted of what exactly? What do people get wrong about your case? People who just read about it in the paper.

[1:37:39] DW: Yeah, I was convicted of conspiracy, white fraud, bank fraud. Conspiracy means two or more people, that was Donald Junior, they put him in and that’s the only way they could get a conspiracy. If they hadn't done that, they would have been outside the statute of limitations. That's why he was thrown in. What they said is I took investor money and used it for personal stuff. That's what they – the claim.

What they get wrong on that, that the prosecutors in New York Jersey got right on that, number one, everything I did was provided for in an agreement. Number two, when the Great Recession of 2008 occurred, that lasted from 2008 to 2011, and 125 of my competitors went out of business, I stayed in business because I borrowed money from relatives, DeAndre, my ex-wife at the time, my girlfriend at the time to keep the business going, so we could survive.

When I was in a position to pay those loans back, they called that personal expenses. They didn't mention that the money was used to keep the businesses afloat. They kept that out. They didn't want any reference to business agreement, or anything like that. Then what they left out

was that for 12 years, even though the business agreement allowed for me to take a salary, and it was a nice, healthy salary, because we grew the company globally, 45 markets around world. For 12 years, I never took a dime in salary.

For 12 years, I reported every dollar I got on my income taxes. For 12 years, there were never any double books, anything like that. Everything was then available for everybody's inspection. What they did was cherry pick back, get rehearsed recollections of folks, and they spun a narrative to paint me out as a crook. “Oh, he took these folks money, and he sent it to his ex-wife for alimony and all that stuff.” They left out the part that I borrowed her alimony money to keep the business alive and intact for them to benefit on.

Then they said, well, he had an airplane and he was using the money to pay the note on the airplane. I did have an airplane. The company didn't have the credit to get it. I had the credit. It was only used for the company, company business, and the only people who were on it were business people doing business for the company. Well, just the fact that a black guy had an airplane, in Birmingham meant that he was doing something crooked. It's just twisted. It's deliberately twisting evidence.

Then they had on the bank charge, there was two brand charges. One of my business partners, who is Mayor Aronson, actually, he joined me two years after he left the mayor's job, his percentage of my business was large enough where he had to make what you call a capital contribution. He had an obligation to put money in. When he did, he went and borrowed the money. They said, because he borrowed the money from my bank, well, that's bank fraud. Now, one account, I didn't know where he got money from, because he didn't tell me. The other account, I told him, just let him know what you're doing, which is you make disclosure, because it was a large amount. He got the money, used it for his capital contribution, which is permitted.

Everybody who made a capital contribution to other two people all borrowed money and used loan money for that. The thing about it is that he got it on his own merit. I didn't have nothing to do with the loan process. The bank made a lot of money off his loans, and he paid the loans off. I got charged with bank fraud. Those are the three charges, conspiracy, wire fraud, and bank fraud. They had to twist and share it to make it fit. The prosecutors in New York did not did twisting, cherry picking. They looked at the old pitch and say, “This guy, he's compliant with all

federal law." I knew that when people don't care about you, giving them the information before an indictment, they don't care about you coming to answer questions to the grand jury, and they try to keep out the relevant information, then I don't request for the truth.

They kept out, even though they brought one of the members of the Rosenblum family there, they kept out evidence that my whole St. Louis Rams football team acquisition transaction, where I was qualified by Goldman Sachs to be a bidder for the Rams in 2008-2009. They kept out all of the finances. It was all to depict me as some failed, broken guy. That's how you know when you're being railroaded. Nobody cares about the truth. It's what can we keep from coming in that the jury can't see.

[1:42:20] LW: In the spirit of those guys that beat you early in your career, looking back now, what could you have done differently? What you do that you wish you hadn't done?

[1:42:31] DW: Nothing. I mean, look, if your business agreement don't mean anything, I don't know why people are signing it. If somebody can just ignore your business agreement, then there's no context for what you all are doing with each other. Nobody complained about my business conduct the entire time, because everybody knew what the agreements were added for. It wasn't like, I was doing a general solicitation of the public. I only had 30 partners in all of my business. Every one of them was a personal friend.

Over time, some of these friends' personal situations changed, and they were vulnerable to pressure from federal agents. It was a vulnerable people. It was six or seven people out of 30. The other 30, they didn't turn on me at all. I'm not mad at anybody that turn out. I don't know the pressures on other people. I don't know what their pressures are. They can't be in my friendship circle anymore. I got new friends now.

[1:43:28] LW: Okay, so you entered the federal prison system in April 28th, 2019. You described that part of your life as your finest hour as a lawyer.

[1:43:38] DW: It was. I wasn't expecting it. I went to the prison camp at Talladega. That's about what? 40 miles from Birmingham, maybe 50. Half the people there were out of Birmingham. It was about 80% black. Half of them were out of Birmingham and half were out of Atlanta. I was

living in Atlanta, and I was working in Birmingham. I knew a lot of the guys when I got there. I just knew them. They all knew me. They were all waiting on me. They made my stay there very comfortable. I didn't think about it, but I had a skill set that could benefit every inmate in every prison I ever went to every camp, every place they ever went to.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[1:44:21] LW: Thank you so much for listening to part one of my two-part interview with my dad, Donald V. Watkins. In the next part, we're going to go deeper into his time in prison and how exactly he was able to get four dozen inmates freed from prison during his two and a half years stint there. A year of that was actually spent while he was in the hole, so we're going to talk about that. We'll get into some of the legal strategy that you, or someone you know could use to make sure you're being properly represented in court. Part two is as fascinating, if not more fascinating than this part one, which is the setup. I think you're really going to love it. Definitely, definitely come back to check out part two when it publishes.

In the meantime, to see more about Donald Watkins, he is bigger on Facebook than he is on Instagram, or anywhere else. I would go to Facebook, search Donald V, Watkins, and you'll find his page. He's also got a website where he publishes his independent journalism articles on nearly a daily basis. That's at donaldwatkins.com. Also, make sure to check out *Trial by Media*, his Netflix documentary, which is about his unique approach to litigating in the courtroom. It's episode number four, 'King Richard.'

Of course, I'll put links to everything else that my dad and I discussed in the show notes on my website, lightwatkins.com/show. If this is your first time listening to the Light Watkins Show, we've got an incredible archive of past interviews with other luminaries, who share how they found their path and their purpose. People like Jung Pueblo, Ava DuVernay, Ed Mylett and many more. You can also search interviews by subject matter in case you only want to hear stories about people who've taken leaps of faith, or who've overcome financial struggles, or who've navigated health challenges. You can get a list of all of that at lightwatkins.com/show.

You can watch these interviews as well. If you want to see my dad and I talking, you can go to the YouTube channel. Just go to YouTube, search Light Watkins Podcast and you'll see the

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entire playlist. Then finally, if you didn't know, I post the raw, unedited version of every podcast in my Happiness Insiders online community. If you like hearing all the false starts and the mistakes and the chit chat and the beginning and end of the episodes, you can listen to all of that by joining thehappinessinsiders.com. Not only are you going to have access to the unedited version of the podcast, but you'll also be able to take part in the 108-day meditation challenge that I started a few years ago, along with other challenges and master classes for becoming the best version of you.

Finally, to help me continue to bring you the best guests possible, it would go a long way if you could just take 10 seconds to rate the podcast. Just glance down at your screen, click on the name of the show, scroll down past the seven previous episodes. You'll see a space with five blank stars, tap that star all the way on the right and you've left me a five-star rating. If you want to go the extra mile, write a sentence about what you enjoyed about this podcast, or recommend an episode for a new listener to start with. That way, people can jump right in to one of the crowd favorites. Thank you very much for that.

I look forward to hopefully seeing you back here next week with another story about someone just like me, just like you taking a leap of faith in the direction of their purpose. Until then, keep trusting your intuition, keep following your heart, keep taking your leaps of faith. If no one's told you recently that they believe in you, I believe in you. Thank you so much and have a great day.

[END]

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