



THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY CENTER  
OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA  
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA



# Oral History Interview

with

## Charles E. Sias

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**Interviewer:** *Francesco De Salvatore*

**Narrator:** *Charles Earl Sias*

**Location of Interview:**  
*7824 Preakness Lane, Fairfax Station, Virginia, 22030*

**Date of Interview:** *5/26/2023*

**Transcriber:** *Kerry J Reed*

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### **Summary:**

*Charles Sias reflects on his life growing up in Mississippi and the City of Alexandria. Also recounts his time spent at Parker Gray High School, service during the Vietnam War, and living in Northern Virginia.*

### **Notes:**

*Charles Sias graduated from Parker-Gray High School on June 11, 1965. His records in Alexandria, Virginia shows "Charles E. Williams" aka. Charles E. Sias. He used "Charles E. Williams" in high school, with*

*“William” being his Aunt’s name. He started using “Charles E. Sias” starting in college. On his birth certificate, “Charles E. Sias” is listed as his birth name.*

## Table of Contents and Keywords

Minute	Page	Topic
00:00	3	Introduction
01:00	3	Early Life & Memories of Family
015:15	8	Moving to City of Alexandria from Mississippi
20:02	10	Living in the Dip
26:14	12	Memories of Businesses in the Dip
27:39	13	Memories of Residents of the Dip
29:55	13	Lyles-Couch Annex
34:26	15	Parker Gray High School
40:07	17	Pole Vaulting Career at Parker Gray
53:57	21	Early College Life & Vietnam Draft
57:15	22	Experiences in Vietnam
1:04:32	25	Coming Home from Vietnam & College
1:06:30	26	Meeting his Wife & Experiences with Wife
1:11:25	28	Charles's Daughter
1:13:24	29	Career in Sales
1:17:17	30	Closing Remarks

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<b>General</b>	Childhood; Schooling; Military; Migration; Segregation; African American History
<b>People</b>	Mitchell Walker; Ruby Walker-Raymond
<b>Places</b>	Rolling Fork, Mississippi; Vicksburg, Mississippi, City of Alexandria, Virginia; Vietnam; Lyles-Couch

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:00:00] My name is Charles Earl Sias. And throughout Alexandria, especially those people during my era, they called me Frying Pan. Today's date is May 26, 2023. And we're at my my home at 7824 Preakness Lane, Fairfax Station, Virginia. [00:00:29][28.9]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:00:32] My name is Francesco de Salvatore. Today's May 26, 2023, and we're at Mr. Sias's home in Fairfax Station. So it's great to be here Mr. Sias, and I'm really curious to hear about different aspects of your life today. But I want to start at the beginning. And can you describe your childhood? Like the first place you were born? [00:00:58][26.7]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:01:00] I was born in Miesville, Mississippi. That's, if you would believe it, is a suburb of Rolling Fork, Mississippi. And it was in Mississippi. And of course, Mississippi, as I describe it, is the epicenter of segregation. But at an early age, I didn't really recognize racism. The only thing that I do remember as I got older, I was amazed that my mother had to address whites as Mr. and Mrs., you know, folks that were a lot younger, even children, she would have to address them as Miss So-and-so or Mr. So-and-so. That was amazing. That was one of the things that really smacked me in the face. But also in Mississippi, I was raised in in Miesville, Rolling Fork, and we eventually moved to Vicksburg. And in Vicksburg we lived in an area called the bottom. And the bottom it was equated to what we would call the projects. Now, I didn't actually live in the projects. We had a home that was a couple of blocks from the projects, so we knew all the families there. But we didn't actually live there. And I went to elementary school in Vicksburg at Rose Hill Elementary School, and I was there for the fifth grade. And we moved to Alexandria, Virginia, and my aunt, who raised me. So it's a long story about that. But anyway. [00:03:05][124.7]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:03:06] Really quick. So let's talk a little bit more about Mississippi. Can you tell us more about your memories growing up there? [00:03:14][7.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:03:15] Yes. In Mississippi, it was a close knit neighborhood, of course. And as a child, you didn't, as I said earlier, you didn't know racism existed because most of your activities were within your community. So you didn't have to go outside. Of course, your parents knew. But but we didn't. We had everything. We had mom and pop type stores there in Mississippi and in Vicksburg. And also, I had to walk about two miles to the elementary school every day; rain, sleet, or shine. And also in Mississippi, I love going to the movies. We had a really nice movie theater that was in Vicksburg. It was in the lower end of Vicksburg, the main street. So I would go there. We had, you know, most of the things that most communities have: we had doctors, we had lawyers, we had various businesses, but they are all kind of designated for the African-American community. What else would you? [00:04:37][82.1]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:04:37] Yeah. Well, what's it like to reflect on that time? Growing up in Mississippi right now? [00:04:43][6.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:04:43] Well, it was sad. It was kind of a cloud over my life because it was something that transpired that you couldn't do anything about. And I was really, really sad that your family had to endure such, especially children who, you know, they're innocent and they grew up in this environment and they could do nothing about it. But most of the kids, during that time when I was there, they found some way to go to college. And and most of them have, you know, really good careers. So I was really proud of that. My sister, my older sister who grew up with me, she graduated. She was the first graduate in our family and she attended Tougaloo College in

Mississippi. And she became a social worker. And, you know, she passed about five or six years ago, but she had a successful career. So I was really proud of that. [00:05:58][74.1]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:05:59] That's Great. And how many siblings do you have? [00:06:00][1.1]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:06:00] I have I have six sisters. And I was the only boy in the family. [00:06:04][3.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:06:05] Wow. What's each of the names? [00:06:07][1.8]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:06:08] Okay. Rose is the one who passed. She was my oldest sister. My next sister is Brenda. My next one was Diane, Ramona, Jean and Lynette. And they were my sisters. [00:06:24][15.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:06:24] Okay. Mm hmm. That's great. And what was your mom's name? [00:06:28][3.6]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:06:29] Her name was Ruby. Her name was Ruby. [00:06:31][2.6]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:06:38] It was just your siblings and your mom living in Mississippi, right? [00:06:40][2.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:06:41] Yes. And I said there was a, you know, kind of unusual situation, but it was typical kind of in the in the delta of Mississippi. My mother had my sister and I at an early age, and my aunt was one of the family members who stepped in to help raise these kids. And my aunt actually raised me. And the relationship became so tight that I stayed with her. So, I was with my aunt; the balance of my life, all my life, until she passed away. [00:07:17][36.4]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:07:18] So what do you know about your mom's family? [00:07:21][2.8]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:07:22] Well, my mom's family, they lived in the Delta. My grandfather, he owned a funeral home in Rolling Fork, Mississippi. He was well known in Mississippi. He also had a burial business. You would actually pay for your funeral. He had that business. So he was well off. You know, being that the Delta was was really a really poor community. But they were somewhat well-off. So, you know, I grew up all around them. We would visit all the time. They would visit us down in Vicksburg and we would visit them at the funeral home, where they actually lived in the funeral home. And one of the difficult things for me would be that there's no way in the world I wanted to be a part of that. I mean, that was on offer at one time, but no way I wanted to be a part of a funeral home. But anyway. [00:08:23][61.0]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:08:24] What was your grandfather's name? [00:08:25][1.0]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:08:26] His name was Reverend Walker? You know, it escapes me right now. Eldridge. His name was Eldridge, along with my cousin, who was also named Eldridge. [00:08:46][19.9]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:08:48] Do you have favorite memories with him? [00:08:51][2.6]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:08:52] Oh, we had a lot of fun in the funeral home. I mean, my sister lived there, you know, where as I lived in Vicksburg. And they would always play tricks on us. And when we came there, because we were all very, you know, afraid of the funeral home, because you would have to sometimes walk through the business office. You'd walk through the parlor where the bodies used to be displayed. And then there was a room where they displayed caskets. And then you had you go to this long hall and there was an embalming room. And then that led to the living quarters. So my sister would sometimes hide. And as we would walk through, she would jump out and scare us. So, we started not going that way, we would go around the back and come in. So she would scare us because it wasn't difficult to scare us, walking through a funeral home.

[00:09:49][57.5]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:09:50] Yeah. Wow. [00:09:50][0.4]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:09:51] But we all love him. My grandmother was a great cook, and my grandfather had a car, so he would you know, I told you he had a business, so he would always go between Rolling Fork and Vicksburg. He had customers all over there. So people paid something like \$0.25 a month or something like that, so they could build up enough to pay for their funeral when they all eventually passed. [00:10:20][28.4]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:10:21] What was your grandmother's name? [00:10:22][1.4]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:10:23] Her name was Adele. Adele Walker. Yeah, she was a really good cook. [00:10:26][3.4]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:10:27] What are some of your memories of her cooking? [00:10:30][3.1]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:10:31] She had this recipe for pound cake. She had a pound cake, that pound cake was really good. But as she got older and she became interested in the stories, the stories on TV, her pound cakes were not as good because she didn't pay as much attention to cooking as she did watching the stories. So every now and then you would have like a burnt crust on the cake, which we all knew meant that she didn't do her best. [00:11:01][29.5]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:11:03] Do you have other memories with her? [00:11:06][2.8]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:11:06] With her? I know she was a very loving person. She liked to travel. She would often come from the Delta up here. She came up here a couple of times to visit her sister, which we lived with her for a little while when we came up here. And she was just a, you know, very loving person. And she would always treat the kids kind, with kindness when we came to visit her. So, they were all pleasant memories of her. [00:11:38][32.0]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:11:39] That's great. Actually before I ask this question about Alexandria, you haven't talked about your father. Would you want to share who he was? [00:11:56][17.1]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:11:57] Okay. My father and I never really had a relationship. His mother, my grandmother, on his side, we were very close. So, we spent a lot of time together. [00:12:09][12.9]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:12:10] What was her name? [00:12:10][0.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:12:10] Her name was, oh, let me see. What was her name? [00:12:16][5.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:12:18] It's okay if you don't remember. [00:12:19][1.1]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:12:19] I can't. I'm amazed that I can't. Georgia! Her name was Georgia. Yes. But anyway, Georgia, I never called her Georgia, by the way, I always call her grandmother. She would come to visit me at our house, and also she would actually come to school sometimes and call me out, you know, give me a hug and kiss and give me money. And on Saturday mornings, I would travel from my home, which was over on the bottom as I said earlier, all the way over to her house, which she lived on the other side of town. I would walk over there to her house. We had a marvelous breakfast at her house and she had friends with a TV. We never had a TV at my house. So, she introduced me to these people and they invited me to watch TV at their home. So, every Saturday I would go to her house to have a wonderful breakfast. And by the time these folks got up, I would go to the house and watch TV from about 9 o'clock til about four. And I would just so, you know, engulfed in loving in TV. So, that's kind of what we did all the time. But she died of an illness which at that age, I don't really know what the illness was, but she did die. And that was one of the first times that losing a family member really did hurt me, when she passed. Because when I was around her, I felt the love. It was one of those type things. [00:14:00][101.1]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:14:01] How old were you when she passed? [00:14:02][1.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:14:03] When she passed I think I was about, maybe ten. I was about ten. [00:14:07][4.1]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:14:08] Do you have memories of that day? [00:14:11][2.8]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:14:12] Yeah, I do. It was kind of strange because where she lived, there was no road. There was a major road. Major road. And then you had to kind of go down to a sizable alley to her house. So at that time it was traditional to have the wakes, you feel me, they had wakes at their house. So they brought her body down through this alley. They would carry it all the way down through this alley to her house where her body was displayed in her house, in her living room. So, I remember that day. I also remember the church service that she had. And that whole ordeal was really sad. And that was the last time I actually saw my father, at her funeral. [00:15:05][52.6]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:15:06] That's great. Well, what was your father's name again? [00:15:11][5.7]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:15:12] His name was Elmo. Elmo Davis. [00:15:14][2.1]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:15:15] So tell us, like, what happened after Mississippi? [00:15:26][11.2]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:15:30] My aunt, she was married. She was married, and then she divorced. So, it was my aunt and I. So, my aunt who lived in Virginia invited us to come to live with them until she could find a job and a place to live. Because of the economic conditions in Mississippi versus Virginia, they weren't close. So, she was able to find a much better paying job in Virginia than in Mississippi. There were more opportunities. So, that was basically the reason why we left. To pursue better job opportunities, you know, and a better way of living. And that worked out real well. [00:16:18][47.7]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:16:18] And so can you describe some of your early memories in Alexandria when you first moved there? [00:16:28][9.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:16:29] Well, when we moved to Alexandria, you would almost expect it to be living in like a utopia. But it wasn't quite like that because they had racial issues, just like Mississippi. They weren't as severe. But I do remember having to ride what was called the A, B and W bus line, which was a forerunner of the metro system, the metro bus system in Alexandria. They had a yellow line down there, down the middle of the bus, when African-Americans came in, you would pay and then you would go all the way to the back of the bus. I do remember that. And this was, you know, prior to 1964. In the theaters white folks were on the bottom and African-Americans were upstairs. We did that in the movies. Blacks and whites actually went to the movie together. But we would have to go upstairs. We did have our own theater was called the Carver, the Carver Theater, which was on Queen Street in Alexandria. It played up to date movies and it was, you know, a theater that cost \$0.25. and we would go in and all of the latest movies we could see. So, we were all proud of that. And also in Alexandria, I met a whole crew of friends. I had a whole bunch of friends. I was at the age where I adored my friends and the friendships that I made, especially being new. So, first we lived with my aunt, my aunt and I. We live with her sister for a few years until she got a job. And then we moved over on the south side of Alexandria, where we got a house. And again, that's where I made, you know, a lot of friends there. My friends and I, what we had in common were we all liked sports, especially basketball. There was a basketball court on Lyles-Crouch playground. At the time, the new Lyles-Crouch school, which is there right now, that school was not completed. It was not completed yet. So, I actually started elementary school in the Lyles Crouch Annex, which was a warehouse that had been converted into an elementary school. And I was there for the fifth grade. For the fifth grade. And when I graduated to the sixth grade, the new Alexandria Lyles-Crouch School, which you see now that's there. It was just completed. So, I was able to to go to that new school, the sixth and the seventh grade. [00:19:32][183.6]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:19:35] Just really quick, some background. So, how old were you when you moved to Alexandria? [00:19:38][3.7]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:19:40] I moved to Alexandria, probably was 11. [00:19:42][2.0]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:19:43] 11. And what year was it? [00:19:45][1.8]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:19:45] Oh, see, it was 1958. I think was 1958 or 1959. [00:19:55][9.2]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:19:58] So you moved with your aunt and your mom? [00:20:00][2.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:20:01] Just My aunt. [00:20:02][0.5]



**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:20:02] Just your aunt. Okay. Okay. And so your aunt again, where did you live in Alexandria? [00:20:06][3.7]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:20:07] My my aunt lived on South Patrick Street. That was called the Dip. The Dip in Alexandria. We lived in the 300 block of South Patrick Street. [00:20:17][10.1]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:20:18] Right. Before we talk about Lyles-Crouch, can you describe the neighborhood? You know, for someone who has never seen it, or never seen old photos of it. What did it look like? [00:20:33][15.4]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:20:35] Well, again, the African American communities were always close knit, and the same thing transpired on South Patrick Street. They were all row houses and all of the families knew each other, liked each other. The kids played with each other, and we all went to school together. We all went to Lyles-Crouch. We would walk. It was about four or five blocks from the Dip over to Lyles-Crouch. And I made a lot of friends. Every now and then, one of those friends that I first met when we came to Virginia will surface. And I just met a guy, I guess about two weeks ago who was part of that neighborhood. And the ironic thing about living in the Dip, my wife's family lived across the street in Dip, and I didn't know her, but I did play with her brother. And we do recall that. [00:21:42][66.9]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:21:44] What did your aunt's home look like? Can you describe her home? [00:21:46][1.6]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:21:47] My aunt's home in the Dip? It was really well laid out. She had really good tastes. She had a TV. She had really good furniture. She had an upstairs where we stayed until we moved out. She was also a beautician. So, she she actually made a living being a beautician. And her husband was retired military. So he was retired probably all of the time that I knew him. And ironically, he was killed as an innocent bystander in a shooting. He took the trash out one morning and apparently a couple of neighbors had had it in for each other and he was shot and killed. But again, back to her house, it was really well put together. She had really updated furniture. She had a small kitchen. She had a little area in the back where she could take her customers to wash their hair. And she had a nice backyard. And my uncle had a car. He would drive us to different places. And also, I had access to a swimming pool, the Johnson Pool, in Alexandria, when I came here. And I never had a pool in Mississippi. [00:23:19][91.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:23:23] And what was your uncle's and aunt's names? [00:23:25][2.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:23:26] My aunts name was Annie Washington. Uncle, his name was George Washington. [00:23:31][4.9]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:23:33] So can you describe any memories, any your favorite memories with them? [00:23:37][4.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:23:39] Well, my uncle was, again, he was somewhat well off, you know. He retired from the military, with an income, and my aunt worked, you know, as a beautician. So, they were by today's standards, they would probably be considered, you know, maybe not well off. But they were, you know, upper middle class. And we would do things together. He would take me on

little trips. He would take me on some of his little trips around the city. My aunt was very nice person. She was, you know, very good. She was stylish, she she wore up to date clothes. And when she would come to Mississippi, I mean, she would make a statement because she dressed so nice. Believe it or not, she would ride a bus from Alexandria, Virginia, all the way to Mississippi. And it would take a week, it would seem like, to get there. But getting back to her house, all of her rooms were well, you know, well finished. You know, hardwood floors and the furniture was very nice. [00:24:58][79.4]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:25:00] Do you remember the dresses or clothes that she wore? Can you describe them? [00:25:04][4.2]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:25:07] She wore, you know, the colorful hats. She did have a mink stole. She had really long dresses. Very nice shoes. She was dressed typical of the early fifties. I mean, she was a fashion statement. [00:25:27][19.9]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:25:29] That's great. [00:25:29][0.0]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:25:29] And he was conservative, a conservative dresser. [00:25:32][2.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:25:33] And so, what was it like for you to, you know, your mom wasn't with you and you didn't move with your siblings, right? What was it like at that time? [00:25:47][13.6]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:25:48] Well, we kept in touch with each other. It was a real strange relationship because even though I was with my my aunt, we still kept in touch with each other. My mother always was in communication with my aunt as to how I was doing. And likewise how were the girls doing that stayed with her. So we never lost track of each other. [00:26:11][23.6]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:26:14] Yeah. So, do you remember what the businesses or places were like? Yeah. What were some of the businesses in the neighborhood that you remember? [00:26:25][11.0]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:26:26] In Alexandria? [00:26:26][0.2]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:26:27] Specifically in the Dip or even the south side. [00:26:32][4.8]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:26:33] Okay there were a lot of mom and pop stores around. There was one there, like on the dip. And on a next corner, there was a mom and pop store. Two blocks down Duke Street was a mom and pop store. [00:26:48][14.6]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:26:48] Do you remember the names of the stores? [00:26:49][1.2]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:26:49] We called the one store, because he took pop bottles. He would give you a refund on pop bottles. His name was Pop. I don't know the name of the store. And the one that was closest to us, it was a Jewish family. I can't recall their names, but it was right on the corner and they sold, you know, things like bread and milk and orange juice and things like that. But there was also a franchise store about four blocks from us called the Sanitary. And it was an IGA

store, and the name of it was the Sanitary. That store was a typical food store. It had all of the, you know, the food, you know, food products in it. [00:27:37][47.4]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:27:39] That's great. Can you describe some of the individuals who lived in the neighborhood that stand out to you from that time? Like who were some of the characters from the Dip? [00:27:53][13.5]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:27:54] In the dip, the guy who actually gave me that name, Frying pan, his name was Butterball. And there was another guy. His name was Dillsey[?]. His brother's name was Mickey. There was a guy named Vanice[?], another guy named Wayward Jackie. Let's see. Brenda's brother's name was Norris. They called him Man. Let's see. [Whispering to self] The girls; there was one girl that I knew, her name was Doris. Doris. There was...who else? Those are the ones just roll right off the top of my head. [00:28:45][51.7]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:28:46] Do you have any specific memories with any of them? [00:28:48][2.4]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:28:50] We did the typical things. In the Dip, there were alleys on all of those homes, so they had clotheslines all on the back. And sometimes when you were playing and you would forget that those clotheslines were back there, and it usually turned out to be like a small disaster. You know, you get hung on a clothesline or knocked folks clothes down and they were not happy. So that happened quite a bit. We would just walk around, you know, as most kids do, we would go up there and get candy and we would kind of like sit around different places and just share stories or brag about different things. Kind of. We, you know, to be honest with you, we never got in trouble. We never got in any trouble. Well, that's one of the fortunate things, because some of the people in other sections of the city, and I'm not going to knock the other sections, but there were a lot of kids who got in trouble and had to go down to, you know, reform school. None of our kids ever had to do that. [00:29:52][63.0]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:29:55] Great. So, let's talk a little bit about Lyles-Crouch in the annex. So, can you explain what the annex looked like for those who've never seen it? [00:30:07][12.5]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:30:09] The annex was a reformed warehouse. It had rooms in it. It had a small auditorium-type setting. And mostly the rooms were small. But it did have two stories. It had a restroom that was all the way down at the bottom floor. There was a girls and boy's bathroom, and it was somewhat dark in there. But we, you know, we didn't critique how light and dark it was. It was an educational environment. And that's basically the way we treated it. But we all saw that new building out of the window being built as we went to that school. When I told you it was the fifth or sixth grade when I was going to the new school. And we all looked forward to that. [00:31:11][61.2]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:31:11] Mm hmm. [00:31:12][0.5]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:31:13] We did have a cafeteria. That was a cafeteria there. Mm hmm. [00:31:16][2.9]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:31:17] And so can you describe some of the teachers from Lyles-Crouch? [00:31:20][3.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:31:21] Oh, okay. [00:31:22][0.2]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:31:22] Who do you remember? [00:31:22][0.2]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:31:23] I guess my favorite teacher was Mr. Willie Thomas. Mr. Willie Thomas was also my Little League football coach. And he taught I think it was the fifth grade. He was a fifth grade teacher, one of the fifth grade teachers. Maybe he was a fourth grade teacher, but he was still the football coach. He was one. Miss Edith Allen. She was a sixth grade teacher. Mr. Carlton Fun was a seventh grade teacher. Ms. Lilly. I can't think of Ms. Lilly's first name, but everyone loved Ms. Lilly because Ms. Lilly was one of those teachers who took her class on a lot of field trips. So we all loved that. We would always go to, like, the Smithsonian Institute. And they didn't have a lot of parents who accompanied us. So, she would kind of just let the kids go. So, we would roam all around, you know, all those marvelous displays over at the Smithsonian. And then she would tell us to be back at a certain time. And we were there for lunch, and then we would spend the rest of the day there. But she would do that a couple of times a year. So, most kids would like to get into her room. Parents would request that the children be put in Ms. Lilly's class. And she was good. She was a very good teacher. You know, she could really relate to all of the hardships that we were experiencing in our communities. And she taught about them. Mm hmm. [00:33:02][98.5]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:33:03] So how long were you at the annex? [00:33:06][2.8]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:33:07] I was only at the annex maybe one year. [00:33:09][2.2]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:33:10] Okay. So describe the transition, then, to the new school. What was that like? [00:33:15][5.2]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:33:15] Oh, it was a happy experience, of course. You know, going from this old rundown building to a brand spanking new school, you know, with new chairs and a real auditorium, a beautiful cafeteria, you know, had a beautiful band room. All of this stuff was really new. And as a kid, you have to be excited from going from an old environment to this brand new school. So it was excitement. [00:33:45][29.9]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:33:47] Yeah. What did you like best about Lyles-Crouch? [00:33:53][6.5]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:33:55] I think the best thing about Lyles-Crouch was how they prepared us for high school, because Parker Gray was the eighth grade and Lyles-Crouch went to the seventh grade. So our seventh grade teacher. His challenge was to prepare us for the eighth grade. And I think he did a great job doing that. So when we went there, we could just move right on into, you know, high school curriculum. [00:34:21][26.1]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:34:26] So what year did you start at Parker Gray? [00:34:29][3.1]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:34:29] I started in Parker Gray in 1960. [00:34:31][1.4]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:34:33] Okay. And so can you describe the school for us? [00:34:36][3.9]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:34:37] Parker Gray. Of course it was a new building for us because we were all coming from, you know, various elementary schools to Parker Gray. And, you know, it was a scary situation for us because it was a lot bigger than all of our elementary schools. And Parker Gray had a football team and a basketball team, track team. They had one of the best bands in the city. It had some of the best teachers in high school. So we were excited and a little terrified because, you know, we didn't know what the expectations of these teachers would be. So we went in there, you know, with eyes wide open and and ready to take whatever it took to get out of there.  
[00:35:31][53.9]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:35:32] Mm hmm. And who were some of the teachers that you still remember? [00:35:37][4.7]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:35:38] I had so many great teachers there. Ms. Casey. I can't remember her first name. Ms. Casey, the English teacher. Ms. Perry was a senior English teacher. Coach Johnson, who was a physical education teacher and a football coach. Mr. Carter. He was a football coach. He was also baseball coach. Mr. Arnold Thurman, which I attribute to Mr. Thurman my basketball success, and he really transformed my life. Because had I not made the varsity basketball team, I'm not certain which direction my life would have gone. But there was Mr. Bracey. Oh, let's see. Ms. Feels. Ms. Feels was one. Mr. Jones in the office. Ms. Davis was a biology teacher. Mr. Williams was a physics teacher. Ms. Jones was an art teacher. All of these people, they were really good in their disciplines. They were really good. And I'm not certain if I took high school as serious as I could have taken it, because my grades did not reflect that I was preparing myself for college. But all of the elements of being a good student were laid out for us. And you got to the point where you had to take the initiative yourself in order to do well if you had planned to go to college. So, I started think about college about midway through my senior year and at that time my grades were probably already solidified. And I was going to have to do a little bit more work if I planned to go to an institution of higher learning. Mm hmm. [00:37:52][133.6]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:37:53] Yeah. You just mentioned how, you know, Mr. Thurman played a big role in your life. So can you describe who he was? Who was Mr. Thurman?  
[00:38:02][9.1]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:38:02] Mr. Thurman was a historic basketball coach at Parker Gray. He won probably about four or five state tournaments. State championships. He also was one who transformed a lot of students who didn't really, you know, athletes particularly, who didn't really have any goals in life to start thinking about making some adjustments in your life. Setting some goals, and to focus on some positive things as opposed to some of the things that a lot of teenagers do, you know. So he was instrumental in enabling me to do that. Also, I made the varsity basketball in the tenth grade. So I went from being friends with kids who really didn't have any goals in life, who didn't think about college. All they thought about was, you know, drinking and going out to parties and things like that, which my aunt never let me do anyway. You know, I had to be at home at a specific time. You know, I kind of had hate in my heart because she wouldn't let me hang out with the folks. So, when I got to Parker Gray, when I made the basketball team, there were a lot of kids who had goals. Some of the seniors were ready to go to college. Their goals were at another level. So it started making me think that, you know, maybe I can do some of these things. So, you know, when I became a better basketball player and I contributed, I was one of the impact players. You know, I start thinking about the next level. And had Mr. Thurman not selected me for this

varsity basketball venture, I'm not certain what I would have done to be honest with you.

[00:40:06][123.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:40:07] Mm hmm. And so other than basketball, what were other sports that you did? [00:40:15][7.8]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:40:15] Well, you hit it right on here. You know I was going to start talking about track. [00:40:19][3.5]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:40:20] Maybe. Maybe. Yeah. [laughter] [00:40:20][0.4]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:40:24] I was a three sports person at Parker. I lettered in three sports and I played football. My senior year I was a featured wide receiver. So, I got a lot of balls thrown to me. I never made a touchdown, but I had a couple of 80 yard runs and didn't score. So I enjoyed that. You know, you had to really work hard to be a good football player. And then I made the track team in the 10th grade. So my pole vault career started probably on the playground. Just taking a pole, just running into the ground, jumping off of it. And luckily when I got to Parker Gray, as part of our physical education, the coaches introduced us to the pole vault, and they brought all these old poles out. One of them was metal. One of them was for someone who weighed 200lbs. They had two metal poles. So with those poles, he kind of introduced the students to it, but I was already ahead of them because I already knew how to play on a pole because of my experience on the playground. So this one coach, the first coach that I had on the track program, his name was Robert Atkins. Mr. Atkins saw the potential in me being a vaulter. He knew all the state records. He knew all of the athletes who were coming to the state tournament. He tried to convince our administration to send me to the state track meet as 11th grader. But they didn't bite on it, they weren't familiar with the pole vault. And they didn't think spending money to pay for entry money, and also expenses and all that to go down here for someone who they didn't think would have a chance to win or place. So by my senior year, Mr. Atkins, he left to go to pursue a master's degree at, I think, Tennessee State, someplace like that. And my new track coach, who had no track experience, he was a biology teacher. Biology physics teacher. And he convinced them that I was good enough to go down and do well. And they paid the expenses. They took myself, and I think three other kids, we went to the state tournament and this was a big, big track meet. They had some of the greatest guys. I don't know if you ever heard of Leroy Keyes. Leroy Keyes. He was second in the Heisman running behind O.J. Simpson. He was one of the first African Americans to get a scholarship to Purdue University. But anyway, he was there and he was an all around athlete. He was a long jumper and some other things. But anyway, I was there. I came there and I'll tell you the story about the pole that I had, you know, whenever. But anyway, I arrived at the state track meet, the record was 12ft 2in and it was set by a gentleman the year before. So in the end, you know, I surpassed that. I jumped 12ft 5in to break the record. And that was the only points that our school got at that state meet my senior year. And a story about the pole, told you earlier that they only had a pole that was for someone 200lbs. They had two metal poles, so I could not jump off of those poles. So our athletic director went to the city athletic director to try to get me a pole. And they did. They tried to do it during my eleventh grade, they didn't do it. But but my senior year they were able to give me a fiberglass pole that I could bend. It was a therma-flex pole and it was geared to my weight. So I was able to work with that pole and I was able to clear 12 feet. I went from just clearing nine, eight or nine feet, to clearing 12 feet almost all the time in practice. And my practice facilities were not adequate at all. I jumped in sawdust, a lot of the kids had air air facilities, facilities like the

Cloud nine and all of that. And also the better Vaulters had multiple poles. I only had one pole. So the key in vaulting is if you have multiple poles, when you maximize one pole, that is when you go as high as you can with that pole, then you can jump on another pole that's bigger. And if you are able to bend that pole, it enables you to ascend higher. So I did not have that. But all the other kids had two and three poles. Now, mindful that these poles are very expensive. Today, you know, we just got a supplier of poles in Lake Braddock, and they're \$650 each. So I know at that time they didn't cost \$600, but it might have been over \$100. But for a school where you didn't have a whole lot in a budget for something like that, it would have been difficult. But eventually my athletic director hung in there and he got me that pole and it was very beneficial. Yeah. I got another story I want to tell you about this pole vault. [00:46:19][354.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:46:21] Yeah. What's the story? [00:46:23][1.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:46:24] Well, after I was the state champion in my conference, the Chamber of Commerce in Alexandria selected kids who had outstanding track seasons, and they all went to a major track meet in Winchester, Virginia. At that track meet, John Pannell, who at the time was a world champion pole vaulter, he was the first guy to clear 17 feet. So, they invited him there to put on a demonstration for the kids. So, [clears throat] I went there and I came in second. I came in second to the guy that I told you was probably the best vaulter in the state. He was a white kid. His name was David Cutler. Really good vaulter. I can't take that away from him. But at the end of the meet, you know, we had had luncheon together and we shared stories. And I think about a week later, an article came out in the Alexandria Gazette. In that article, they had all of the white kids pictures in here with the with the J.C. people. You know, they never called me. They never notified me that I was to be a part of that. In the newspaper article, they didn't mention the fact that I set a record as the highest a Parker Gray student had ever jumped. You know, I have that in my scrapbook there. But they never called me. See, they called me to go to the track meet. They picked me up. They picked me up to go to the track meet. And certainly they could have called me to go to the luncheon and to take the picture in the Gazette with the other kids. But they never did. And to be honest with you, I never thought about racism at the time, and I never thought about the racial overtone of that little situation until later years. But it happened. And as I look back, I'm sad that that they didn't think enough for me to invite me to be with the other kids. [00:48:36][131.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:48:39] Yeah, I'm sorry that that happened. Do you have other memories from from pole vaulting? [00:48:47][7.5]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:48:47] From pole vaulting? My senior year, I was very competitive. So they put me in a lot of meets. Some of the meets I did well, some of them I didn't. You know, at American University we had a big meet. I think I came in maybe fifth. If you're a competitive vaulter and if you're in a top five vault, is that's pretty good. You know, so I was always in the top five of all of our meets. So we did it at A.U at Wig field. Where else? [to himself] It was several places. We had one at GW [George Washington University]. So I was always, always there. [00:49:28][41.1]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:49:31] Why do you think you were drawn to pole vaulting? [00:49:33][2.4]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:49:35] What was drawing me to the pole vault? [00:49:35][0.6]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:49:36] Yeah. Like, what led you to really take a deep interest in it? [00:49:38][2.8]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:49:39] Well, you know, during the summer months, you know, you have to explore to find out what, you know, what you like. You know, what would turn you on. Of course, I was always a basketball player, but I had this long pole that, my stepfather at the time, he knew that I was interested in that. So he brought it home for me. So I took it over in a playground and I just ran and planted the pole and jumped off. It was a bamboo pole. And, you know, I said, "you know what? I might be able to do this." And an opportunity never came about until I got to gym class. And the coaches put an emphasis, they had a section of physical education in the 10th grade where they illustrated the pole vault, the discus, the shotput, you know, the hurdles and all of that. So my interest, when they demonstrated how you vault, I could already jump about six or seven feet. So from there, the coach said, "you know what, you could probably do better. You know, if you spend a little bit more time with it. And this is what we have." When I started vaulting, the box where you plant your pole, they hadn't used it in so long that it had deteriorated. So, [coughs]excuse me. What I did, I dug it up and asked them to order one. So they did, they ordered a box. The box was where you plant the pole, in the box, ok? So, I replaced the deteriorated one with the regular box. And also they had concrete platforms on this side and they had pole vault standards. They had the standards that they hadn't used in years. And also they had a bar that you could jump off of. Nowadays at Braddock, we have what's called a bungee. So you can jump off that and you can land on it and it won't break. But with that aluminum pole, you try to land on an aluminum pole from 12 feet. [laughs] And it was really difficult. But that's kind of how I got into it. [00:51:54][135.3]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:51:56] Yeah. Are there any memories, other memories from high school or from your sports that I haven't asked you about that you want to share? [00:52:02][6.1]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:52:07] I told you, I started on the football team. I was one of the impact players and on the basketball team. In my junior year and in my senior year, I was an impact player on the basketball team.[coughs] I started my junior year, and the majority of my senior year I started on the basketball team. And those were good memories. And also we had so many great players at Parker Gray that you didn't really get to illustrate your talents because, you know, you had to share the ball with a lot of players. And also, when you run kind of like in a discipline offense, you don't get to school. It's not like a freelance offense where you just run up and down the court and shoot, you know, run and shoot type offense. We didn't have that at Parker Gray. So when I competed as a senior, I felt that I could go farther. I didn't have an idea that if I made some of these basketball teams, that I could get scholarships. So each institution that I went to the first semester I had to pay for, but once I made the basketball team, the school would pay for the rest. So that's how that happened. But again, at Parker Gray, you know, in football, I'm kind of rambling now, but football, I did have an 80 yard run that was, I guess, the highlight of my football career. And I also kicked extra points. And I do remember kicking one extra point and then they decided to start running for the extra points. [00:53:54][107.5]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:53:57] What year did you graduate from Parker Gray? [00:54:00][2.7]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:54:00] I graduated in 1965. [00:54:01][0.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:54:03] What happens then? [00:54:04][1.0]



**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:54:06] Well, the summer of 1965, I had a nice little job. And you probably already know about Helen Day. Ms. Helen Day lived three doors from me. And once I graduated, Miss Day had many conferences with me, and she told me in so many words that, "you have the potential do a lot more than you're doing right now. So, I would suggest going to college." She introduced me to this man. His name was Robert Stufflebeem. He was a part of the school board or something like that. But anyway, he took an interest in me and he kind of encouraged me to go to college. So at that time, the Northern Virginia Community College opened up in Bailey's crossroad. So I turned in my transcripts and my application, so forth, and I got accepted there. So in my 1966 year, I went there and they had a basketball team. So again, the first semester I paid for, but next semester I didn't have to pay. But I was drafted because you had to be in the top 25% of your class, I believe, to not be drafted. So I was drafted into the military from that. But again, my senior year, when I graduated, you know, I had a job and eventually I prepared myself for college. [00:55:44][98.4]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:55:47] Walk us through like that the day you found out you were drafted. [00:55:50][3.2]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:55:52] Oh, well, you know, normally the draft, you know, is a buildup. You know, you have one classification, which is a school classification, and the next one is your eligibility for the draft. So when I got drafted, I was disappointed because I wanted to continue on in college. I'd grown to like college and after a few courses, I saw that I could do the work. And also I thought I had a future in college. But the disappointment was that I got drafted, and that had to be put on hold until I served this two years I got in the draft. You have to take aptitude tests when you go into any of the military services. And apparently, I did real well on the aptitude test because I got a really good job. I didn't have to go to the infantry. [00:56:51][58.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:56:53] So where did you end up? [00:56:55][2.0]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:56:56] You mean where was I stationed? [00:56:56][0.0]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:57:00] You didn't end up in the infantry. [00:57:00][0.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:57:01] No, I was in artillery. I was in artillery. [00:57:03][2.1]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:57:05] Gotcha. So once your drafted you got into the artillery. What happens next? [00:57:15][9.7]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:57:17] OK. I went to basic training in Fort Jackson, South Carolina. After Fort Jackson, it's traditional in the military to go to an IT school, that is a school for different training, like the infantry people they go to where they train infantry soldiers. And I went to an artillery school. I went to Aberdeen Proving Ground. At Aberdeen Proving Ground they train soldiers for different things, you know, And one of the things that they trained me for was to be an artillery mechanic. I actually started training on tanks. But as you know, with the terrain in Vietnam, tanks were not, you know, used very often. So they trained me how to repair and pull maintenance on guns, the various guns. So, the guns that they trained me on was the 105 Howitzer, 15517510-- I think it's 108-- recoilless rifle. And in my shop they had all of the weapons that you used in Vietnam. And it was really a good job because the infantry, you know, they they loved us because

we would keep them supplied with weapons. And when they would lose weapons, we would resupply them. I was in Hawaii for a year. And when we came from Hawaii to Vietnam, we brought Connex. Those big units filled with replacement weapons. And so when we when we got to Vietnam, I just performed the job that they had trained me for, you know, and it was easy, but it was something that the various units enjoyed because you may recall in Vietnam there were situations where a lot of artillery was falling on friendly troops, you know. So, my job was to keep the artillery pieces, you know, keep them up to date. And also, you know, working at full, you know, full capacity. [00:59:42][145.1]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [00:59:44] How did you feel about going to Vietnam? [00:59:45][1.1]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [00:59:46] I did not want to go. You always think about the negative when you go to a place where some of the guys that you played basketball for have gone there and they will kill you. [unintelligible] It was several guys from our high school that I was real good friends with. One guy was actually on the basketball team with me when I went there. He was there for two weeks and he was killed. So certainly, I didn't really want to go. I always thought about the worst. [01:00:12][26.5]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:00:15] What were your memories there? [01:00:16][1.6]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:00:17] In Vietnam? [01:00:17][0.2]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:00:18] Yeah. [01:00:18][0.0]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:00:19] Oh, [sighs] in Vietnam, it was very nice people that I met. Very, very good guys who had interests. But I don't know if they had the same interests as me, because my thing was I wanted to get out of the military and go back to college. Now, these guys, you know, they would think about jobs and they would think about getting married and these other things. You know, that wasn't my idea, but I just wanted to be the best that I could be. And in that position and I think I was, you know. I'm sure you heard of the Mai Lai massacre. We supplied that unit with their weapons. And I actually met with Lieutenant Calley, Captain Medina and Colonel Henderson. These were the people that were responsible for the Mai Lai massacre. I Actually met with them earlier because we had to explain to these units the service that we were going to provide once we got into the country. So I was there for that meeting. [01:01:23][63.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:01:24] What's your memory of that meeting? [01:01:26][1.5]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:01:27] That meeting was a typical meeting. You just asked the armament. You know, how far, where would you be located and what type of service will you be able to provide for us, for my unit. And we had individuals who could provide that information. [01:01:45][18.7]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:01:50] Are there any other memories from Vietnam that I haven't asked you about? [01:01:52][2.3]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:01:58] Vietnam was hot. [laughs] It was really hot. I had never experienced weather like that. And the temperatures would hover around 110 degrees at 12:00 every

day. And we had monsoon season where it rained a lot and we had no drainage system. So you had to slosh around in mud all the time. Yeah, and I had I made friends there that, you know, I don't think we ever contacted each other after we left the military. I'm not certain how they made out. And I was looking forward to getting out. Also, they would fly me by helicopter to a site where I would pull maintenance on a gun. When they did that, I didn't have to do the little meaningless jobs at the base camp, like pull guard duty or KP [kitchen police or kitchen patrol] or I can't say it on this, but, you know, we had to do some other things that were not real nice. So you didn't have to do those things when you were out actually working your job. [01:03:13][75.4]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:03:16] What did you miss the most about home? [01:03:20][3.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:03:21] Oh, my mother, my aunt, my family, my friends. Surely missed them. My girlfriend at the time. I had a girlfriend. [01:03:31][10.0]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:03:34] And so, really quick, did your mom ever moved to Alexandria? [01:03:39][5.3]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:03:40] My biological mother? Yeah, she did. [01:03:42][2.0]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:03:43] She did. So when was that? [01:03:44][1.7]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:03:45] Oh, it was, gee whiz, it was really late. And I guess we moved there in 60. She probably came up there in the eighties. [01:03:54][8.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:03:55] Okay. [01:03:55][0.0]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:03:56] To help take care of my aunt, who was the beautician. Her health had failed, so she came up to help. [01:04:05][8.5]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:04:07] So how many years where you in Vietnam total? Or just in the military? [01:04:13][6.1]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:04:14] I was in I was in the military for 11 months. [Francesco begins to ask next question] Oh, I'm sorry. 23 months. [01:04:25][11.2]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:04:26] Okay. [01:04:26][0.0]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:04:27] 23 months. [01:04:27][0.6]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:04:28] So tell us, what was it like to come back home from combat? [01:04:32][3.6]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:04:32] Oh, it was joyous. It was joyous to come back home to see all your family and friends, also to pursue your college education. So, you had a lot of choices. And you also had the GI Bill to help you. So you had all the all the features to select an occupation. And at that time, I did. When I work part time while going to college, I determined that sales was what I wanted to wanted to do. I wanted to be in sales. [01:05:11][38.6]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:05:12] So tell us, how did you use the GI Bill? [01:05:16][4.4]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:05:17] I used it for for my education, to pay the tuition. [01:05:20][2.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:05:20] Where did you go? [01:05:21][0.4]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:05:22] The first place I went was Northern Virginia Community College. To finish what I started before I went in the military. And after Northern Virginia Community College, I determined that I needed a four year degree. So, Southeastern University had a curriculum that I could use to transfer the majority of my credits that I earned at Northern Virginia Community College. And they also had a basketball team. [01:05:51][29.2]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:05:54] And so what did you end up graduating with there? [01:05:59][4.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:05:59] I graduated from Southeastern University with a Bachelor of Science, Business Administration. And later I worked as a graduate assistant on the basketball team. Mm hmm. And I, you know, I was able to get a master's degree. [01:06:15][15.6]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:06:18] What was your master's degree? [01:06:19][1.4]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:06:19] My master's was in business and public administration. [01:06:22][2.9]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:06:25] When did you end up meeting your wife? [01:06:29][3.4]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:06:30] My wife? I met her at church. I met her at church. And 46 years later, I'm still going to that same church. [01:06:38][8.9]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:06:41] Yes. Tell us about the day that you met her at the church. [01:06:45][4.1]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:06:46] Well, my mother was really, you know, anchored in his church. He had been in his church a long time. So she knew everyone. She knew all the families. [01:06:58][11.5]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:06:58] What was the church? [01:06:58][0.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:06:59] Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church. She knew all of the families. And my wife came and she joined church. So when she walked down the aisle to join church, bing [emphasizes the sound, chuckles] a light went off and I said, "I got to meet her," you know. So, I had my mother to do research. And so she found out who she was and where she lived and her family and all of that. So, a couple of Sundays later, I just accidentally bumped into her in church. And so when I spoke with her, see, I had my Omega Psi Phi pin on and she was in she's a A.K.A, Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. So, she thought that I graduated from her school, which she graduated from North Carolina A&T University. So, from that moment, we struck up a conversation. We determined that, you know, why don't we just have a meal together? Let's do that. Nothing more interesting than that, just have a meal. So we decided to go bike riding, and we both

had bikes. We went down to Mount Vernon, so we rode all the way down to George Washington, his house, from home, from the parkway, you know. I don't know if you're familiar with the parkway. So we rode because they had a bike trail down there. So we rode all the way down there. From there, you know, we started seeing each other on a regular basis. And after about maybe a year and a half or two years, we just decided getting married would be the right thing. [01:08:55][115.6]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:08:57] And so when did you end up getting married? [01:08:58][1.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:08:59] We got married on March 5th, 1976. [01:09:03][4.0]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:09:05] And so during this time you were living in Alexandria? Were you living with your aunt? [01:09:10][5.6]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:09:11] No, no, no. I had moved away. I had moved away. I was living by myself because I had a job. I lived in the Barcroft area. And I had a job, I had a job with Kellogg, you know, the cereal company. So that was my first major job with Kellogg right out of college. And so I was working there. So I had my own place. And that's kind of how we met. And she had her own place. [01:09:39][27.7]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:09:46] Can you describe the day you got married? [01:09:48][1.6]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:09:49] It was a happy occasion. Very happy occasion. My best friend was my best man. My pastor of over ten years or so presided over the wedding. I had all of my family, my biological mother, my aunt, my grandmother, all of those people came to our wedding. My sisters, all of my sisters were there. So, it was a grand occasion. [01:10:13][24.4]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:10:17] What are some of your favorite memories that you share with your wife? [01:10:20][3.7]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:10:22] Well, when we first got married, the one thing that she did that I never did, and that was going on vacations. So she liked traveling. She had already, you know, gone to like the Bahamas and places like that, which I never did. But we started doing that and I liked the idea. So, our first vacation together was a trip to California and Las Vegas. So it was, you know, maybe like ten days to two weeks. We traveled and we visited all these various landmarks all the way, you know, through California, Los Angeles, San Francisco and L.A. And that was our first one. But the last two, all the [unintelligible]. We'd gone to so many places in the Caribbean and Hawaii and different places. [01:11:24][61.4]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:11:25] And can you describe what it was like having your daughter? [01:11:36][10.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:11:37] We adopted. [01:11:37][0.5]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:11:39] You adopted your daughter. Can you describe her? [01:11:43][3.6]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:11:48] We adopted her at, I think she was six weeks old. And, you know, we always did want a child. You know, we weren't able to have have our child on our own. So, this was a godsend for us. We loved this child. We did everything possible, you know, as any parent would do for a young child. And she grew into a very, very beautiful girl, lady. And we are very proud of her to this day. You know, we had some, you know, ups and downs. I mean, if you have teenagers, you know, what you go through. And we probably went through some of those harsh days as teenagers, you know. Respectfully disagree and with each other and that type thing. [01:12:39][51.4]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:12:41] What are some of your favorite memories as a father with her? [01:12:44][3.1]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:12:44] As a father, seeing her walk across the stage at the University of South Carolina at Buford to get a bachelor's degree and then having her get a master's degree subsequently. Yeah. [01:13:00][16.2]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:13:02] That's great. [01:13:02][0.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:13:03] Well, you know, of course, having children, you know, that was important. That was, you know, very fond memories of her with the children. And we all love all of them. [01:13:14][11.5]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:13:15] You're your grandchildren? And how many grandchildren? [01:13:18][3.4]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:13:19] We have three grandchildren. 24, 14 and 6. [01:13:23][4.0]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:13:24] Okay. So really quick, you talked about working at Kellogg. Can you give us an overview of where you've worked? [01:13:33][8.7]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:13:39] What I did was, because of a good friend of mine, he showed me how to send out resumes. At the time, it was advantageous to African-Americans to put their picture on their on the resumes. So I had a lot of offers. I got a lot of offers on various companies like Xerox. And but, you know, I didn't want that. I wanted to I wanted the food industry. So, I got a job with Kellogg. And the amount of money that I was making was incredibly low. But you got a company car, you had an expense account. So, those were attractions that I enjoyed. I was also offered promotions with Kellogg, but I didn't take them because you would have to move. In the sales industry you have to move a lot in order to take advantage of where the opportunities are. But I did not want to relocate. And if you don't relocate, your career probably stymied, you probably not going to, you know, move up any any higher. And but with Kellogg, I had local accounts, and that made it very easy for me to drive around and have a home life and also be able to work. And also, I worked as a graduate assistant while I worked for Kellogg. [01:15:08][88.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:15:11] OK. And so how long did you work at Kellogg? [01:15:11][0.7]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:15:13] I was with Kellogg about seven years. [01:15:14][1.3]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:15:15] Okay. And then where were you? [01:15:17][2.7]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:15:17] Then I worked for a food broker for about another six years. The difference between a food broker or a manufactured job is a food broker represents manufacturers. So with the food broker we represented about about 15 different major companies like Ocean Spray, lipton, the company that made hefty bags, you know, that type of thing. But I worked with them for about six years, and then the opportunity came for me because I knew someone in the industry. There was a job opening there, General Mills. So, I applied for that job and I was able to get the job with General Mills, and I spent 24 years with General Mills. [01:16:08][50.6]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:16:10] So, do you have any memory tht stands out from your career that you want to share? [01:16:10][0.2]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:16:16] Yeah. I was able to ascend to a regional sales manager without moving. That was one thing. So I stayed local all the time. My headquarters was in my house. The other thing that happened was I got to go to so many beautiful places as being, you know, a manager, you know. Napa Valley, Phoenix, you know, Arizona, Camelback. All these different places that I got to go as a manager. And probably one of the main accomplishments I had as a manager, I was selected along with another manager. We developed a blueprint for actually how to sell to our customers, and that was what everyone used to sell. [01:17:14][57.9]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:17:17] That's great. So I have some closing questions. But before I go to those, is there anything I haven't asked you that you want to share? [01:17:24][7.1]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:17:28] I had a couple of things down here but, but they were things that maybe they're not as relevant. [01:17:34][5.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:17:35] You're welcome to share if you want. [01:17:37][1.7]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:17:40] Well, you know, I was going to say that in my family, we are proud of the fact that my daughter, my wife and I, we all have master's degrees, which is something that we're very proud of. And also, my wife was one of the recognized teachers in the area. In 1990 she won the Agnes Mei Award, which is the outstanding teacher for that year. [01:18:10][29.7]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:18:10] What's her name again? [01:18:12][1.7]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:18:13] Brenda. Brenda Lamberson Sias. [01:18:14][1.5]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:18:15] Where did she teach? [01:18:17][1.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:18:17] She taught at Mount Vernon Elementary School and also George Washington Middle School. She taught there. And the other thing I was going to tell you, I'm sure you familiar with the situation that happened in Rolling Fork, Mississippi. The tornado devastated that city. My cousin is the mayor of that city. So he was the one that welcomed the president, the governor and a congressman to Rolling Fork. And they visited the devastation there. So that was one of the things I wanted to share with you. And also, I visited 39 of the 50 states. Might not be important to anybody but me. I'm a member of the Omega Psi Phi fraternity for 52 years. And so what else? And my brother in law is depicted Remember the Titans. [01:19:23][65.3]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:19:26] Which character? [01:19:26][0.8]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:19:27] He was the Rev. [01:19:27][0.0]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:19:30] Great. I'm gonna have some closing questions. What were the most important lessons you've learned in life? [01:19:37][6.7]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:19:38] Well, first of all, I learned to listen. You know, I'm an honest person. I always wanted to be the best that I could be. You know, I didn't want to cut any corners. You know, whatever it took to be the best, honestly, then I did. [01:20:04][25.8]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:20:07] And if you could hold on to the memory forever from your life, what what would it be? [01:20:11][4.3]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:20:15] I would say my wife, meeting my wife. You know that my wife is my best friend. There's no one in this world that I trust more than my wife. And she will give me nothing but honest opinions, you know, when I need support. [01:20:36][21.1]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:20:39] What do you hope the future holds for your daughter? [01:20:43][3.7]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:20:44] Well, my daughter is strong willed. She's very talented, smart. And, you know, sky's the limit. You know, whatever she decides, she's going to be the best at it because she does think about things. She doesn't just go off and jump into things that she doesn't have a grasp on. And she's very good at whatever she does. [01:21:10][25.3]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:21:11] What about for your grandchildren? What do you hope for their future? [01:21:13][2.0]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:21:14] My grandson, the 24 year old, he's finding himself. You know, he tried college. He didn't like it. And right now, he's trying to find himself, you know. So, we're hopeful that he'll do the same thing as his mother because she didn't really finish college right after high school. You know, she took a couple of years for her to decide what she needed. And then once she discovered what she needed, then she developed a plan. And I'm hopeful that he'll do the same thing. And the other two are very young. The 14 year old, he's starting to develop an interest in college. I think they're going to start visiting college at the age of 14. The 6 year old, you know, she has some years to go before she starts thinking of anything serious. But I'm very proud of all three of them. [01:22:13][59.1]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:22:14] Great. And how would you like to be remembered? [01:22:17][2.4]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:22:18] I would like to be remembered as strong willed, honest. A person who was able to set goals and pursue them in an efficient way. And also I want to be recognize as one of the best athletes in the city of Alexandria. Hopefully someday I will be listed in that Hall of Fame in Alexandria. [01:22:48][29.9]



**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:22:52] That's great. Well, Mr Sias I want to thank you for speaking with me today. [01:22:55][3.5]

**Charles Earl Sias:** [01:22:56] Well, you're welcome. [01:22:56][0.3]

**Francesco de Salvatore:** [01:22:57] It was great. It was great. [01:22:57][0.0]

[4648.2]