

John Patton

The Roberson Project on Slavery, Race, and Reconciliation

April 18, 2019

[00:00:01.220] - Dr. Woody Register

Okay. Good. So this is- I'm in Mount Sinai Missionary Baptist Church in Cowan Tennessee.

[00:00:13.400] - Pastor John Patton

That's correct.

[00:00:14.860] - Dr. Woody Register

And it is April 18, 2019. This is Woody Register, and I'm with Pastor John Patton. So. John, I'm going to- I thought today we would kind of start at your beginning a little bit and have you tell your story of your childhood and your parents and your family growing up and then allow the conversation to develop from there. Why don't you introduce yourself and tell me when and where you were born?

[00:00:56.560] - Pastor John Patton

My name is John Patton Junior, named after my father who was John Sr., who was born and raised in Decherd, Tennessee. His father, his name was Porter Patton. My mother's name is Sarah Patton. Her maiden name is Sarah Fuqua. Until she married my father. My dad has passed. My mother's still living. She's 82 years old. She lives here in Winchester. She's my next door neighbor, actually. And my memories as a child growing up in Sewanee-- I think I, I was born in Winchester. I'm not sure when we actually made residence in Sewanee. But my earliest recollection of being there was that's probably third grade, when I could remember most of the activities and what I can recall of my early childhood. It's probably in the third grade or so. But Sewanee was a unique place to live, a unique place to grow up. I started out in the Black public school in Sewanee, and I think it was around the third grade when we started going to the Sewanee Public School. And ever since then, it was a pleasant experience for me, being with different people. We were all accepted well, we didn't have the same problems that the kids had in Cowan, in Winchester, and this area. Our transition was smooth, easy. Teachers were fair at that time. If there was any partiality, I wasn't mature enough to see it. From there- I, the elementary school, from there, I went to South Junior High here in Cowan and from South Junior High, high school years I did at the Sewanee Academy and graduated there from 1976. That was an experience all in itself. But prior to going to high school, being raised up as a Black kid here in the South, being raised up basically on the campus of the University of the South. The proximity of any place that you wanted to go to was no more than 15 minutes to walk. So we actually lived right in the back door of the University. My dad worked there as a custodian. My mom was a maid. They made the best of that. They made the best for their kids. We were as kids, afforded some opportunities that most black kids did not, were not privy to. And so again, not being mature enough to understand the blessings that that I had under the circumstances of that time,

we're talking about the '60s, all of our neighbors. I think we all probably had the same opportunities. My older brother, he went to the Sewanee Military Academy when it was military.

[00:05:48.670] - Dr. Woody Register

His name?

[00:05:50.240] - Pastor John Patton

His name is Jeff. My sister, Kathy, who is a couple of years younger to me. She also went to the Academy with me. Both my sisters, Evelyn, she's my youngest sister. She went to the Academy, and she still lives in Sewanee. And I think most people in Sewanee probably know her by name now.

[00:06:21.700] - Dr. Woody Register

And your other sister's name again?

[00:06:23.930] - Pastor John Patton

Kathy.

[00:06:25.000] - Pastor John Patton

With a C?

[00:06:25.580] - Dr. Woody Register

K. I want to talk more about this, but I mean, can we go back to where you started a little bit? Your mother, Sarah Fuqua. How do you spell her last, maiden name

[00:06:44.100] - Pastor John Patton

F-U-Q-U-A.

[00:06:46.350] - Dr. Woody Register

That's what I thought. Tell me, what do you remember her about her or what do you know about her family

[00:06:57.370] - Pastor John Patton

Well they came from- I think it's Rogersville. I'm not sure. I think. Rogersville, Alabama. That's where her family came from. And they lived here in Cowan for years. And I just recently found that out. Now, my

mom is as a child, they grew up here. And she was as she talked, and we talked about her past, she talked a lot about her granddad. She called him Papa. She never really ever called his name, but he was a sharecropper. And they grew up doing a lot of sharecropping. And back then, they would turn the schools out in the summer so that they would have to work. And she would always tell me about these stories. And, and when you look at my mom now, she the way she dresses in the way that she carries herself, I always kid her about. I told her that, well, I said, I know you didn't have have on boots and you didn't have a hoe over your shoulders. She said, yes, I did. I said, no, I said you probably went out in the fields with white gloves on and high heels. And with her, I always make a joke of that. She assured me that that wasn't the case. But she said that when she had to pick cotton, her brothers and sisters would have to make a quota for her. But she would tell us about that. And she said they never went hungry. And she said that her Papa, I think, probably made it to the third or fourth grade. But she said he was a whizz at math. She said there wasn't a problem that he couldn't solve. And so her childhood, I think it was, give me a minute- Think it was nine, nine kids. And so that's pretty much all I know about that side. My dad's side. I don't know much about his side at all. He never talked that much about it. He had a rough childhood coming up, so he didn't talk a lot. And he worked a lot. He didn't have a lot of patience. He was a good man, but he didn't talk a lot about his past. He worked on up until he just couldn't work anymore. And he passed away. I think it's been now six to seven years, but he worked at the University all of that time.

[00:10:04.820] - Dr. Woody Register

When you say he had a rough childhood-

[00:10:09.070] - Pastor John Patton

Mom would tell me a few things about the relationship with how he was raised, his father was a strict man. And he and his brother, his younger brother, they were responsible for the chores around the house when my granddad was working, and he was a strict disciplinarian. And so I always wondered why he was so sharp and reserved really on talking a lot about his side of the family. And as I grew older and got bits and pieces, I could kind of understand. But we never talked about it. And I think the reason his work ethic was the way it was. I think it was an escape. That's what he knew. That's what he was taught to do. And that's what he did all his life. And he expected the same out of his kids.

[00:11:22.620] - Dr. Woody Register

A source of pride for him.

[00:11:24.640] - Pastor John Patton

Yeah, I think it's a source of pride and also a way to stay focused. He was an outdoorsman he loved to hunt and fish. His dad did the same. He loved to hunt and fish. I've heard stories about how good a marksman he was, and he loved to fish my dad did. He followed in the footsteps, and that was one of his

ways, I guess, of an escape. But he never talked a lot about, you know, how he was treated, his childhood. So it was just basically, you looked at him, you followed him what he expected out of you. You didn't question it. You just did it. And I think I picked up a lot of those traits myself, but at the same time, I tried not to be that way. And that which you hate, that is what you do. So I catch myself a lot, having to apologize and explain myself to people, because sometimes the way I sound when I talk, it comes out sharp. I don't mean any harm, but you just pick up traits that, you know, living around somebody and you're not aware of. But now I'm aware of some of those things.

[00:12:52.290] - Dr. Woody Register

Yes. I hear my father's voice coming out of my mouth all the time, and it shocks me.

[00:12:59.390] - Pastor John Patton

Yeah.

[00:13:01.040] - Dr. Woody Register

Yes, I was determined-

[00:13:02.880] - Pastor John Patton

Not to.

[00:13:04.340] - Dr. Woody Register

Not to too much.

[00:13:05.440] - Pastor John Patton

And I was determined that a lot of the things that he did and the way he did them. And the way he set 'em, I made a vow that I wouldn't. But I find myself I'm almost a spittin' image. And most people, that's what they call me. They call me, my kids, is they call me Papa John, My wife, she calls me Papa John. My Mama, calls me Papa John because of my mannerisms.

[00:13:39.780] - Dr. Woody Register

And Papa John was what they called John Sr.

[00:13:43.450] - Pastor John Patton

John Sr. His grandkids gave him that name. And so it just stuck. And so when they want to get at me, they called me Papa John.

[00:13:53.250] - Dr. Woody Register

That knocks you off your-

[00:13:56.150] - Pastor John Patton

they say well you act just like him.

[00:14:07.410] - Dr. Woody Register

So to your recollection is through the second grade you lived in the Valley in Winchester?

[00:14:12.060] - Pastor John Patton

Probably, that's the best of my recollection.

[00:14:15.540] - Dr. Woody Register

What do you remember about those years in Winchester?

[00:14:19.530] - Pastor John Patton

It was not much. It was back and forth from Sewanee to Winchester. My grandmother lived in Winchester. My dad, we moved to Sewanee once he landed a job there, if you know where Kennerly Road is, it's the house right there on Kennerly Road. The brick house on Kennerly Road is where I grew up. And my grandmother, she also did housework. She worked for people called the Goodsteins, and she worked for them for years. And so she commuted back and forth from Winchester to Sewanee and worked for them, I don't know, six, seven hours a day. I know five days a week, 'cause I know when I was old enough to get my license. Well, I was actually driving her back and forth before I got my license from Sewanee to Winchester. She would catch a ride up with one of the guys that worked with my dad as a custodian for the University. So sometimes she didn't have the patience to wait. So she would entice me to drive her home. She never drove. I don't even think she knew how to drive.

[00:15:41.540] - Dr. Woody Register

And your grandmother's name was-

[00:15:43.880] - Pastor John Patton

Emma Hill. And she was again not realizing I'm not mature enough to understand who she was. You just know your family as your family. And she was doing a great work, and I didn't realize it. I think she was the President of the NAACP, this chapter here in Winchester Franklin County County area and she used

to carry on and raise funds, do fundraisers, bake, cakes and stuff and where the bookstore is in Sewanee. The old bookstore, used to call it the supply store, we would set up there. And she would set up tables and booths and sell baked goods and- to the students and stuff. And she raised money for that cause. She traveled all over the country and never drove one mile. She's been more places than most people that I knew that could drive for that time. And she did a great work. But like I said, I was not mature enough to understand. Because like I said, growing up in Sewanee, the white community, the Goodsteins, especially, I think they were Jewish people, they were part of the organization too. And so they made a great contribution to her efforts. And the University was gracious enough to let her and a colleague set up and do what they had to do to raise funds. And for the most part, I think indirectly at that time, I think the students there got a little education of what it was all about. The community got a little education of what it was all about. But the people down in the Valley in Winchester really paid more attention to it than I really did, because like I said, I didn't have to endure some of the hardships and some of the stuff that the people in the Valley had to see and had to endure. I never saw a 'whites only' sign. And I talked to my wife now who's from Decherd, her name is Iris. She shows me some of the landmarks and some of the buildings that when she was a kid that they arrived by and, you know, had 'whites only,' and they saw the separate water fountains and stuff like that. I didn't have to deal with that growing up in Sewanee. And so when you drive less than 14 miles from where you grew up and it's like night and day when you start telling your experiences, it takes a little time for it to sink in. But it was surreal when you hear it. But it's still a hurtful part of their lives. And when I sit down and talk to my wife, it's always a big joke, well you grew up in Sewanee. Well, big deal. Yeah, I did grow up in Sewanee.

[00:19:23.150] - Dr. Woody Register

What do you know?

[00:19:24.480] - Pastor John Patton

It's like, what do you know? I did get off the mountain on it. I did come down, but I didn't know all of the spots that they had to stay away from. The movie theater, the movie theater here on the square in Winchester. All the black kids had to sit up in the balcony. And all the white kids, had to- they had the privilege to sit down in the bottom section. But when you look back on it, the black kids had a better vantage point because they're sitting in the balcony. But it was just stuff like that. And you hear these stories all the time growing up in Sewanee myself, like I said, I was afforded a lot of opportunities. Some of the things that- the outings. I remember my first time ice skating when we were in grade school on up until we all graduated in the weather chain stuff when we were younger, you know, we used to get feet of snow. A foot of snow was light and all of the hills that are up there on those streets, we used to sled and the whole community would come together-- blacks, whites. And we would all just go out and sled down the Hills. And we would do dangerous stuff, like two people on the sled at one time and those sleds were-- by the time you get to the bottom of the Hill, we could probably be doing 30 mph. We would do some dangerous stuff. Some of us got broke up from some of the accidents and stuff like that. But it was a community affair. It wasn't the blacks was over here and the whites was over here. We all just-- we did it. When we went to the movie theater, we could sit where we wanted to. You pay to get a ticket, you went

in. The building that they called a Union, you know, we went in and that's where the students would go in and purchase burgers and fries and stuff like that. It was right up stairs from the theater. And we could go in and in the wintertime, when we were skating and sledding, it was a place to get warm. And if we were fortunate enough to have a little money in our pocket about plate of French fries or maybe a French Fries, drink, and a burger. And, you know, the students would be right beside us. And when you were young like that, I always thought that the students were a lot older than what they were. And then as I grew up and start understanding, you know, they like, only, like, two years, you know, two or the three years older than we were. But-

[00:22:31.100] - Dr. Woody Register

I want to ask you more about that because you came of age after desegregation, really. By the time you're six, seven, eight years old, you've kind of past the tipping point of the Civil Rights Act and Desegregation in Sewanee. And- which is, I think, a really important time that's when the first black students entered the College, with a lot of trouble, but, but still the color line was broken in the College, you know, much later than the school of Theology.

[00:23:21.300] - Pastor John Patton

Um, I mean, just to tell you a story about the the movie theater. Somebody was telling me recently that they saw the plans for the construction of the movie theater. It's in the 1930s when they added it to the Union building, and it's clearly marked off 'colored section.' And so- and I'm wondering to what degree that formality was really enforced in practice.

[00:23:58.780] - Pastor John Patton

In my time, it wasn't. You went in, you paid for your ticket and you could sit in anywhere you wanted. As I got older, as a teenager, my junior high years and my early, the early part of my high school years, you know, you made friends with some of the students that were there, you know, like I say, the age difference wasn't that big of a gap. And, you know, we made friends with some. And wherever we went, there was no enforcement of these, these rules that were supposed to be enforced. Now, like I say, some of the local whites, they weren't pleased with it, but it wasn't anything that they could do. I think as I look back, I think they felt like their hands were tied, and I think that they felt like they were being discriminated against. I think the fight in Sewanee, it was not so much that the black people were struggling for a place, their rightful place, even though that stuff was hidden. Like I say, I'm looking at it from an immature standpoint. Now I can look at it now and go back and find some faults. But the story that I'm telling now, it was from an immature- from a kids- from a a child's eye, the innocence, you know, of a young child growing up. But I think it was more of a struggle for the local white people than it was for us as black people. Because if you look back at the history to be able to come and find a job that would give you some type of dignity, which a lot of people would snub their nose up at. But it was a job. It was a way to support your family. It was something that would keep your mind off of my dad, you know, a way to to keep his mind off what he saw and the way he had to grow up and the way his dad grew up, my mom

being the same way. These were jobs that people would call menial jobs, but, you know, that's what they did. And it afforded us as kids the opportunities to see things and do things that a lot of people, black people, didn't get to do. And I think because of the number of Blacks that work there, I think some of the white people did not- the local white people. I'm not talking about the professors and stuff like that. I'm talking about the show we rode Bob Towns and the surrounding places in Sewanee. They had a different outlook. Their belief system was kinda different, and I think they feel, they felt inferior. Not- I think the blame was directed towards just us Blacks. But I think at the same time, the way that things were goin' there, they felt inferior because of the policies of the University, because they did hire so many black people. And I think some of 'em felt like, well, they didn't get a job because we got preferential treatment. And so as time went by and I started doing a little research and looking back, it wasn't so much that we were fighting for a spot in that particular space in Sewanee. I think it was more than the white people were trying to find a spot because they didn't understand. And they they didn't see, like, for black people, that we were not supposed to have those types of jobs. And why do they have the jobs and we don't? And I think their resentment was towards the establishment, the campus establishment rather than with us. But when any fight starts, you got to find somebody else to blame. You can't fight the University. So what do you do? You fight somebody else. And so it was easier for them to to take out the resentments on us. But like I say, every day, it was a fight. We went to school together to fight. We left school fighting. We could get up the next day and we did the same thing. Recess was a fight. But it was like, well this is my domain, this is where we live. You come from across the trite, you came from Sherwood Road, you know, you come from Jump Off, your ideology is not the same as here. Where are you gonna run us to? We're going to hold our ground, so bring it on. And that's the way it was. But as far as being on campus and stuff like that, it was peaceful, but it just became a way of life and it was fun, you know, where are you going to run us to? What are you going to do? You know, so bring it on you, coming on our turf.

[00:29:47.840] - Dr. Woody Register

Do you remember any specific incidents of those conflicts with you and your friends?

[00:29:55.360] - Pastor John Patton

We had some ugly conflicts. I had a friend and one of the guys, I won't call their name. They went through one of the glass windows.

[00:30:05.870] - Dr. Woody Register

One of the glass windows where?

[00:30:08.160] - Pastor John Patton

At the Union, the huge glass. I mean, it was those kinds of ruckuses. I mean, throwing rocks, bottles, stuff like that. Another incident with another one of the guys that I grew up with, is one of the white guys. He was big guy. He was a bully. And they got into it. And I think the white guy got the best of my friend. And

my friend went home, put on a overcoat and had some type of bottle in it and came back and just cracked 'em over the head. I mean, it was intense at times. There's a lot of rock throwin', a lot of talking back and forth, and a lot of dares, you know, but we held our ground. You know, because this is where we live, you know. So, that was- that was how we had to survive.

[00:31:17.070] - Dr. Woody Register

So you didn't appeal to your parents, you didn't appeal to the the University leadership to look out for you?

[00:31:25.640] - Pastor John Patton

No, this was our ground. It was like a battle. You know, this is where I live. You come in on my side of town, that campus part, we live, the proximity of where we lived as black folk, it was almost like living on the campus, you know, it is the campus and that's where we live. And that's where we play. That's where we slept. That's what we ate. That's where we had our fun. But you always have this- when you talk about Blacks and whites. When you talk about, you still hear this word today, the black people live in the bottom, you know, and you could be on a hill. But that was a phrase that they used to say that you were a lower species. So it didn't matter if you lived on top of Mount Everest. If you lived in a black neighborhood, you lived in the bottom. And I always tried to figure that out as a young kid, because on Willie Six street, it's right, the elevation is the same as Otey Parish. The elevation is the same as the Sewanee Public School, but they called that the bottom. But you are actually right there on the campus.

[00:32:48.770] - Dr. Woody Register

So this confused you, you were puzzling with this as a child.

[00:32:52.900] - Pastor John Patton

I've always, was a thinker. I would look at things and and meditate on things. I've always done that. And, and I would look at things and listen to things that people say in some kind of way, that just didn't fit. And I always did that. And it got me in a lot of trouble when I was young. I mean, not as far as with the law or anything like that. But I was- It made me a little more radical than I needed to be because I was aware of words. And I always thought that words meant something. And then when I start looking at the way, looking at life and the way the world, the world was going, you know, having a TV and going to school and reading your history books and stuff like that, I'm looking at certain things. And, you know, I was always puzzled by it. Why is it, this is the only story about a black man? Eli Whitney was basically the only person that you ever heard about, you know, when we did history. You know, and George Washington Carver, then, I cant think right now, the runaway slave-

[00:34:27.030] - Pastor John Patton

Frederick Douglass?

[00:34:28.810] - Pastor John Patton

Frederick Douglass. That was about the extent of American history as far as black folk. And then it came Columbus and all of this, the other stuff. And that was basically it. And then when you get in high school and you start having your lab classes and stuff like that it starts to be kind of embarrassing because all that was good was Columbus discovered America. Well, I thought the Indians were here first, you know, I'm trying to figure out this timeline. You know, if Columbus came to America and then they met the Indians, how did he discover America? And there was never any teaching, you know, no one would ever elaborate on that. And so it was just what you read in the history books and you had to go with it. And you had to take a test over what you read. But it was never expounded on, never explained. This is just the way it was. And if you- the mind that I had, I always had questions about these things. You know, this can't be right. Some kind of way the numbers are not adding up, you know, the way this stuff is adding up. You showin' that, this beautiful picture of Thanksgiving, the Pilgrims and the Indians, you know, and then you tell me Columbus discovered this. And then the Indians has always been here. And then you showed this beautiful pictures of the pilgrims and their vestige and the black hats and this visual that they gave you and the Indians over here on this side, like, you know, everything was good. And it wasn't because all you had to do is turn the television on and watch a Western, these savages, these red-skinned savages. The Indians are always considered to be less than humans. And then you look at your history books and you have your teachers who never expounded on these types of things. So you're constantly getting a mixed message and I don't know if other blacks saw it the way that I saw it. But you constantly gettin' these mixed messages of how life is. But you actually livin' a different type of life, and you actually experiencing a different outlook. And the outcome is always different than what you've been taught.

[00:37:11.840] - Dr. Woody Register

So who did you take these questions to when you were young?

[00:37:15.800] - Pastor John Patton

I just dealt with 'em, who could you talk to about it? My dad would get up and- just after daylight and go to work, and you wouldn't see him again till 8:30 or 9. So by that time, it's about time for us to go to bed, to get ready to go to school. And like I say, you work. And I was like he was working and with his temperament, sometimes you just kind of stayed out of the way. My mom, she works, so basically, the rules were set. The house better be in decent order when I get home, the dishes to be washed, your bed made, everything that I told you to do needed to be done, you know, and after you got that done, you could pretty much do what you needed to do until she got home and fixed dinner, and we sat down, ate, and then we had to take turns washing dishes and doing stuff like that. But dealing with these types of things, having somebody to talk to, somebody to go to talk to about 'em, you just had to work it out yourself. These things that you carried around- that I carried around- like I said, they got me in some trouble, you know. I cut my nose off to spite my face a lot of times.

[00:38:44.480] - Dr. Woody Register

So what people would call a smart mouth?

[00:38:47.760] - Pastor John Patton

Not really, no. It's just the fact that, um, I could see what was going on. And I've always had a, I've always had a sense of self worth. You know, you can't dictate who I am, and I will not allow you to do that. You know, my dad, his dad and their dad. They had to do that to survive. And as a kid, I watched it as it was starting to water down some. But I also, like I talked to you previously, I think a couple of weeks ago, I saw some things that I just couldn't stomach because of my academics, the way it was presented and the way that you started seeing the news is a lot slower. But you can learn something from it. And then my grandmother being active in the NAACP, and I didn't really understand the significance of what she was doing. But she was fighting for those types of rights that was pinned up inside of me that nobody, no matter what color you are or who you are, you're not going to determine who I am. And, you know, my dad's work ethic was great. And he passed that on to us as children. And people call me a perfectionist now because that's what he demanded. And you know, I think that gave him a sense of pride because of the trauma that he had to face as a young man. And so he took pride in everything he did. And he always told whatever you do, you do it to the best of your ability. And everything I did, I took a lot of pride in it. And so I was a prideful person. So because I knew that whatever I was doing, my dad was gonna check up, check up behind me and make sure it was done right. So if I did a job and you came to me and said, I half did it, I was ready to fight, because I know I put everything I had into it.

[00:41:07.780] - Dr. Woody Register

Can I ask you about your father, what do you know about- so he was the custodian at St. Luke's, and St. Luke's was the School of Theology at that time. What do you know about his work there and what he did and how he thought about it?

[00:41:22.890] - Pastor John Patton

I think St Luke's was, I think what they did is they designated buildings. And I think what he did- they had three or four before their eight hour day ended, they had to work longer hours in the summertime because they had to move the furniture and do all of the major cleanups and stuff. But during the school year, I think they had different buildings that they had to attend to. But I think St. Luke's was probably the one that he started, maybe put 4 hours into it, but that was the one that he talked about the most. But he worked in all of them. All the custodians worked in all of the buildings. But I think they mainly talked about the first one at the start of the day. And I think that was his because he didn't talk a lot about the professors or the students that went to the seminary. Most of his friendships were developed with a lot of the students, the young students, because like I said, my dad was a outdoorsman and a sportsman and a lot of these kids had some of the same interests. And so they talked to him and found out that he fished every weekend, every chance he got, that conversation would come up and he would just invite 'em along and made a lot of friends, younger friends like that. And I got to know a lot of them. He was- our place

was a place for some of the guys that lived miles away and just decided that they didn't go home during the holidays and stuff, so they had a place. They could stay in the dorms. But on the holidays and stuff like that, they they would always have a place at the table. They would have somebody to mentor 'em, take 'em fishing off the mountain around Tims Ford and places like that, hunting and stuff like that. They had that luxury because of my dad.

[00:43:49.940] - Dr. Woody Register

Did you go on those hunting trips too? Or those fishing trips?

[00:43:53.660] - Pastor John Patton

That's what we used to do. And when I was really young, he made sure I had to dig the worms and have them ready, you didn't go to the store like you do now and buy night crawlers and stuff like that.

[00:44:06.190] - Dr. Woody Register

Out of the vending machine.

[00:44:07.560] - Pastor John Patton

And it wasn't like that. You had to go out and and dig worms and stuff and have all the stuff ready when he got off work, because all of this would always happen after he got out of work and we would leave, you know, 5:30, 6:00 o'clock. It would be dark sometimes and what we would do, we would stay overnight, fish at night. Leave Sewanee and come here on Tims Ford, Childress Creek, Bradley Creek a lot of these places. And a lot of these places were cut through farm lands and stuff like that. And we had to go down to whole track the trails and get into these slews and creeks. And we did a lot of catfishin' and stuff like that. And we stayed overnight. One of the things that I look back on is when you went through, you had to go through a lot of the corn fields and a lot of the fields. We picked a lot of Turnip Greens and got a lot of corn if you didn't catch any fish. So you always had a meal or something like that. But we always stayed overnight, you know, dad was young, 30s and stuff like that. And I could tell you some stories, but I won't tell you those. But in sum, it was just bittersweet. But it was just a learning experience. It built my character and who I am today by having that experience.

[00:45:30.760] - Dr. Woody Register

So you bring uh the Catfish or the corn and the turnip greens home and your mother would Cook them up-

[00:45:37.260] - Pastor John Patton

Dad would cook 'em, clean it. We would clean 'em. Dad pretty much cook- mom would maybe cook the corn or something like that to turn the Greens. But, you know, we pitched in, we helped clean the stuff or

wash it up and stuff like that. We always had, dad always had time to have a garden, but I was the one that had to tend it. The kids, you know, me, my older brother, I don't think my younger brothers and sisters had to do it, but I had to go and till between the road, make sure the weeds and stuff, it was weeded and stuff like that. They would plant it, but I did the work because he just didn't have the time to do it. And so those are the types of things that that I grew up doing.

[00:46:19.410] - Dr. Woody Register

So are you the second child then?

[00:46:21.300] - Pastor John Patton

Mhmm.

[00:46:21.840] - Dr. Woody Register

Okay, after your older brother, Jeff. Do you have any other memories of what you liked to do as a child? Family gatherings or things that stand out to you as as important in your childhood growing up.

[00:46:52.480] - Pastor John Patton

This may sound crazy. I don't- my life is- Time, days, dates don't mean anything to me. I've always just went with life. When I wake up in the morning, I had a day. You start your day, and that was it. And like I said, it was basically, it was basically surviving. And like I say, you have to get older to understand. There was probably some things that I did. I enjoyed the outings that we had, going caving. Like I say, my first experience, personal experience, physically watching a pro basketball game was because of some of the outings that were sponsored by some of the students.

[00:47:49.950] - Dr. Woody Register

The college students.

[00:47:50.180] - Pastor John Patton

The College students. Swimming at Lake Cheston and even being able to go into and swim and play in the swimming pool right there on campus. We could do all that. The gym. Used the gymnasium and stuff like that. So, you know, it was just, you grew up as a child, but we had more to do than the average black kid who lived here. Most of the black kids would come to Sewanee and go, and we would play basketball because we had access to the gym. As long as there wasn't any practice or anything going on, we do had what they call the old gym and then they built a new gym; they had two gymnasiums. So we always had something to do. We will go in as kids and when they have the wrestling mats out on the floor, we will go inside and play what we call knee football. We would get down on our knees and we would play tackle football just because we had those wrestling pads stretched out on the floor. So, you know, you just made

the best of everything that the University had. And as long as you didn't tear it up, nobody would say anything. But every now and then, you would have one of the white custodians who didn't like it because we were there and they would try to make it hard for us. They were going to some authority or something, and they would try to- a lot of times they would go to the police or something like that. And you be in doing something and you look up and the police be looking in the door and sometimes they would run us off. But when Sewanee played football at home, we would have our own football games in the back of the bleachers back there. So we always had enough people there to have two football teams and another football team waiting to play the winter. It was like that. But I just lived a life, I just went with the flow of what was there.

[00:50:05.640] - Dr. Woody Register

Do you think your parents, they knew what they were giving you by bringing you up in this, in that community?

[00:50:13.080] - Pastor John Patton

No, they were living. They were making a living. I mean, there was no conversation about well you need to watch out for this, and you have to watch out for that. When I got in junior high, we were hitchhiking down the mountain because I played sports, and my mom worked my dad worked. They didn't have time to take us to South. So how do we get there for practice? We hitchhiked. In that day, we hitchhiked, 7th grade all the way until I got into ninth grade. So playin' baseball, same thing. If the coaches didn't pick you up and we had a game in Decherd or Winchester and Babe Ruth and stuff like that, you had to hitchhike. and so when we got around, that's the way we made it. All of my junior high. That's the way I got through junior high. And I played every sport that they offered, the basketball and football, we hitchhiked.

[00:51:37.030] - Dr. Woody Register

And your brother, too?

[00:51:38.740] - Pastor John Patton

My brother had hitchhiked to New Orleans, he was a different sort.

[00:51:51.510] - Dr. Woody Register

He's two years older than you. That's good. What families did your mother work for?

[00:52:02.320] - Pastor John Patton

She worked for the Puckett's and the Wood's. Cecil Woods.

[00:52:13.600] - Dr. Woody Register

Right. Simultaneously or at different stages?

[00:52:20.660] - Pastor John Patton

At different stages, Sometimes, maybe, sometimes in the same week. But it was for the Wood's on up until I think, about five or six years ago.

[00:52:35.470] - Dr. Woody Register

So a long time.

[00:52:37.063] - Pastor John Patton

A long time.

[00:52:37.540] - Dr. Woody Register

That's, like a lifetime really. The- Did you have a relationship with the Woods family?

[00:52:54.470] - Pastor John Patton

It was pretty much a working relationship, too. It's like I say, it's hard to explain. I mean, it's really hard to explain. My mom and dad work. They raised a family in the environment that they, that my dad chose. But it was everything was based on a working relationship. You have a relationship with your employee, but it was based on work. For the most part, all of the people that they work for were pretty fair people. But like I say, bein' the thinker that I was, I saw two sides of how people operate just because of who we are and the color that we are and the backgrounds that we have based on the history of the Americas. And so, like I said, I saw two sides. There's a subtle side to all of this. And there was just a blatant side. I told you previously about the blatant side, but on the subtle side, it was always a work relationship. You know, I told you about the experience about the young girl and and the people that my dad worked for. And that was one of those things that I struggled with for a long time. When I moved to Nashville, I was it for the rude awakening, and that's when I started looking back on my raising and my childhood here. And that's when it all came together. But living in Nashville, coming from a place like Sewanee that's like going to another country. But the subtleties, the people that my parents work for, you know, they got what they wanted, we got what we needed. Because they could afford what they wanted and it sufficed what we needed. But at the same time in a very subtle way. This is as far as you can go.

[00:55:45.230] - Dr. Woody Register

Accept that.

[00:55:48.290] - Pastor John Patton

They didn't just put it that bluntly, but it was there, and I'm not even sure if they realized it, but they could have. But like I say, it took me some time to sit down and put all the pieces of the puzzle together. But I was just always curious and aware of a lot of these things. I'm not a big reader, but I'm a good reader of people because of the awareness that I have in myself and because of some of the things that I've seen.

[00:56:23.490] - Dr. Woody Register

Did you not- was your mother's relationship with the Wood's family, for instance, comparable to your grandmother's relationship with the Goodstein's?

[00:56:35.060] - Pastor John Patton

Probably, they would do whatever they could for you. But it's, it's a work, it was just a work relationship. They had a relationship. They had a personal relationship. My mom, like I say, it hasn't been long that she retired, but she would go visit Ms. Woods. Miss Woods would call and want her to visit. Ms. Woods children would come and visit my mom after she moved off the mountain. They still have a relationship. But that's as time went by that they were able to have that that relationship. They treated my mom with great respect. I don't take anything from that. But with my dad's work relationship, it was just a little more, it was subtle, but it was not as subtle. So I don't want to call any names because some of those people are still alive.

[00:57:40.100] - Dr. Woody Register

I respect that. But I thought a lot about in our conversation last week. The story about what you learned from observing your father and observing his interactions or relationships with with his employers and how you puzzled through and, and learned from that. But that that learning occurred over years in your life, thinking you understood it at this point, but learning later that you didn't and having a better understanding. Can you tell me a little bit more since we have a- the recorder going this time about that, about your father's, what he, in a sense, showed you about what it meant, what it meant to be black in Sewanee. I mean, that's a little vague if-

[00:58:50.010] - Pastor John Patton

It's just like I say, I always watched. It wasn't a teaching moment to teach 'em, I can show you better than I can tell you. My dad could have sat down and told me all kinds of stories, but he's looking at- he's having to deal with his childhood. He had to deal with the way he was raised in his own family. So it's a dynamic of all things, not just one thing. It's not that moment.

[00:59:19.400] - Dr. Woody Register

Multigenerational.

[00:59:22.830] - Pastor John Patton

Right. Life is not just this moment, like we're talking now. We're talking about my childhood and trying to mix what I remember about my parents and all of these things. That's the recollection. This moment is just what we're doing. But we're trying to go back and tryin' to piece the puzzle together. So as I grew older, I couldn't ever understand why my dad couldn't articulate things very well. I didn't understand why he was so short tempered. I didn't understand these things. I found myself always trying to please him, but I could never do enough to get it done. And then, you know, if I start looking back in the little that I know about him growing up, he probably saw a lot of me in him that he could not exert in his time, but I was able to do, but under control, because I could not disrespect him because he wasn't having it. But he saw a side of me that he didn't understand because of the way that he had to work, working for the University, not making enough money. So he would work after 4:00, after he got off from the University, and he would go out and do odd jobs for other people in the community. Some of them were the professors that he knew when he worked at the School of Theology. And then he would go to their houses, and then he would bring us along. We would plant their flower beds, we would maintain their yards and stuff like that, wash the windows, did the floors, whatever it took for him to make extra money. But it took extra help. And it was the child labor, him being the dad, you have to follow him. So I became his labor. But they were the one that paid me. And he felt like you just pay him what you think is worth. So you could go to work and work all day, all Saturday and all Sunday and come back with \$2.50 or \$5. And that's doing man's labor. Raking leaves because you couldn't burn them. You had to rake them up on a blanket, a piece of plastic and tote 'em on your back, and we'd look like Santa Claus, and you would have to walk a mile and dump 'em off because some of 'em would want 'em mulched up. They had a machine that did that so that they could put 'em on their flower gardens and stuff like that. So it was something constantly to do. And I kind of resented that. Because he allowed them to set the price and the time that you put in and then when you get paid, it just didn't match up. And so when I got a little older and he would tell me, he called me Junior, so Mr. So and so wants you to mow his yard. But if he didn't set that price for me, I would set my own price. And back in the early Seventies, I started mowin' yards and I would get \$30 and \$35 a yard. And the first one I did, that my Daddy, I thought he was going to kill me. Because I refuse to work by the hour doing what you did. You know, the size of those yards, and you had to do it with a push mower. I had to push uphill, the trees, all the trimming that you had to do. They had sidewalks. You had to trim all around the house that you had to trim, you had to use hand trimmers. So to me, if I'm gonna do this type of work and people are going to be looking out the window making sure I'm getting it done. And you're basically getting it done for slave labor. I'm not doing that. So I just took it on my own. If my dad didn't already have the price set when I went and done it, they asked me what was the charge, it would be \$30, \$35, and the people were happy to do it and asked me, Will you be back next week? Because that was probably the first time anybody had ever had the guts to say, this is what I want. I bought my first weed eater, I bought two motorcycles. I bought my own lawn mowers, I had a business, but because of mixed emotions of what I thought my parents wanted, they wanted us to higher education. If I would've stuck with my dream then, there's no telling where I would be now. But I'm not sorry for it, but I saw my opportunity that I missed. I had already established a business before I got, before I graduated high school. I help my dad a lot of times when he was short of money. But when I first did that, my first job that

I charged \$30, and he got wind of that, I thought he was going to kill me. He thought I was cheating the people.

[01:05:03.400] - Dr. Woody Register

Did you respond to that?

[01:05:05.820] - Pastor John Patton

I couldn't. I mean, you just look and you can't say anything.

[01:05:11.310] - Dr. Woody Register

But you kept on doing it.

[01:05:13.480] - Pastor John Patton

But I kept doing it. And I think as he saw me as I progressed, as I progressed and started doing things like the work, that what I'm doing now. And the reason I work doing construction now is because I always had a problem working for somebody else because my work ethic was good. But my dad thought I wanted fast money. No Dad, I want to be paid for my labor. And he didn't quite understand that. And I think it kind of, with his ego and me being his son, and him working the way he worked for so long all of his life and then for me to have the audacity to do that, I think in some way, it kind of- I don't know if it's the right word- gave him some resentment because he looked at his life and see that, you know, maybe I could have did the same thing because he was a multi talented person. He was a great cook. He worked a lot in some of the restaurants and stuff, and he could cook anything. I mean, my mom, interior... She could have been interior decorator in today's time. They both could have run business, successful businesses and been very successful in what they do. But because of the times, you know, their mindset was that that we just got to make a living, a bird in hand is better than one in the Bush. And that's what my dad was always conveyin'. If he conveyed anything, tell me, that was it, you know, don't take chances, don't have a dream. And that was just instilled in him. You don't have time to dream. Dreams won't pay your bills. So, you grew up at a time where you had to struggle to pay your bills. And that's what they expected. That's what being a man was being able to pay your bills on time, being able to make a check, even though it wasn't enough to suffice all of the expenses that you had in a household. And so we had that struggle. And that's where our struggle came from, because he had a different perspective of what I wanted. But he didn't understand where it came from. And I didn't tell him that. I couldn't say well Dad, well, I watched you and I watch some of the things that you took, and I see people taking advantage of you, you know, indirectly or whatever. But you were being taken advantage of because you gave everything that you had and these people got what they wanted. You were providing a service. But you just looked at it as a job because you knew you had a family. And then there's a lot of other things that go along with it because we have habits. We do things, you know, like I say nothing is what it looks like. You know, when you just sit down and talk about it, when you in the moment of doing it, there are a whole lot of other dynamics. This goes along with

some of the things that you do, some of the decisions that we make in life. It put us in a situation in places where we have to do some things in life in order to make up for some of the bad decisions that we made. And he didn't make all good decisions. A lot of the stuff he did, he put himself in those positions to have to abide by whatever the rules were that they laid down or the rules that he thought that they were laying down to him.

[01:09:31.860] - Dr. Woody Register

How would you, in your own words, describe what those rules were?

[01:09:36.940] - Pastor John Patton

Well the rules were established when he was a kid. The rules were established because of his age and the times. That's what people have trouble understanding. The rules were always different for black people. They're just different. You had to be 20 times better than your counterpart. So when you performed or did anything, you had to do it ten times better. If a white person went in and cleaned the floor, they would have to sweep it and dust mop it. If a black person went in and did it, he had to sweep it, dust mop it, strip the wax, and wax it, and it still wouldn't be good enough. So the expectations of what we had to do, you always had to do more than everybody else. And because of generation after generations of being told that you are nothing and that you constantly had to prove yourself to be able to get a position. People took advantage of that. And once it becomes a lifestyle, it becomes something that's asked in your mind that you're not even aware of, because it's just something that- it's repetition, you get up every day and you know that you gotta' perform in a certain way. So why do I have to do that? That part of it is gone, because now it has become a lifestyle. There's no reason, and now because you have practiced that behavior, you have been made to practice that behavior. And after you practice it for so long, it becomes a lifestyle.

[01:11:27.120] - Dr. Woody Register

Who you are.

[01:11:28.680] - Pastor John Patton

Right. So what happens? You develop a lifestyle so the why's and why not's, they don't occur to you in your brain. You just doing now what you practiced most of your life. And once you practice it long enough, what does it do? It's just like your hands, it becomes a part of your body. And that's the same thing it is with your mind. So when we talk about these things, it's more complicated than question answers. There's a lot of other things that that mixes in with why I am the way I am today. And looking back on yesterday why it did happen, because now I understand. And so what I understand is because like I said, I've always had this gift of observing and asking questions to myself and try to figure out these things. And as I grow and have different experiences, they started to come to me. They didn't just come to me when I was a kid. But every day still, today, I still figure out a lot of things and I'm starting to understand a lot of

things. So my life, as far as recalling fun, if it would not for sports, I would not have finished school. That was my motivating factor of going to school. I love to play. I'm very competitive and I love to play sports. And that's what got me as far as I did in my academics. But that's what kept me going.

[01:13:18.260] - Dr. Woody Register

Football?

[01:13:19.400] - Pastor John Patton

Football, basketball, baseball, whatever there was. That's what kept me interested in school. If it hadn't have been for that, I don't know if I would have made it or not.

[01:13:35.380] - Dr. Woody Register

So by the time you you entered the Academy, it was no longer the military Academy.

[01:13:44.830] - Pastor John Patton

No, I think it was a year after that, it became the Academy, Colyer.

[01:13:55.210] - Dr. Woody Register

What do you remember about going from South to the Academy?

[01:14:01.700] - Pastor John Patton

I went to the Academy. It was just it was, I don't know, divine intervention. At Franklin County, there was a lot of stuff that was going on between the Blacks and the white teachers and coaches, and it was very prevalent and nobody was doing anything about it. There were a couple of incidents at Franklin County High School when I was in South, just as I was getting ready to go over into the 10th grade that had happened to a couple of the black football players. They never got the, there would be positions that we played at South, you could be quarterback or whatever, but when you got to the high school, you could not do that because you're not smart enough to do that. They treated the black players a lot differently there. And and it got physical with a couple. And like I say, back then, I had already built up this resistance towards this type of behavior. So my ninth grade year, during spring practice at Franklin County, we would go from the junior high to the high school because we're coming into the 10th grade and we would practice with him during the spring. And I had an incident. One of the coaches- I was fast, really fast and he had me in a wide receiver position and most quarterbacks, you could not overthrow me because I could just catch up with the ball. And so they called a play for me. The quarterback was from North Junior. I never played with him before, but he was a quarterback, and I had ran probably 30, 40 yards down the field and he hadn't thrown the ball. So what happened is I broke my pattern, I slowed down, and when he threw the ball, he overthrew me. But I had broke my route. And when I got back into

the huddle, you get in huddle, you put your hands on your knees and you bend over. And I felt this light kick in my tail, wasn't malicious, anything like that. But one of the coaches, had did that. I said, my dad has never done that to me. Now he scolded me. He says some pretty bad things to me, but he's never kicked me in the tail. So I just left. I walked off the field because of the stuff that had happened previous, it's not going to happen with me. So I didn't know what I was going to do, but I wasn't going to take that. Now see, that's what I was saying. Those, that was the way I handled problems back then. So I was just sitting out on my front porch one day trying to figure out what I was going to do because, without sports, and I had just quit. Like I said, I'll cut my nose off to spite my face. And so I was just sitting out on the porch one day and this car pulled up in my yard. And one of the students from the Academy was looking for me because they had heard about my athletic ability. And so they were trying to recruit minorities, too. And so he pulled up. His name was John Colts, I think he was, I don't know, maybe sophomore junior at that time. So he pulled up, he said, I'm looking for John Patton, and I thought it was talking about my dad. And I said, Well, he's at work. He said, no, I'm looking for John Patton Junior. I said, well, I'm he. And he said, Well, how would you like to go to the Sewanee Academy? No, I mean, it's just out of the blue. And it was a no brainer because I was out on the porch thinking about what I was gonna do. And I said, Well, you have to ask my parents. And he said, Well, are they at home? I said, no, they're at work. I said, you have to come back by. And so he came back by and he talked to my parents and they said it was up to me. So it was a no brainer for me. So that's how I started the Sewanee Academy

[01:18:37.020] - Dr. Woody Register

In the 10th grade.

[01:18:41.760] - Pastor John Patton

Mhmm. And, so from that point, I went to the Academy, graduated from there, and it was an experience in it's own, another eye opener. And-

[01:19:02.930] - Dr. Woody Register

What opened your eyes?

[01:19:05.460] - Pastor John Patton

The thing that opened my eyes on that is that you can look, you can be oppressed two ways. You can be oppressed by other folk because of the differences of your skin color. And you can be oppressed in your own family. Most of those kids that went to school there-- it was a boarding Academy. Most of those kids that went there, went there, it's because their parents were too busy to take care. I saw a lot of hurting kids. I saw a lot of troubled kids. The majority of those kids there were trouble. And when I sit down and once they got used to to being around because they didn't have to deal, they were sheltered from the inner cities and, you know, the public school system and stuff like that. So what they knew about black people would basically what they've heard. But once they got to experience being with somebody of a

different ethnic group, they could sit down and see that all this stuff that I've been taught wasn't right. But at the same time, I was listening to their story and how they grew up. They were rebellious kids. They were kids who were pretty much shipped off because the parents were busy making money and they had troubles in other school systems. And so they were shipped to Sewanee. And a lot of them were already alcoholics. I was a bootlegger. At that time you could go to Monteagle with no id and buy. These kids didn't have cars. So they got allowance every week, I think it was on Thursday. And so I was driving. You didn't have to have a license, all of this stuff. So I was driving it. And the laws not like this. So I would drive, I would take the orders. These guys who want something to drink. I would go get the keg, go to the Sewanee market, get the kegs, take it off in the woods wherever they wanted. And whatever money they gave me, if they wanted to half a pint, a pint, if they gave me \$20 back then whatever change was left, I kept. I shouldn't be telling you this, but I'm not going to retract it. I'm not worried. I wasn't a bootlegger, I was just doing what they- I was sellin' whiskey, well not sellin', I was buying it for 'em.

[01:22:18.160] - Dr. Woody Register

I know. I went to high school, too.

[01:22:21.700] - Pastor John Patton

So I was the source of them getting what they wanted because I had access to a car. And so, and then, as I started looking at this, I say something's wrong with this because you had a 10:00 curfew on the weekend, and I could go and get a keg of beer on Friday and Friday night it's gone. And probably that when I started in that school probably was less than right, around 300 people. And not all of these folks were doing the same thing. So then I would get a keg of beer and on Friday evening and Friday night, they wantin' another one. And the ones that were giving me money to buy liquor, were trying to find me to get more? I'm seeing people cutting their wrists, you know? And then I'm sitting down talking to these guys and these folks telling me their stories. So I'm looking at their life versus mine, and it's the same thing. It's just that they had money. Their parents have money. They were misunderstood by their parents. Their parents misunderstood their kids. The parents didn't get to know their kids because they would ship their kids off. So I played so many roles, I found myself in so many different roles, trying to figure out my life. And then people telling me about their lives and then looking at our lives together. There's no difference. And so then you start all over again. You try to figure out life again, and it's all the same. hey cut that off for a minute, I have to use the bathroom.

[01:24:42.980] - Pastor John Patton

If you need to use the bathroom, it's right over here.