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Audacious Love: How Daryl Davis Convinced 200 Racists to Leave the KKK

August 5, 2021



The Veritas Forum

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- Daryl Davis is a Black Blues musician who builds friendships with members of White Supremacy organization. Through this he has helped convince over 200 white supremacists to renounce their ideology and leave their organizations. He is joined by one of these men, Jeff Schoep former director of Neo-Nazi organization who is now a Human Rights Advocate.
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Transcript

Hi, this is Carly Eshleman, the assistant producer of Beyond the Forum, a new podcast available now from the Veritas Forum and PRX. The Forum you're about to listen to is featured in Beyond the Forum's first season on The Good Life. We interviewed Daryl Davis, one of the presenters you're about to listen to, for episode three of our first season.

We talked with him about how his life and his friendships with white supremacists can testify to the power of curiosity and the real possibility of change. You can listen to our interview with Daryl, access full show notes, and learn more about the rest of our first season by visiting beyondtheforum.org. Thanks for listening and enjoy the Forum. Welcome to the Veritas Forum.

This is the Veritas Forum Podcast, a place where ideas and beliefs converge. What I'm really going to be watching is which one have the resources in their world view to be tolerant, respectful, and humble toward the people they disagree with. How do we know whether the lives that we're living are meaningful? If energy, light, gravity, and consciousness are in history, don't be surprised if you're going to get an element of this in God.

Today we hear from musician, author, and activist Daryl Davis. Expressing how, as a black man, he got involved with and continues to work with members of white

supremacy groups. He's accompanied by a former white supremacy leader, Jeff Scoop, a former director of a neo-Nazi organization, a discussion titled Audacious Love.

How Daryl Davis convinced 200 racists to leave the KKK, presenting from the stage at New York University. This lecture is more about communication and how we communicate with one another better through civil discourse than antagonistic conversation or combat. I simply use white supremacy and myself as a black person as two extremes and how we can communicate and how if we do it effectively, the results.

I find that we spend way too much time in this country talking about the other person or talking at the other person or talking past the other person. I'm going to show you some of the things that can happen when we spend time talking with the other person. So I'm going to jump right into it.

Three years ago, almost three years ago, you all saw on the news unless you were there, the incident, the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, and all the mayhem that went on there. Well, this is a cross lighting at a clan rally that I attended. Let's just move a little bit forward here.

This is what I do when I meet with these people. I communicate with them. I talk with them and listen to them.

I'm not there to combat. I'm not there. I confront but do it in a civil in a civil manner, not yelling and screaming or threatened to beat somebody.

I listen to why they believe and what they believe. And when they finish, then I'm allowed to present my platform. I present my platform and they listen and then they think about the things that I've said.

And as a result, many of them struggle with their own ideology and eventually think, you know what, he may be right. Do I want to continue living a lie or do I want to turn my life around and live the truth? And that's how people come out. You cannot compel what somebody feels.

You can only compel their behavior by law. So if you don't do this, we're going to lock you up because it's illegal. So you can compel their behavior, but you cannot compel what they think and how they feel about you.

So but you can influence them through civil discourse. Now, this scene right here is took place in Charlottesville. What do we see here? We see some men coming down the steps trying to hit somebody with a Confederate flagpole.

And the guy who's about to be the target of their hitting is trying to set them on fire with an improvised flamethrower consisting of an aerosol can and a match. The guys coming down the steps are members of the Ku Klux Klan. Now, you don't know that because you

don't see them wearing their traditional robes and hoods.

I happen to know that because I happen to know each one of those guys individually, personally. The guy, so there is a confrontation going on there. What you don't see right there is the guy in the white shirt, the first one of the steps is the grand dragon, meaning state leader of Virginia.

The Imperial Wizard national leader has already come down the steps. You don't see him. He's out of that shot.

And he came down as this black gentleman was spraying the mist and you made the light the thing. He walks the Imperial Wizard walks this way. You're going to see him in a moment.

He's wearing a black bandana on his head, a blue jean vest, and black jeans. So he comes this way, he turns around right as the guy is lighting the fire. He sees this man trying to set his members on fire, and he pulls out a gun, and he points it at the black man's head and shouts, "Hey, nigger." And then he lowers the gun and fires.

The bullet goes into the gravel there that you see near the feet, in between the feet of the clansmen and the black man. They had to dig it out of the ground. And then he turns around and walks away, right past the Charlottesville police who were standing there in green neon vest like this doing absolutely nothing.

A man fires a gun right in front of the police and they all stand there, do nothing. That was just two and a half years ago in Charlottesville in August 12, 2017. That was one of many incidents.

And as we know, a white supremacist got inside his vehicle, drove full force, full speed into a crowd of protesters attempting to murder as many as he could. He succeeded in injuring 20 and murdering one young lady named Heather Heyer. All of this happening in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Now, let me tell you something. You're up here in New York City. That's in Charlottesville.

That's about six hours from where you are. It's two hours from where I am. But let me tell you something.

Charlottesville is your city. Don't think for one second that cannot happen right here in New York City. Anywhere there's hate, it can happen.

Now, how is Charlottesville your city? If you are an American, every city in this country is your city and you are responsible for your cities. You can only live in one at a time, but they still all belong to you. Every city in this country.

I'm from Chicago originally. I live in Silver Spring, Maryland, right outside of Washington,

D.C. But Charlottesville is still my city. New York is still my city.

When the trade centers here got hit, I'm in Washington, D.C. The Pentagon got hit. I feel that because it's part of my country. So what do you do about that? Now, you saw the man in his street clothes.

Here he is in his traditional clan attire. Same guy. This is the Imperial Wizard.

What do you do when you see something like that happen? Our society can only become one of two things. It can become number one. That which we sit back and let it become or it can become number two.

That which we stand up and make it become. So I want to ask you all a question. I don't want you to answer it right now.

But before you go to bed tonight, I want you to think about it and answer it to yourself. And the question is this. When this happens in my society, what do I do? Do I sit back and see what my society becomes? Or do I stand up and make my society become what I want to see? Now, what do we do? We can blame people.

Let's blame the black guy for trying to set those people on fire. That was wrong. Absolutely.

And he should be blamed. Should we try to set somebody on fire? Let's blame the clansmen coming down the steps trying to hit somebody with their Confederate flagpole. That's wrong too.

We can blame them. You blame them. They're going to blame him for trying to set them on fire.

Well, you know what? Let's blame the Imperial Wizard for pulling out a gun and firing it. A stray bullet could have ricocheted and got somebody or even got the guy he was pointing at. That's wrong too.

Let's blame the police. What are they paid for? We pay them to do what? To serve and protect. They were doing nothing.

That's why the Charlottesville Police Chief got fired. So today, Charlottesville has a new police chief as they should. But you know what? Maybe we should blame ourselves for allowing our country, our society to reach that point in the 21st century.

But you know what? Sitting around blaming people doesn't matter who we blame. It doesn't know good. It's a waste of energy.

You blame them. They blame you. They blame somebody else.

What do we do? I chose the second option. I stood up to make my country become what I want to see. I called that guy on the phone.

I said, "Hey, man, you and I need to talk. Not clansmen to black men, but man to man. American to American.

Your Confederate history is as much a part of my history as my black history is a part of yours. Let's get together and explore American history together." We talked about half an hour on the phone. He said, "Okay, we agreed on a date, and I drove to his house about an hour and a half from me by myself, and I sat in his house, this clan imperial wizard, with him and his clan lady, Fiancé.

I sat on there, the living room was full of KKK stuff, Confederate flags. I sat on this Confederate flag blanket on the couch, and I listened to them give me a two-hour lesson in American history from a Confederate perspective, of course. I listened.

Some things he got right. Some things he got wrong. When he finished, I corrected him on the things that he got wrong.

Then it was my turn to present my point of view. I said, "Here's what I want to do." There's a new museum in Washington, D.C., the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. I know somebody there.

Let me secure some tickets, and I want you and the clan lady to come down to my house, and I will drive you down to D.C. I'm only 15 minutes from D.C. We'll drive down to D.C., and we'll go to that museum, and let's explore that museum together." He said, "Okay, I mean, I sat in his house for two hours, I listened to him, so now he's going to reciprocate." So I secured tickets, and then we set the date. He and the clan lady came down to my house, hung out a little bit in my living room, then got in my car, drove down to the museum. So here we are entering the largest museum on Black history in the world.

We looked at displays on slavery, on integration, on segregation. We watched little video clips on blacks in the arts, blacks in science, blacks in education, medicine, sports, music, etc. Now, his biggest musical idol was Elvis Presley.

Now, I loved Elvis Presley. I'm a huge Elvis Presley fan. I saw Elvis 14 times, I met him twice, and I went to his funeral.

But Elvis Presley did not invent rock and roll. My boss invented rock and roll. The late great Charles Edward Anderson Berry, better known to most of you as Chuck Berry.

Now, I played piano for Chuck Berry on and off for 32 years. Without Chuck Berry, we wouldn't have an Elvis Presley. We would not have the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, Ted Nugent, Metallica, Twisted Sister, Aussie Osborn.

I don't care what kind of rock you play. No matter what kind of rock you play, all that DNA goes back to Chuck Berry. Just like no matter what kind of car you drive, a Lamborghini, a Rolls Royce, a beat up Chevrolet, a Pinto, whatever, it all goes back to Henry Ford and his Model A. So you have to give credit with credit as do.

We toured the museum for about two and a half hours. And there's no way you can take in everything in two and a half hours. You're not even in two and a half weeks.

You must come back and come back again. It is so vast, and you really got to let it saturate into you to understand what goes on in that museum. Well, after two and a half hours, we left.

I gave the Clans lady my cell phone and after take a picture of myself and the Imperial Wizard for posterity posing in front of the museum, the marquee by the museum. Now listen, this does not happen overnight. All right, he still has a little ways to go, but at least now he's going in the right direction.

This is a little less than a year from, hey, nigger. Boom. Okay, that was August 12th, 2017.

This is late June, 2018. So a little less than a year. This is a result of civil discourse, having conversations with one another, listening to one another, understanding why people think the way they think, and rather than beat up on them for thinking that way, listen to them.

Everybody wants to be heard. And when you allow them to be heard, they allow you to be heard. At the end of the day, you think about what each other has said, and you're building a relationship, and then you began your planting seeds, building a relationship.

And as you nurture that relationship, you're forging a friendship. And by the time you get there, you have found a lot more in common than you do in contrast. In fact, the trivial things that you have in contrast, such as skin color, begin to matter less and less, on whether you go to a temple, a church, a synagogue, or a mosque, they don't matter anymore.

Now, that's not the end of the story. It goes way deeper than that. A couple, a few weeks after that picture, the clan leader there is going to marry his fiancee.

Now I've been working with him for a year, right? We've become friends. Now he knows where I stand. I don't support that ideology.

And but I see him changing. He's definitely changing, because guess what? He invited me to his wedding. I'm the only non-clan person at the wedding.

Okay, that's quite a step. And it goes deeper than that. His fiancee is from Chattanooga,

Tennessee.

Her father was too ill to come up there to Maryland to give his daughter away, to walk you down the aisle. Rather than ask one of their trusted clan members to step in as a surrogate father, they ask me what I walk her down the aisle. That's how close we've become.

I said, sure. Here we are. Now, if you look up in his bedroom window there, you'll see the Confederate flag, right? So like I said, you know, he has a little ways to go, but at least he's going in the right direction.

Now early on, CNN interviewed him, and he was very staunch, a very adamant about it. He said he was going to be buried in his clan robe. So they ran that.

I asked him if I could invite CNN to the wedding. And he was and he trusts me. He said, yes.

He said, just ask them not to show the faces of my members. It's okay to show myself and the bride and the preacher, but not the other members. I said, okay, I talked to CNN about it and they agreed.

So here we are. And they ran the little thing where he had said he was going to be buried in his clan robe. This was almost a year before the wedding.

As you're standing in the presence of God, this time it was Davis getting something away. The broad. Me and his friendship has been something really special.

She wanted me to be a part of this wedding. That's beautiful. That's a sea planted.

So here you have the clan leader, the clan's lady bride, and the surrogate father. Again, this has not happened overnight. It happens over time, investing in patience, love, and compassion, and a willingness to listen.

You may hear things that you don't like, but get over it and listen and exchange ideas. This is how friendships are formed and how battles are won. When two enemies are talking, they're not fighting.

They're talking. They may be beating their fist on the table to make a point, but at least they're talking. It's when the conversation ceases that the ground becomes fertile for violence.

So keep the conversation going. Now with that in mind, I'm going to tell you a little bit about this gentleman that I met when I was filming the documentary called "Acidental Courtesy." I had written a book on my experiences with the clan called "Clandescent Relationships," and then we did a documentary. The leader of the largest neo-Nazi party in the country, and I interviewed him in the documentary.

Here we are folks. In the 21st century, we are living in space age times, yet there's still too many of us thinking with stone age minds. We put a man on the moon.

We can talk to that man, Neil Armstrong on the moon, while he's walking around saying his famous quote, "One small step for a man and one giant leap for mankind." We invented that technology. Everybody in here has a cell phone. Everybody here has email.

Here's a few words that hit send. Are you talking to anybody anywhere on the face of this planet? We invented that technology. So why is it we as Americans can talk to people as far away as the moon or as far away as anywhere on this planet.

But yet we have difficulty talking to the person who lives right next door. It seems to me that before we can call ourselves the greatest, our ideology needs to catch up with our technology. We are living in space age times with thinking with stone age minds.

Thank you all. [applause] So I'm Jeff Scoop. I spent 27 years involved with the National Socialist Movement, which is considered the largest Nazi party in the United States.

The last 25 of those years, I spent leading that organization. The conversation that Darrell just had up here today, talking about sitting down and understanding, having compassion, having dialogue. Dialogue is more important than anything anyone could imagine as far as getting to people, as far as reaching them.

When you're in the movement, you are in, I call it like a prison of the mind, but you're in this echo chamber. You're in a bubble and everyone that you know is inside that bubble. Everyone that your support system, you quite often, you lose family members when you're involved in this kind of extremism, you lose track of everything.

You lose track of your humanity. You lose track of who you are. One of the things that I started noticing the last couple years that I was involved in the movement, and this is going to sound incredibly hypocritical, but I started getting angry because I thought the press and the public were dehumanizing people in the movement.

Now I was able to see that, but I didn't see that here I was a person that had been dehumanizing other races and other religions my entire life. How hypocritical could someone in that position be even talking about dehumanization when they didn't humanize others? We blocked off in our minds those of us that were in the movement, that were in this extremist movement, whether it's the Klan, whether it's the National Socialist movement, or any other type of white nationalist, you block out the humanity of others. Meeting Darrell was an incredible experience for me and he planted a lot of seeds.

We talk about planting seeds up here, sitting down with me like that and talking to me like a human being and seeing how much we had in common and how much of similar interests we have. We had a lot more in common than we had differences, but planting

that seed, even though I did not leave the movement in 2016, that was a key part in my de-radicalization process. Another was, well in particular hearing Darrell's story about when he was a young man in the Cub Scouts, in the Boy Scouts, how people were throwing rocks at him and he thought that the people didn't like the Boy Scouts.

They were throwing rocks at him because he was black. As a father, when he told me that story, when he explained that to me, it bothered me on the inside, but yet we were filming for a product for the movement, so I didn't let on that that was bothering me, but that touched my humanity. A couple of years later, or within the next year, I was filming on another project called White Right Meeting the Enemy with my friend, Dia Khan, who was another person that helped greatly in the de-radicalization process.

By the end of that movie, Dia had said to me, she said, "The movement that I was a part of caused her to hate herself and feel ugly as a child," and she had explained a similar experience to what Darrell had gone through. I'm sitting across from this woman, I'm on camera, and I'm sitting across from her and I can see and feel her pain and how that scarred her and hurt her as a person. In the movement, we dehumanized others and we blocked out those things.

We wouldn't allow ourselves to feel. If you showed emotion, that was considered weakness. So here she's telling me about this, and this is a person that I consider a friend, and I can see and feel that pain, being able to have that dialogue, which most people in the movement don't give themselves that opportunity or don't allow themselves to have that opportunity, but being able to take that in and feel that is what helped in a lot of ways in the de-radicalization process.

Other factors came into play as well, but the deepest, most meaningful things came from dialogue and conversation. I know it's hard to come here and say, hey, you should sit down with someone in the National Socialist Movement or in the Klan. Not everybody can do what Darrell does.

I mean, he's an incredibly unique, brave, courageous, and intelligent individual, and it takes a lot of strength to be able to sit down with somebody that you feel hates you. That takes tremendous courage, but I can tell you that no one has ever left the movement by getting punched in the face. In fact, when we got into violent confrontations over the years, those type of things further radicalized us.

Those type of things further pushed us into that bubble. So when you hear people say, oh, we should punch a Nazi in the face, okay, that feels good for about two seconds, but what you're doing is you're shoving that person farther back into that echo chamber, farther back into that bubble. If you really want to make a change, you need to understand why people are in those places and how they got there.

And I forgot all about my clicker here. So radical to redemption. So I was a pretty radical

individual.

The National Socialist Movement is the largest, as Darrell was saying, is the largest Nazi organization in the United States. And in the last few years, as I was going through my de-radicalization process, I started changing some of the things that were going on in the movement before I left, because in my mind, I thought I could make it less radical, that I could make it more palatable for the public. We stopped using the swastika in public, we changed it to an oedal rune.

We did things like that. I was calling it a white civil rights organization. And looking back at it now, I mean, it's kind of humorous isn't the right word, but ridiculous.

When you're outside of the movement, you thought, who in the world would have thought, you could change the National Socialist Movement into a white civil rights organization. That's not even possible. You cannot change the Nazi party into a white civil rights organization.

But in my mind, as an extremist, at that time, I truly believe that. So here are some images of me growing up. Tell a little bit about my story here.

Everybody has a different story of how they got involved in this. For me, I came from a very normal family, a very normal household, middle class, working class parents. You can see there I am with my sister family.

But my interest in the movement, everyone has a different story. My interest in the movement started with history. My grandfather fought in the third Reich on the side of Adolf Hitler.

My great uncle's also did as well. So my fascination came from historical interest. Later that developed into hatred and all the things that come with being in part of the movement.

Here are some pictures, images of me from some of the early years. You can see some of the, a couple of the guys posing with the rifles. And there you see an image of me holding up a noose.

That was in the late 90s. And that was at the state capital in Topeka, Kansas. So you can see there was no, there was no bones about it about some of the hatred and the anger in the movement back in those days.

And in my heart as well. This picture actually was from 2015 or 2016. Actually, let me correct that.

This picture is from 2017 or 2018. This was one of the last public events that I was at. And you can see the swastika lighting and you can see the oval room.

So this was definitely in 2017 or 2018 in Georgia. And I'm in that picture as well. So you can see some of the, some of the anger and some of the, the hate that we had in those days.

You know, I, I hesitated about preparing this picture introduction because I thought when people see these images, it brings up all kinds of emotions, you know, and none of them are good. But I think, and you know, Daryl had said too, it's really important for people to see these images. So they kind of get an idea of how deep and how involved people get in these.

And, and that literally anybody can be recruited into a movement like this. And how, how easy that is. I mean, we tailored our recruitment tactics.

And I say we and, and past tense of the time that when I was in the movement, we tailored our recruitment process to the individual in a lot of different ways. If someone was religious, we, we brought them material on religion. If someone was had a bad experience with a black person, then we'd focus on that.

If someone had a bad experience with the Jews, we would focus on that. Any particular thing we would, we would hammer away at if we needed to further radicalize the individual. These, these are the kind of things that the National Socialist Movement would do.

We were involved in political activism in the streets, rallies, video game production, music production, leaflets, podcasts, media, DVDs, anything you can think of and old school leafletting and, and newsletters and things like that. This was some of the things that we would do as far as political activism in the streets. And the idea of these protests is any chance that we would get to fight, you know, we would do so.

Now we were under strict regulations that no one could hit anybody unless you were struck first. But, you know, as I said earlier, you know, the whole punch of Nazi in the face thing, it feeds into the narrative. It feeds into the narrative.

That's exactly what we wanted in those days. That's exactly what those men and women want. So when you're out there, you're protesting, I think silent protesting or protesting in general are great.

I mean, you should not allow these things to go on opposed, but I can tell you from experience being there and being in those demonstrations, the more violent they were, the more riled up the men got and the more they wanted to come to the next one. There was an event in Tupelo, Mississippi one time where there was no counter protesters. There was literally no one there.

And it was NSM and Klan together at that rally. And everyone had said this was the worst, most boring rally they'd ever been at. And I thought, oh no, you know, at the time,

I thought, we can't have rallies like this anymore.

People aren't going to show up. So I mean, the public doesn't think of it like that. And the other side doesn't think of it like that either.

They don't realize how demoralizing it is. When you're in a movement like this, you, we manipulated the media. We wanted the media coverage.

We got no media coverage in Tupelo. It was literally like a ghost town when we were there. Very effective.

Very effective. So I remember hearing later that night from just about everybody, why couldn't this be like what happened in New Jersey where we were fighting in the streets and all that kind of stuff? This was terrible. I don't even want to come.

So that's pretty telling, you know, when you look at movement activism. 25 years I've done public speaking, never have I done it until this last few months. Have I been speaking out publicly against the movement? And I can tell you that I thought at first, I thought, wow, I've had 25 years of speaking experience, this is going to be easy to speak out.

Absolutely not. This is this is some of the most difficult things that I've ever done is to speak out for a man to admit he was wrong about his belief systems, a man to admit that he was wrong about how he viewed the world and other people spending a lifetime involved in this type of movement and to be able to talk now in the movement if you showed emotion or had any kind of empathy for others that was seen as a weakness and you could be targeted even from amongst your own organization or other organizations that would see you as having weakness. So I can tell you just from personal experience talking about wrongs and talking about regrets and feelings and things like that is one of the hardest things I've ever had to do in my life.

So I'm humbled and I'm honored to be here and I'm humbled and honored to have friends like Darryl Davis and Dia Kahn and the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the other wonderful people that have given me the opportunity to be able to and people like yourself to be able to listen and give us the chance to have a dialogue and talk about these things because we can truly make a change in this country just by listening to one another and understanding. And this started with dialogue and it helped in the de-radicalization process more than I can explain in words but is that human connection and it's the kindness, the compassion, the empathy, the understanding of others and mutual respect. In the movement people always talked about how important it was to respect, respect this, respect that.

We weren't used to getting respected by other people. We always saw the media as our enemy. When you're in the movement and you're in that echo chamber you are at war

with the world literally.

You are at war with all the other races, you're at war with half of the white race, you're definitely at war with the government, you are at war every single day. So I explained being out of the movement like I am now for the last years, being out here in civilian life. So bear with me please as I'm learning how to behave out here in civilian life because I mean literally when you're in an extremist movement whether it's jihadism, whether it's a gang, whether it's white supremacy movement, black supremacy movement, any type of extremism or far left extremism like some of the Antifa groups.

If you're in any type of extremism it can become your whole entire world and you don't have a normal way of seeing the rest of the world and understanding other people and having compassion for that. So I was speaking out as much as possible to try to get people to disengage and then de-radicalize from those extremist movements. I retired originally when I left the movement and the movement's okay with people retiring.

But when you start speaking out against it they consider you and brand you a traitor. So the first thing I had actually done publicly after leaving the movement was speaking in Ankara, Turkey at the International Symposium on radicalization and countering extremism. So that was pretty interesting meeting a lot of people from different parts of the world that are trying to understand this type of extremism and trying to fix the problems that we're having in this country and around the world really.

And I'll close with that. I know we've got a lot of other important questions and people that are going to come up here and speak. Again, I'd like to thank NYU for having me, for Darryl for inviting me and all the wonderful people that are participating and thank you and the audience for listening and being open-minded and hopefully we can all take something away from what's learned here today and make this a better country for everyone.

All right, well thank you both very much. I think we were all at least I was taking notes and taking a lot in so much to process. So first question, I'll pose I guess in the order that you all spoke, is to Darryl and I'm curious to know if you could unpack for us a bit more about what you mean by showing respect and the specific ways that you try to indicate respect to people and why you think that the specific things that you do resonate so much.

So I mean you started there but I just want you to really nail that for us. Sure. Well for me, you know respect is paramount and I think it is for everybody.

Everybody wants to be respected and you know we have we don't have to respect what someone says but we should respect their right to say it and that's where we get in trouble when we want to enforce our opinions on somebody else but yet we don't want to hear theirs. And you know if you take away somebody's right to express themselves, it

won't be long before yours can be taken away to express yours. So that's what I mean by respect.

I've sat there and I've heard things that I don't like but I let them come out and then I'm able to reciprocate. Just give you a very quick example. The incident that Jeff mentioned where I was had rocks and bottles thrown at me while I was marching in a cubscot parade, I was only black scout in the thing and I didn't realize why people were throwing things at me until you know I found out because I'm the only black person there.

I formed a question in my mind at that time. That question was how can you hate me we don't even know me and now for the next 51 years I've been looking for the answer to that question. Well I would ask people in the clan how long you can hate me you know you don't even know me you know all you see is this and here are some of the answers I would get.

Black people are criminals we're prone to crime that's why they're more blacks in prison than whites. Now that's half right there are more blacks in prison than there are whites but why not because we're criminals but because of the inequity of our judicial system. I'm also told that blacks are lazy we want to scam the government welfare system because we don't want to work and then I'm told that black people have a smaller brain than white people and therefore we don't have the capacity to have a higher IQ you know as they do which makes them you know supreme.

Now what I'm hearing from these people is that offensive? Absolutely it's offensive. Am I offended? Absolutely not and this is the difference. Why am I not offended when most people would be offended and want to fight the person and slap somebody across the face for saying that? Why am I not offended? You know why? Because it is not applied to me.

That person is spewing BS. How do you meet somebody for five minutes and all you see is this and you ascertain because of their skin color they're a criminal and they're on welfare and their brain is small. Why should I get emotional about that when I know it's not true? That's the way of syvenagy and that's what they are expecting.

They're expecting that combat and when I react that way to what they're saying I am further solidifying what they already believe. I'm enforcing I'm empowering them so you know if my mother or my father told me something like that maybe I'd give a little more credibility after all they know me they know me all my life but somebody who just sits there if I tell this person right here because you have black hair you're not as smart as a girl over there who has red hair. Who am I to say that? And while while I'm saying maybe offensive to you don't be offended by it because I don't know you.

You know and so that's how I'm able to to have conversations because once they see I'm not pushing back and there's no combat they're throwing off their game and then the

wall comes down and we're able to listen to each other respectfully. I think one of the struggles at least for me is connecting what I would call the micro the meso and the macro so the the micro would be the interpersonal conversations that you all have said have been so instructive for you in terms of understanding what it means to connect with somebody so that you can in your case de-radicalize and for you they're all conveyed to them that you're just as human as they are and so then there's the meso of these intermediate institutions which I would say MSM is right this is an institution that is not the capital system it's not racism in the service of capitalist interests but it's an institution that has a particular narrative that then is able to mediate a certain extreme version of white supremacy but if we understand white supremacist capitalism as structural and in the service of accumulation that benefits disproportionately a certain group of people then I think one of the questions I have and I guess this is for as for both of you is is how you see this interpersonal relationship as connected to our social understanding as you said just now Darryl of the inequities in our system so like the judicial system that does disproportionately target African-American so how do we connect the dots between what's going on in these organizations you are willingness to step into them and what we know are structural conditions that create those very narratives about why black people supposedly are different right so those narratives don't come from nowhere they're not divorced from a set of power relationships so I'm just wondering how you will see your dialogue as part of that micro-meso structure okay well I had a little different upbringing than than most Americans certainly most most black Americans my parents were in the US Foreign Service so I grew up as an American Embassy brad starting at the age of three in 1961 traveling and living all over the world in different countries every two years we're in different country I lived in Africa I lived in Europe and I went to international schools so back in the 60s when my peers were either in newly integrated or still segregated schools all black or black and white I was in international schools at the same time my classmates were Nigerian Italian German Swedish French Japanese Russian anybody who had an embassy in those countries all of their kids went to the same school if you opened the door to my classroom looked in you would say this looks like a united nations of little kids that's that's exactly what it was right so when I was living overseas literally I was living about 10 to 12 years ahead of my time because that scenario had yet to come to my own country so when diversity finally came and multiculturalism multiculturalism is still a relatively new word I remember when there's multi-hyphen culturalism that was all one word but that term did not even exist when I was in elementary school all right but that's how I was living back then and when it came here to my own country I was already ready for it unfortunately other people were not ready for it when when you when you combine my travels as a child with my parents in the foreign service combined in my travels now as an adult musician performing around the world I have been in a total now of 57 different countries on six continents so I've been exposed to literally a multitude of religions colors ethnicities cultures traditions and all of that is that it's up shape who I've become and one of my very favorite quotes of all time is by Mark Twain and it's called the travel quote and Mark

Twain said travel is fatal to prejudice bigotry and narrow-mindedness and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts broad wholesome charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime and that is so true and I think I think another important thing is you know like where I grew up in rural Minnesota it was all white and we didn't have a lot of experience with different people of different races and you know we had like one day out of the year that was multicultural day or international day where they would bring in food or things like that for you see we'd experience the different cultures I think if people actually had the opportunity not just one day a year but that in the school systems from a very young age that we need to start out and have dialogue even if it's just like we're talking about here tonight sitting at tables and asking people from different cultures things about their culture and teaching about it not just one day out of the year but having that experience so we realize that there really isn't that many differences between the different races and the different ethnic backgrounds and the different religions that we're all really the same we all really have the same desires and things of that nature I think if we got that at such a young age we wouldn't have the problems that we have today I mean all of that totally makes sense to me I guess where I struggle as a sociologist in particular is that we're in many ways resegregating or reinforcing all of the segregation progress that we've had even since Brown and and that is structured right so the reason that our school systems are highly segregated and some have more resources than others is because of the way resources flow through our system and so to have what you're having right now would actually fly in the face of what a lot of people are very intentionally doing which is moving if they can afford to to best public school district that you know to allow their children to go and then our term in sociology is to say hoarding resources meaning that you take on a disproportionate share of the resources relative to what you should have and so I think the challenge that you all are posing is in the midst of that kind of structure how do you still have meaningful dialogue and so I think one of the lessons perhaps you're you're showing us is that I think with something that Brian Stevenson brings out when he's talking about a press from the other side which is how you are an african-american well I guess in some ways very similar to what you're doing but in a but in a different system Brian Stevenson teaches at NYU actually here but he's known for the Equal Justice Initiative and so he has four things he says get proximate to the problem which I think you know both of you are doing right you're de-radicalizing and going back to people who you help to radicalize. Joe obviously has the courage to go to people and confront them but not in a way that you know reinforces as you said their posture so he's get proximate he says change the narrative right so you have the dialogue and you offer a counter narrative he says stay hopeful right so you didn't assume that because you know he's in you know NSM that he's not being able to change his mind and then he says be willing to get uncomfortable so I think in many ways you all are doing that and so I think Brian Stevenson is very much about structure and he's trying to change the criminal justice system but I hear in what you all are saying at the interpersonal micro level that this can have a certain resonance too so for the audience

maybe each of you could talk about maybe if it's not spiritual maybe a moral or sort of ethical compass maybe that guides you like what are some of the guiding principles you've both talked about mutual respect the importance of dialogue but where do you get that sense of the importance of mutual respect and dialogue what keeps you motivated what keeps you going you mentioned your international experience there for example but is there some aspect of your religious beliefs or other things that give you that courage beyond just having had that experience what are the things that motivated you to get out there you know if we don't have hope what do we have we just we just really get ourselves back to say you know what and I was brought here as a slave I guess I just stay as a slave and you know that that's that's my life you know no we always hope for better um you know without that hope you know we have nothing and unfortunately all of us want to have hope and hope things will change but then unfortunately there's a segment of us that want that and when it happens we refuse to recognize it um not so sure you say more about that what do you mean by recognize the change you know some people they fight for change and then when change happens they don't want to believe it they're still skeptical right what kind of changes are you saying they've been so so so involved in um in the fight they don't know how to get out of um are there certain changes you're thinking of just so I can get a like you know for example my parents had to drink from separate water fountains they had to ride in the back of the bus they were refused entrance in certain restaurants or whatever back in the 1950s or 40s I was born in 58 so they fought against that they marched and are so born and so on so things got better for me I never had to drink from a separate water fountain I never had to ride in the back of the bus have I experienced our discrimination absolutely but not as bad as they did and they did not experience it as bad as my grandparents did right so change is happening but then there are those who want to say no no change is not happening you know you know we're no further ahead you know than we were way back when yes yes we are we've come a long ways but yes we still have a long ways to go and without that hope we're going to go nowhere and what motivates me is I spent 27 years promoting national socialism and putting a lot of negativity and a lot of bad really bad negative ideas a lot of propaganda I brought a lot of people into the movement countless I couldn't even put a number on it if I tried a lot of people into that into that world so for me the motivation is doing something right I'm a firm believer in karma and I believe that what you put out in the world comes back at you I don't want to put out any more bad stuff in the world so I'm trying to reach others that are in that world I know what got them there because I recruited a lot of them and I know what I can do to help reach them to get beyond get them beyond the barriers of that prison of the mind and get them out and back into a normal society if we can stop you know it's not about them it's really more about society as a whole and the damage that it's doing to other people one guy walking into a mosque in Christchurch New Zealand one person walking into a black church like Dylan Ruffed did one person walking into a synagogue and killing all those innocent people how that affects the families how that affects the chain going down through all those communities if one person that's can

be de-radicalized that's not going to do that it's worse every bit of what we're trying to do now and I want to point out something real quick that a lot of the media does not want to does not talk about maybe they don't want to talk about it but I'm telling you what's happening here there is going to be a major major shift in this country in 22 years from now in the year 2042 all right this country was built on a two-tier society white supremacy and slavery and over the years as we progressed we progressed like this we did not progress like this we are still like this all right and with with all people having less segregation laws things like that immigration coming into the country is being called the Browning of America white genocide and in 22 years from now for the first time in the history of this country this country will be 50 50 50 percent white and 50 percent non-white and shortly thereafter it's going to flip never before has it been have whites been a minority in this country while there are plenty of people white people etc who accept that that's just part of evolution that's what happens hey i embrace that there are plenty who don't accept it and they're becoming very unhinged and this is what Jeff was talking about when he mentioned those people the Robert Bowers and the Tree of Life Center Dog the guy in Christchurch the Dillon Roof in Charleston South Carolina these organizations are stepping up their recruitment efforts come join us you know we're going to take our country back we're going to get rid of the obvious illegal immigration we're going to build that wall blah blah so people are seeing their landscape change color this is a white man's country this is our country everybody else needs to get out all right they're seeing their country being eroded by this coloring of it you know and when they and when they say illegal immigration they're not talking about people from Canada or the UK or Eastern Europe all right you're talking about people from Guatemala El Salvador Mexico Nigeria because that's what they say the Browning of America they're concerned if their child marries somebody from Guatemala or or Mexico or Nigeria the kids the kids going to be Brown right they're not worried about somebody marrying their daughter who's from Scotland or England or Canada and there are plenty of people here from those countries who are here illegally either they may have come here illegally but they've overrun their visa or whatever all right so there are so these people go and join these organizations to help protect their country and take their country back but when the organization fails to act or fails to do so they say you know what if the Klan can't do it or the NSM can't do it I'll do it myself and they walk into a synagogue boom boom into a black church boom boom boom into El Paso Texas boom boom boom they're getting rid of those people that are Browning America and so while they're organizations that infiltrate these organizations and get the intelligence and foil some of these plots the ones that go and do this individually are called lone wolves and there's no way you can infiltrate a lone wolf so as we get closer and closer to 2042 unfortunately we're going to see more and more lone wolves this is why these conversations now are very important yes I would I definitely understand that we're not experiencing slavery right now and certainly can see that the conditions now reflect that but I think this sort of determinism that I often hear about 2042 requires a bit of social context one white people still disproportionately controlled resources so if you think about you know global

terms the global north the global south we think about the United States consuming 25 percent of the world's resources why we're 5 percent of the population we think about how in this country the wealth gap between African-Americans and whites is about 10 to 1 we can think about how most Latinos identify as white so that even though non Hispanic whites will be not the majority they will still be the plurality so so we can think about the numbers in global terms and national terms but importantly the monopoly on resources and the legitimate use of violence that's how you have the the disproportionate criminalization of African-Americans even though white men 18 to 34 actually the you know the biggest drug users they think about a drug's cost money right so you know it reflects also that those resources start to consume drugs so my point is I struggle sometimes with this idea that because the numbers will be there the power dynamic will change and so for example you mentioned that it was the Nazi history that attracted you but there and so there's certainly there's a parallel between white supremacy in this country and not see them in fact Hitler gets a lot of his ideas from our Jim Crow laws but the the way that white supremacy worked here was to justify chattel slavery and so Ryan Stevenson to bring him back into the conversation talks about slavery's after lives that we never that the South may have lost the war but they won the ideological battle so that you can still treat black people as less than fully human because we haven't actually reconciled with the fact that we dehumanize them so my concern is that we not have some notion of linear progress that does not require a sort of reckoning with this historical legacy because as you're de-radicalizing I can envision more people being radicalized because the system is still set up to reinforce a notion of white humanity that is fundamentally distinct from black humanity so Dorothy Roberts talks about blackness or black people as a political category it's about a relationship with the state so I'm just trying to still contextualize how your work is still so important for not giving up in the midst of these structural issues but still recognizing that it's part of a much larger system absolutely but you know what you're doing is extremely important you're having this this discussion here and and you all you know I tell you what should be very appreciative here in yu that this conversation is allowed to happen on this stage for you because I give 50 to 70 lectures a year all over the country and many universities and student activities boards and things like that student councils will book me or book somebody like jeff or whatever and then the administration right before we shut it down oh no no we can't have them on campus that's too controversial it'll stir up stuff there'll be trouble blah blah this is the real world what we're talking about is the real world you all might be treated equally in the confines of this campus but out there when you graduate you got to face things you got to face discrimination because of your color because of your religion because you're a female even even today in 2020 women are still making what 79 cents on a man's dollar you know how does this college prepare you for that you know these are things that you know that we need to hear and so when you're doing us a favor by allowing this message to come out and be heard and be grateful because there are a lot of schools who while there are a lot of schools out there that do book us and have a speak there are a lot who don't want to so be grateful for this

yeah so as as I close out this portion and pivot to the next section I just thought we would we would end on our a hopeful note as you said um they the alternative to hope is uh it's not something I think any of us in this room or I think most of us at least in this room I want to consider and so um for me I know that my faith journey is very important in thinking about something bigger than me being part of something larger than me because that helps me not to be so concerned about the gap between where I am right now and where we want to be which is a more inclusive set of social systems that really honor everyone's humanity so in terms of thinking about the transcendent something greater um sort of the move of of of of of God if that's an appropriate term for your belief system how do you um sort of reach for something outside of yourself to embolden you to persist in the midst of the history going yeah other than the piano it could be some of it but so what what gives me hope is the fact that this man right here is sitting next to me on the same side on the stage that's hope whereby before we would never even be on the same stage together further hope I've had people give up stuff like this this is a as a clan flag a clan rally banner but they fly at their rallies or at their uh at their marches all right this came up this came from the nsm not from him he was still in there but one of his members quit and gave this to me one of their rally banners people giving up this typical as they no longer believe in what it stands for here is the robe of of an imperial wizard who quit uh the clan I have a ton of these things at home robes flags rally banners etc no you you last but this is hope this is their badge of honor if you like one of our us generals take off his uniform and giving it to somebody an Isis that doesn't happen unless let's say give up that ideology so yes I have plenty of hope and I hope you all will too after after you uh you finish up this this lecture how about for you Jeff what gives you the future you know seeing seeing uh having the opportunity to to uh reach so many young people and be able to to help shape minds um I think if someone's faith drives them to do greater things to be greater than they are then I think that's that's a really good thing you know no matter whether it's muslim jew christian pagan it doesn't matter what one's faith is I think a lot of times we spend too much time in this country saying well she's black he's black he's white he's Asian you know instead we just need to look at all of our all of us as human beings you know one race the human race and and I think that's I think when we can start it's it's a difficult process I think for a lot of people but I think when we can start seeing beyond the color of skin or religion and things like that and seeing everybody as as part of the greater good we're gonna get we're gonna see so much progress and that that gives me a lot of hope mm-hmm yeah well one thing to tell them I say in my race class is that we're all africans member ancestors left more recently than others right I mean if we go back far enough like we know that race is a is a biological fiction and a social fact right there's no actual breakdown um along the lines of any racial hierarchy in any scheme that we've devised in the world so so I think what I hear both of you saying is um as you both said is the mutual respect in the dialogue and so I think the persistence in that maybe comes from as you said different faith beliefs and so perhaps in this room people can share what helps them to persist in the face of um of what can be very disturbing and um you know a disturbing process and processes

that create a lot of suffering and I think that's what I struggle with is that in the meantime how do we manage the the suffering of what happens as a result of this hate um at scales that are um proportional to as you said the fact that we live in the space age right we can kill quite ruthlessly and quite efficiently um slow deaths as well as fast as the violent ones we see but the slow deaths of poverty for example that come from institutionalized racism are the things that are right here in our city so um so I definitely appreciate the work that you all are doing to um to stand in the midst of that and to hold multiple things at once both the truth of that harm that's happening but the hope that um it doesn't have to remain that way so thank you both for sharing and we'll I think pivot to having a couple um people who will be talking more about faith and morality and some of these other bigger themes so first up we have uh Dr. Jonathan Hite okay well thank you um so I was um I had the great fortune to uh to to hear from Darrell Davis in April 2017 he was given the Tribeca Film Festival gives out a disruptive innovation award and so I was there in the room and I saw him receive it they had a little they had a short video clip about what he had done and I was moved as as many viewer tonight by by his story and then um last November I was up on stage at a Veritas Forum with John and Azu and after our discussion about civil discourse and and some of the themes that you heard here tonight a student one of you actually maybe that person is even in the room tonight asked me a question uh sort of challenging me and the gist of it I may get this wrong but the gist of it was something like well what are you saying that if somebody is a racist we should just like let them get away with it and I can't remember what he was the the gist of his question was he was basically treating his his hypothetical uh enemy as a monster as a person who does not deserve basic compassion as a person who does not deserve to be listened to or treated seriously and I said so wait a second are you are you basically dehumanizing them are you treating them as though they're not a real human being and again I might be getting this wrong but I think the gist of the answer was when the student was like well yes they they don't they don't deserve that and so then I hit them with Daryl's story and we're talking about like an NYU student talking about a fellow NYU student that they think they shouldn't have to listen to and I said well look if Daryl Davis can do this with client current Klansman and Nazis surely we can all do this with people for whom we have much smaller differences and it was probably the most effective response I've ever given to any hard student question and it's because I gave that little it's because one of you asked a question and I gave that answer that is how the Veritas people heard about Daryl and then that's how this came to be here and that's why then they invited me up just to tell that little story and to then ask therefore ask the first question so my question is this so Daryl I happen to be I'm teaching a course on positive psychology here in the business school and just before I came here to have dinner with the two of you I was trying to frantically figure what are we going to talk about on Monday Monday's topic is communication and persuasion and oh my god have you given me good material from Monday's class and so I want to see I'm going to see here here are the three principles of starting a conversation according to Daryl Davis and my question is going to be what's four five and six help us because this is so valuable so

here's one two and three from what I gathered one respect the person and the right to speak and Jeff mentioned this over dinner at Park's I said how did he get you out and Jeff said he gave me dignity so rule one respect the person and the right to speak rule two listen really listen for as long as the person wants to speak rule three the judo move don't be offended be civil as you make your case and as you deepen the relationship so my question Daryl is first did I get that right and if so what is four five and six help us okay well the next move would be you know learn use the microphone sorry yeah learn as much as you can first of all you know we're all day all day all day all evening here we've been talking about race and what would you know Dr. Hyatt here talking about and and everybody here is communication it doesn't have to be about race in fact let's take race off the table it could be another hot topic abortion nuclear weapons climate change the war in the middle east the current presidency you know these are all hot topics um you're on one side somebody's on the other side give that person a platform allow them to air their views but also do your homework learn as much as you can about the other person's perspective where they're coming from where their ideology is rooted all right learn as much as you can put yourself in their shoes all right and that when you come into the conversation um you have some knowledge and they automatically have respect for you when they say that you have done your homework and you know as much about their organization or even sometimes more than they do um they automatically have respect for you they may not like you because you're Jewish you're black you're whatever um but they will respect you because you have done your homework that's easier for them to communicate with you that's number one um learn as much as you can don't be afraid to walk across the cafeteria oftentimes the metropolitan cities such as New York DC Baltimore or Chicago whatever you have different people from different backgrounds ethnicity ethnicities religions all working together in these companies maybe even working in the same cubicle on the same project and they get along fine but what happens at 12 noon they go downstairs to the cafeteria to eat and blast it with blacks his Spanish with his Spanish Asians with Asians uh they self segregate does that mean that they're racist no not necessarily you know people tend to feel more comfortable around someone who shares their their culture or their language or their look or their dress or whatever uh they just feel more comfortable take a chance walk across the cafeteria and sit with somebody else a couple times a week because you have something to give that person and that person has something to give you and it makes you a more well-rounded person you know while while you are actively learning about someone else at the same time you are passively teaching them about yourself you know and that's what makes us come together because as Jeff pointed out as I pointed out we have more in common than we do in contrast but we don't find that out if we don't communicate don't be afraid to walk across the cafeteria and sit at somebody else's table a couple times a week fantastic I took great notes the students are gonna love it on Monday thank you okay Rabbi Sarnet once you come up for the next question thank you both thank you all right next we have Rabbi Sarnet thank you I um Daryl and I got to know each other over the past year as part of our research

action group looking at how to confront violent extremist narratives and it's a it's an amazing group of former extremist victims of extremism some educators some public policy people some religious leaders and we've been talking a lot about listening and there's a professor here named Carol Gilligan who started something called the radical listening project and she talks about listening as something that happens when you replace judgment with curiosity listening is what happens when you replace judgment with curiosity and she distinguishes between coding or binning which is when you already have the boxes in your mind you already have the categories and now all you do is you select the data that another person is saying that fits neatly into one of those boxes and just put them in as opposed to real listening where you just you allow the other person's categories to become your own even if temporarily and this is my first time meeting Jeff and I was wondering Jeff for you as you reflect back on your life the process into radical a radical movement and more recently the process out did it feel like as you were engaging in the steps of de radicalization that you were retracing your steps back it wasn't like walking down a staircase and then walking right back up that staircase or was this just a continuation of a of a journey I'm thinking particularly Jeff mentioned to me that just in the past month you went into synagogue for the first time and actually I brought my kids here tonight guys son of boys and and probably I wanted them I wanted them to come tonight even though it is past their bedtime which they know just to be able to hear a little bit about your courage and and this kind of most recent moment asking the tough questions yeah why not why not right right well getting in getting in I think is is sort of a easy process and you don't realize how quick you're radicalizing when I joined the movement and a lot of people when they join the movement they're not joining it and this this is a hard pill for a lot of people to swallow because a lot of people think and they've heard stories from others that oh I just joined because I hate everybody or I was an angry kid or that sort of thing you don't stay 25 27 years because of hate in fact I thought that I was doing something good something honorable something noble I was going to save my people I was going to save my country that's the that's the majority of the people that are in there of course you've got crazy people there's psychopaths and sociopaths and people that are all about hate and and that's what brings them there but that's the minority of the people that are in there not that's I'm saying that from my my own personal experience and crossing through many of the different groups you know I mean I was with the national socials movement but I also spoke at clan functions skinhead concerts you know other other functions from different groups and you don't realize how quick you go from being what you feel is a patriot or somebody that's doing something good and noble to being hateful hate filled individual that's just full of anger and at war with the world like I was saying earlier I mean we literally were at war with the world everyone every day every day fueled by rage and anger and that's that's a tough way to live getting out for me especially my whole life was encompassed inside the movement my business was involved in the movement yeah I ran a record label I don't know if I mentioned that earlier or not but I my business was involved in that so everything in my life encompassed the movement

everyone I knew just about was in there your whole support network was there so getting out when I first left in march of 2019 I told some of the key people in the organization at that time I said I'm gonna leave I'm gonna retire I passed it down to the chief of staff I said you know you guys can get ahold of me for a little while or whatever but I'm done I'm leaving I'm retiring and retiring is okay in the movement they see that is okay like well maybe he burned out or he's he's done he's just not doing this anymore well I knew I was going to speak out but I wasn't ready for that you know wasn't ready to speak out right away I call it the decompression period and for for some people that decompression period can take years for others it can take weeks it just it just depends on the individual the human beings human beings are resilient they some of them have different ways of dealing with stress and coping with different things like that but some of the fears and concerns that I had when I first left was is society going to accept me back as as an individual you know we talked a little bit about dehumanizing I felt like because of all the dehumanizing I had done over the years and because of how the movement and the people in it were being dehumanized even if I left that the rest of the world would not give me a chance of course I wasn't verbalizing that or saying it to anybody because who could I say it to I told a couple of people that I had known for 20 years or so in the movement hey I'm leaving I just don't want to be part of this anymore and they were like what are you gonna do you're closing down your business what are you gonna do what are you gonna do what are you gonna do with your life what are you gonna put on your job application Jeff commander of the nsm for 25 years who's gonna hire you you know like that's and those were some of the fears that I had and I don't really like using the word fear but you know like fear emotion these sort of things and but it was a it was a fear or a concern you know like what what was I going to do would society accept me back so these are for everybody there's all these different complications you know for me it was a lot of it was a lot of that you know but at the same time it was you know and there was other smaller factors that played parts too but I felt like especially because of some of the people I knew and some of the pain that I had caused countless people thousands of people maybe over the years that not only was it necessary to speak out but I had a moral obligation to do so that I had to do this that I felt compelled just like I once felt compelled to be in the movement this was going to be my new mission now is to be able to reach as many people to do peace building to reach out and and help others and a lot of people a lot of people would say why would you do that why would you walk away when you're at the top in your old world why would you walk away from that when you had it was easy you know it got it was easy to hate people it was easy to make money there and all and all that sort of thing I had my life cut out for me so the easy thing would have been to stay but I couldn't morally participate in that any longer not when people were losing their lives not when people that I knew that I had met that had shown me compassion were hurting and that because of the organization or because of the movement I was involved in causing that hate and pain as a human being you can't you can't reconcile that like in the movement when someone would go kill someone Christchurch tree of life all these different things

we would say well wasn't one of our guys so it didn't matter you know that's the that's the type of the type of dehumanizing that we did when we were there at the time of the Oklahoma City bombing you know when I was in my more radical time period you know when people were mourning what happened there and this sounds is probably really disturbing and from a psychological aspect people someone asked me this and I want to share it now when I speak out they asked like what was how did you feel when Oklahoma City bombing happened and all those people died well I knew that there was a daycare center that was in there and that government employees had brought their kids there and that that I think they were on the second to the bottom floor or something so most or all of those children died my thought was how could the scumbag parents have put their children in a federal building in the daycare there knowing we are at war with the system that's the kind of that's the kind of thinking that when you're in an extremist movement that you have you're not thinking about like oh my gosh all the loss of life and stuff like that you're thinking how bad were those parents to put their kids there when we were at war with the system well the rest of the world didn't know we were at war I mean that day they did but I mean this is this is the kind of mentality that people have in the movement and it's the same mentality where you have guys that are doing these killings in New Zealand in in Pittsburgh and all these sort of things and they're filming it and there's people online calling them martyrs and saints and things like that we had to have a policy in the NSM towards towards the end when I was getting out we had social media policies telling people don't post violent memes celebrating death or terrible violent things it just seemed like a wise policy at the time but reflecting on it after getting out why would you have to have a policy like that if you had a normal type of thinking individuals in these groups why would you have to have a policy like that but at the time it was just a management decision hey don't do that you guys but when you get out and you de-radicalize and you see all these things and I call it called it my decompression period you reflect back on all these horrible things and reflect back on why did I do that why did I think I could fix this why did why did I stay so long and I mean that's a process that's probably going to be ongoing for the rest of my life for me personally but seeing it and understanding it is why I say I feel like we can reach others there because we know the processes we know what what gets them there and no amount of education or books or anything like that can quite understand that unless you've been there and walked in that in those shoes so I feel a sense of moral obligation and responsibility to do this work that I'm doing now thank you so we have we have some questions from the audience that have been brought to me on the tablets I'm going to in the interest of times really combine a couple questions and I had a little bit of a primer on some of Darryl's insights that I think I can draw out that will also reflect the interest I'm seeing here and the point that I thought was most interesting in the conversation I had before our meeting or among them let's say Darryl was this idea of meeting people by I think this the theme that we've been talking about about deep listening hearing what they're saying and then offering them back a counter argument so we were talking about Christian identity and and in our and our belief systems and

someone had mentioned to you the idea of or had talked to you about in the KKK the burning of the cross and you talked about there was the cross burning which is at just FYI the the warning that you're out of place then there's the the cross lighting which is when they're within group and they're just adorning the cross to sort of I guess rally the the clan right you know and so I'm and we were both saying like and does this really matter but the point that I want to draw here was they said that the cross when they were doing the cross I guess you know sort of um internal cross burning um that it was to to light the world for Jesus to come back and so you said that wasn't your version of Christianity so could you talk about they think we also mentioned that you know religions matter and perhaps the belief systems themselves don't matter but I guess I think that we might be able to to to add some nuance to that in terms of thinking about the content of our religions and how those ideations those ideologies excuse me can actually create the foundation for um the actions that were later seeing as hatred and so I think you had a great way of explaining um how you push back on this idea that Jesus needed a lighted cross to find his way right well in in a nutshell um I was talking with this one clansman in my car we were riding around and I was driving and we're talking about the clan claims to be a Christian organization so I'm questioning well if you're Christian why are you you know burning up the cross and long story short when they light the cross out of ceremony it serves two purposes fire symbolically is a purifier and uh like you know if you get a splinter your fender your mom takes the needle puts it in the fire to purify it and then digs it out of your fingers you don't get infected uh number one so symbolically they use the fire to to signify the purity of the white race second reason they use the fire on the cross is because they are Christian and they're lighting the way for Jesus Christ because Jesus Christ is going to return one day well I countered that there had to be two Jesus Christ and they and he said no it's only one Jesus Christ Daryl I said no there's two there's yours and there's mine and he said well what is your Jesus Christ black or something I said no he's not black but he's not white either now he you know he's all of conflicted of anything because of the area where he appeared I've been to Damascus Syria I've been in that area and everybody there was all of conflicted and when Jesus appeared there he appeared as one of them so the guy said what's your point I said my point is they tuned Jesus Christ your Jesus Christ you have you have to light the cross for he goes yeah well if you were Christian you would know you know Jesus Christ is going to return we were lighting the way for Jesus Christ I said well there's a difference you have to light the way for your Jesus Christ my Jesus Christ lights the way for me who the heck are you to light the way for Jesus Christ and this it made it made him stop and think and this is what Jeff was talking about being in an echo chamber being in a bubble when you hear this over and over again it's pitch to you over and over again you begin to believe it's true but then when you think about it wait a minute who am I to light the way for Jesus Christ the Bible says Jesus Christ is the light and then all of a sudden it's like well I've been wrong but a black guy was telling me that so he must be wrong but it is right it's in the Bible so there's all this cognitive distance going on until they figure it out another quick example of something is this another Klansman the biggest body of

authority is one that we don't see and that that authority's name is they you know they say you know who is they so we were talking about crime black crime and there's one different Klansmen said to me well you know that they say all black people have a gene in them that makes them violent and I said what are you talking about and he said who's doing all the drive-bys and carjackings in southeast you're talking about southeast Washington DC which is predominantly black high crime ridden there's some whites that live there but predominantly black I said okay there's black people but that's what lives there who's doing all the crime in Bangor Maine white people because that's what lives there I said you know you're not you're not considering the demographics oh no no that's not to do with it you all have this gene or they say oh black don't have this gene I said look I'm as black as anybody you've ever seen I said I have never done a carjacking or drive by how do you explain that he didn't even hesitate he answered me like that he said your genius latent hasn't come out yet it almost came out right then but but but you know I mean because he was so programmed you know from hearing that over and over again black people you know they have this gene it just makes them uncontrollable violent and so I was speechless because how how do you even bite on that and chew on it you can't so I was speechless he said they're all smother huh so you're gonna say so I thought about it and then I used his body of authority I said well you know they say that all white people have a gene in them that makes them a serial killer and he's like well how do you figure I'm like well name me three black serial killers he couldn't do it I said here I'm gonna name one for you I named one for him I said I'm gonna give you one just name me too he couldn't do it I said look here Charles Manson John Wayne Gacy Henry Lee Lucas Albert DeSabo the Boston Strangler Ted Bundy David Berkowitz son of Sam on and on I said I said you know they're all white I said son you are a serial killer he said Darryl I've never killed anybody I said your genius latent hasn't come out yet and he says well that's stupid I said well duh and I said yes it is stupid I said but it's no more stupid for me to say that about you what you said about me he didn't concede right then he got very quiet but you can see his wheels are like spinning real fast and within five months he left the clan his robe was the first robe I ever got and I'll tell you what I did with it I never had a clan robe before I know some of y'all are wondering something go ahead and answer the question for you so you don't have to ask it all right I brought the robe home because I know they feel very powerful in their robe and hood like Clark Kent Superman kind of thing I put the robe on I put the robe on I'm transparent I'm in my line I put the hood on and I went and I stood in front of the mirror I looked at myself I looked stupid so I took it off simple as that so that's where the black Klansman story came from so you know sometimes it's not the amount of education academics and books written you know stats of books written this high that's going to persuade somebody is meeting them where they are as some stupid example that I gave was what resonated with this person right so it sounds like the the layering that happens through the various socialization processes that I think you all have you both have unpacked I think is perhaps penetrated right by the deep listening by the reflecting back of humanity and perhaps thus informed by your religious understanding and certainly the idea of

forgiveness is very central to to Christian understandings of who Christ is to to us as Christians and then what we're to be modeling as as Jesus was skinned on as it were here on the on the earth and so I think one of the things it is a theme in Christianity is this idea of of of the state of the soul the state of the spirit and the ways in which we can go in either direction at any point and so you know the the greatest sin is right the sin of pride and that's what leads to the fall so one of the questions we have here Daryl all of that was a setup to talk about this idea of even as you're leaving and trying to spread light both of you many people have asked you know how you're dealing with perhaps threats on your life ways of dealing with the the evil that might come back toward you because you were part of a group that promoted a set of beliefs that you know if it didn't actively promote murder certainly was willing to engage in various kinds of acts that were deeply threatening and perhaps could lead to death or serious injury so just a series of questions about your sense of your own protection how you're managing that mentally perhaps if you have other ways of managing security or thinking about your continued process of leaving the movement and speaking out and what that looks like for you and to be able to sustain that in all the ways that that is going to entail well that's a good question but when I was in the movement I mean for I can speak from personal experience but from when I was in the movement the doxing and and I think everybody probably knows what doxing is where you put out somebody's address and where they work and all that I was doxed by Antifa when I was in the movement so you know there there was threats there before I would be remiss to say that you know one shouldn't be concerned about those type of things you know but at the same time I think if a person lives their life that way and dwells on the pos the possibility of something like that happening it's not healthy and it also if people if the movement thinks that they can install fear in people like us then we've already lost the battle I'm not afraid of nothing you know and if people that are trying to de-radicalize think that they that they should be afraid also they're not going to leave they're going to stay in that bubble they're going to stay in that echo chamber so you know we it I don't want to sound like try to sound too macho or anything up here like or anything like that but I mean we in the movement were used to violence we're used to fighting and stuff like that so if anybody wants to try to attack us you know we already know that world all too well so I mean it wouldn't be in the best interest that's that's just now you're on the other side of it so you'll be fighting for something else um you know and you know the more threats you get the more you know you're doing your job right right well to wrap up this portion of the Q and A because I want to transition to the next the last portion of the the evening a short question for both of you um what as you're thinking about the journeys that you all have been on over the I guess few months for you and years um uh for a Daryl what has been most surprising to you like what are one of the things that you're or one or two things maybe that you're able to just sort of tuck about and say wow you know I think the point about curiosity came up from Rabbi Sarna like what if what what has allowed you through your curiosity to just you know learn something that was just something you never would have discovered had you not taken this journey that's maybe you know just

a hopeful note for us to think about in terms of the delights that could come along the way even as this journey can be quite um uh taxing in many ways even as it's it's um bringing light in the biggest sense of the word for me and and I know Rabbi Sarna wanted me to explain this too so I didn't get a chance um for me I guess the biggest thing was is I let the racism go a few years ago as I was in the de-radicalization process but the anti-Semitism stuck the anti-Semitism I did not I was not able to let go of until I was starting to let go of it when I left the movement but it wasn't really until after I left that I had the opportunity to um understand you know better understand the Jewish people through interactions and things like that and and uh as he mentioned I spoke at a synagogue just within the last month or so and um the incredible amount of compassion there and forgiveness it was it was just unbelievable and I brought a couple of people that were also in the NSM at one time one was on my security team and the other one was a woman that worked in the propaganda department and none of us had been in a synagogue before so it was telling our story or telling my life story there in front of all those people that had been this on the receiving end of the most hateful stuff that I had put out over the years and to be literally hugged by almost everybody in this in the synagogue was unbelievable I still it gives me chills thinking about it you know because it was it was like when when your kids are in school when they're young and it's opposite day it's like being out you know it's like being out of the movement everything is opposite day but in a good way so it's sort of like karma came back and you know it's like it's like we'll give an example like say you picked on this person in school like you bullied this person and it turned out that that person was like gondi you know like that that's that's I mean that's a that's a extreme example but that's kind of how it felt it was like we in the movement literally thought the Jews were behind every evil every terrible thing in the world and then to see my experience with the Jewish people since I've been out has been the opposite of that just about every single one of them so it's that's pretty incredible for me you know I never set out to change anybody that was that was not my mission my mission you know you you see the name in the media darrel Davis black musician converts X number of of white supremacists or whatever no I did not convert anybody I didn't even convert one all right over 200 have gotten out and I have been the impetus for that but they converted themselves just through the information in conversations that I've planted and you know as a kid we all I think everybody in here has heard the expressions a tiger doesn't change your stripes a leopard doesn't change your spots I and I grew up hearing that why would I think that a classmen would change his robe and hood you know I then I expected anybody to change but in having these conversations one by one they started changing not everybody and they'll be those who will go to their grave being hateful and violent there's no changing them whatsoever but I saw one after another after conversations and giving to no people begin to change I thought this is weird I never expected this person to change and now I own this person's robe and hood you know you know how is that and so I must be doing something right so I'm going to keep on doing it I would much rather be on stage playing a concert or a dance and having fun then going to a clan rally or listening to somebody's you hate you

know but I see a greater need to do this and if what I'm doing has become effective and tigers are changing their stripes and leopards are changing their spots then let me keep doing it and I can tell you something you know I am just a rock and roll piano player I'm not a you know my degree is in jazz I'm not a sociologist or psychologist but if I can do this as a rock and roll piano player anybody in here can do it if you go about it the right way and like I said it doesn't have to be about race and think about it this way a black man sitting here with a former neo-nazi or KKK people or whatever having these conversations being able to have these conversations and effect change don't you think it'd be a lot easier to go home at Thanksgiving and have those conversations at your dinner table because so many people don't want to go home for their family thanks having dinner because one of their family members voted for that person and you voted for this person and you don't want to talk about it and the family is divided think about the extreme that I did you know Thanksgiving is not that extreme okay so if I can do it as a rock and roll piano player everybody in here can do it that's what I learned if you like this and you want to hear more like share review and subscribe to this podcast and from all of us here at the Veritas Forum thank you.

[Music]