

Interview with **Darrell Evers**

April 3, 1986

Production Team: B

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Interview gathered as part of *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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**Note:** These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in ***bold italics*** was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize*.

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[camera roll 399]

[sound roll 1345]

[slate]

INTERVIEWER: OK, DARRELL, DESCRIBE YOUR FATHER TO ME, AND YEAH, JUST DESCRIBE HIM TO ME.

Evers: Well, he first, was a man of lots of love, he had lots of love.

INTERVIEWER: OK, START AGAIN. TELL ME WHO HE IS. SAY, MY FATHER MEDGAR EVERS—

Evers: Oh, OK. My father, Medgar Evers, was a very kind and loving man, very strong, had lots of strength that emanated from him. And the thing that made me feel so comfortable being with him was the fact that he was going to protect me. He was going to protect my family. He was going to also educate us and give us every opportunity that everyone else had. And I felt that, you know, when I was younger, and I just feel the love that came from him, you know, su—as an example, he used to come home at night and we would all be waiting for him if the time was permissible. And he would come home and we would run to the door, and he would say, well, I have, you know, some gifts for you, and he would always bring us something—and usually it was Cracker Jacks or something like that, and we would just jump all over him. And you know, those times I remember really clear because, you know, some kids might not have that opportunity to be close with their father, you know,

every time that they'd see him that he could spend quality time and quality love and, I don't know, I just remember him educating me, schooling me, teaching me. You know, how to protect myself, how to be strong, don't let anything, you know, put you down, don't let anything, you know, take away your rights. And, he, for example, he would teach me how to fight and how to block punches. And he would teach me how to be aggressive in running. He'd teach me how to run straight, run properly. He would run with me, you know, and play with me, he would teach me how to mow the lawn at a very young age, you know, something that my mother thought was, [laughs] wasn't right. Says, he's just a young boy, let him enjoy his childhood, but he says, I want, I want him to know, know responsibility. And I really appreciate that, you know.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

[cut]

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[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARK.

INTERVIEWER: OK, DARRELL, TELL ME ABOUT THE GAMES AND WHAT THEY MEANT TO YOU AT THAT AGE.

Evers: Well, the games, at eight years old, you know, kids like to play a lot of games so to me it was, it was Army and combat and my father used to see that in me, so he made a self-protection game. He says, OK, we're going to pretend, it's like if someone approached you, what would you do? And I said, well, I guess I'd run. And he said, no, if, if you heard a loud noise or you heard a menacing sound, I think the best thing we should do is fall on the floor and get under cover, get under a table, or get under a bed, you know, so that we're not hit or hurt by that. And I thought that was, was a great game, you know, and I lived my life as a game, in that sense, because it was, it was more of, you know, it was more exciting than, than just, oh my God, you know, what's going to happen, you know. People are after us and everything like that. So, that was, that was a—it was a nice game that he played with us and it was, it brought in a whole new feeling in my life when I was, you know, at that age, because at, at first I had the, the free reign of the lots. I could run and play anywhere I wanted to play. I could do—not anywhere, but within a certain area. But then the area, the boundaries of, of playing were cut down and I couldn't understand why. And later on, I found out, you know, from Medgar, that those boundaries were there to protect me and I really wanted to know, well, what was I being protected from? You know, why did I need to be protected? What did I do to anyone? I did not do anything to anyone. And he said, well, there are some people who just don't understand you, even the way that you are, just as a human being, just because of your color. And, and that was something that I found very difficult to, to understand, so naturally I felt like a caged person. You know, you can only go so far. And, to be able to go and visit my grandparents with my father and my mother, you know, was like such a joy because there was so much freedom. It was in the country and we could run

anywhere we wanted. We didn't have to have that feeling of, of entrapment, we didn't have to have that feeling of being in a boundary. And, I guess, freedom is a key word there, because it's something that most kids know, something that most eight year olds or any age, as a matter of fact, knows that, that it feels good to be free, it feels good not to be pigeonholed. And—

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[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARK.

INTERVIEWER: OK TELL ME ABOUT THAT EXPERIENCE GOING IN AND SEEING YOUR FATHER AT THAT TIME.

Evers: Well, going down to the downtown branch of the NAACP, I encountered a group of people inside the building. They had sugar, ketchup, syrup, you know, whatever, you know, you can think of that would be in a cafeteria—all on the top of their heads, their shoulders, their whole body. And as a young kid, I, I couldn't understand, you know, why, why do these people have all this on there? My father took me aside and he said, basically, Darrell, I want to tell you that these people are standing for their rights. They want to be served where it's only white people are allowed to eat and they would like to have the respect, you know, of any other human being, you know, that they could be served there. And people did not, you know, want to serve them, so they poured ketchup on 'em and sugar and it was, it was a little confusing for me at that time because I couldn't understand why someone would submit themselves to that sort of treatment and why someone would not want to fight back, but that was one of my father's main goals and objectives, was a nonviolent action. That that had more power than anything else. And he tried to explain that to me the best way possible and the only way that I could really have a practical experience of that, a recollection of that, was when I went to the zoo in Mississippi. And they had the black drinking fountains and the white drinking fountains and the black restrooms and the white restrooms. For the life of me, I couldn't understand why there was one for black people and one for white people. I said, I want to go to the one that's, that says white. What if I'm thirsty and I want to go there? And I, in, I could understand at that point, you know, what he was trying to tell me, is that you have rights, you know, you have rights, and don't let anyone take those rights away from you. And it was a very practical lesson for me, at that point.

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[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARK.

INTERVIEWER: OK, DARRELL, DESCRIBE FOR ME THAT EVENING, IF YOU CAN.

Evers: Well, it was an evening that my brother, sister, and I were waiting for my father in anticipation like we usually do, you know, when he came home, we expected him to bring us something. And we were watching TV and all of a sudden we heard a very loud noise and we heard glass break then we heard a loud thump and my mother got very excited. She ran, she told us to hit the floor, so we all fell on the floor. And this time I knew it was really serious, because we had been attacked before with Molotov cocktails, but never had it been a bullet and I, and I recognized that some high velocity projectile had come through the house. My mother went to the door and she told us to wait behind. She opened the door and she screamed. At that point, she ran outside and curiosity got the best of me, and I, and I walked to the front door and I just stood there and I saw my father. He was laying [sic] in a pool of blood. I had a very strong feeling that, that my father was taken care of, even though he was wounded by an assassin's bullet. I felt that his soul was in peace, his soul was in rest, and I felt that myself, personally. And I felt very, very comfortable even though I was hurt and it was—it's, it was a confusing type of feeling, it was like comfort and hurt at the same time. And we were escorted, my brother and my sister and I were escorted across the—

[sound roll out]

[cut]

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[slate]

INTERVIEWER: OK, DARRELL, TELL ME THE STORY, THIS IS AFTER YOUR FATHER'S DEATH, AND YOU'RE IN THE HOUSE WITH PEOPLE.

Evers: Well, I remember, now, being in the house after—the day after the death of my father, and this overwhelming grief that was in the house, a number of people had come by to comfort my mother and to comfort our family, and there was just a lot of, a lot of grief, because so many people loved Medgar, and, you know, he was so respected, you know, throughout, throughout the country, and especially in, in Mississippi. And it was a little bit too much for an eight year old at that time. I'm talking about myself, cause I have the nature of being a light, and, a light person, a person who just felt free and felt love, you know, and, and grief was very alien to me. My father, I felt, was in peace and I felt that he was finally resting, you know, because there was so much pressure on him before the day, you know, that he died. And there was just a lot of grief that I couldn't relate to too much of because I knew that he was taken care of. And, I was outside riding the bike, you know, trying to forget about what had just happened and I was stopped and someone said, well, why are you, why are you playing? You know, why are you, why aren't you in the house? Why aren't you with everyone? Why, why are you playing? To me it was, I was like, why are you asking me that question, you know? I know where my father is. I've had a deep feeling and experience with my father, you know, and I know that he's taken care of, and I know that he was a good and a

great man and very few, you know, who are like him, and so, I know that he's taken care of. And, you know, that was the feeling that I wanted to relate to that person who asked me that question.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

[cut]

00:14:10:00

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARK.

INTERVIEWER: OK, DARRELL, TELL ME ABOUT D.C. AND WHAT YOU WERE FEELING THERE.

Evers: Well, D.C. was—

INTERVIEW: START AGAIN AND TELL ME, YOU KNOW, AT MY FATHER'S FUNERAL IN WASHINGTON.

Evers: OK. At my father's funeral in Washington, that was a very sad moment for me because, you know, it was, it was an acknowledgement that the actual body that I used to hug, the actual being that I used to, you know, expect to come home, was really going to be gone, because once you, you see the casket closed, and you see it lowered, it's, it's very, it's very powerful. And no matter how much love and comfort that I knew that he was in, I still missed the physical part. I still missed hugging him and holding him. And, also at that time, I was, I'm not very much—I don't like to dress up that much so it was hard for me [laughs] to get dressed and be somewhat, you know, in happy spirits, I guess that's not the type of feeling that you have at a funeral, and I definitely wasn't happy, but just to add on the fact that I had, had to get dressed and I didn't particularly like to dress up as a young kid, and at the same time, you know, on the sad occasion that my father was being buried was—it was a lot for me. And I think that was one of the first times that I, I actually did cry very hard and very strong and I really let that flood come out, because it was something that needed to come out and something that you just can't, you know, think everything's all right—

00:16:16:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: STOP, STOP. JUST HOLD IT. KEEP THAT THOUGHT.

00:16:18:00

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARK. DID YOU GET THAT?

Evers: I didn't really like to dress up and it was something that, you know, I had to do, and it wasn't a pleasurable thing for me, but I just, you know, missed my father, you know, the physical part of my father. I, I wanted to touch that physical part. I wanted to hold that physical part. It was, it was all right to know that he was taken care of and he was gone, that essence of what my father was, that, that equality amongst men, you know, but I wanted the physical part and I wanted, I wanted him back. And it was the first time that I really cried. The first time that I had really let go after his death because Medgar was, was more than just someone who was on the television screen for the whole nation to see, to me. He was mine. You know. He was my father and all the feelings about having to dress up and, and wear a tie and all that, really were kind of insignificant when it came down to knowing that I was really gonna be without a father for, for the rest of my life. You know, my real father, for the rest of my life. And, and that really hit me at that point—very sad, very sad.

00:18:05:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: OK.

00:18:07:00

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARK.

INTERVIEWER: OK, EXPLAIN WHAT YOU EXPERIENCED THAT DAY AND THEN DESCRIBE WHAT IT MEANT.

Evers: OK. When I saw my father in the pool of blood, I, I had a feeling, not an, not an intuition, not a thought, but an actual feeling and experience of an overwhelming love. A love that surrounded me and was definitely in that area where the incident had happened. I couldn't explain it at the time, but I knew that it was a feeling of what some people might call God or some people might call—

INTERVIEWER: LET ME CUT FOR A SEC, I'M SORRY.

[cut]

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[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARK.

Evers: I remember when I saw my father laying there in a pool of blood, I got this overwhelming feeling of love. This overwhelming feeling of, of protection. And I knew that he was all right still. I knew that he was encompassed in this love and it just brought back to me the whole message that he was teaching me as I grew up, was that, that there's that equality and along with equality there's that love, along with that love there's that friendship, you know, all these things go together. It's not, it's not just one thing, it's not just we want freedom. It's not just we want justice. We want to be human beings, and that's all my father really showed me. Was be a human being, be a real person, don't be anything else, just be a real person. And that's, that's what led him, that's what motivated him, that's what I saw move his whole train down the track that, that he was running on. And that was a track of, of equality—that was a track of, of love. That was a track of friendship. And that's, that's a very nice track to be on and I'm glad that he had me on his train. And he has me on his train, cause I'm still living it. So—

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[cut]

[wild audio]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THAT WAS GREAT.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:20:45:00

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