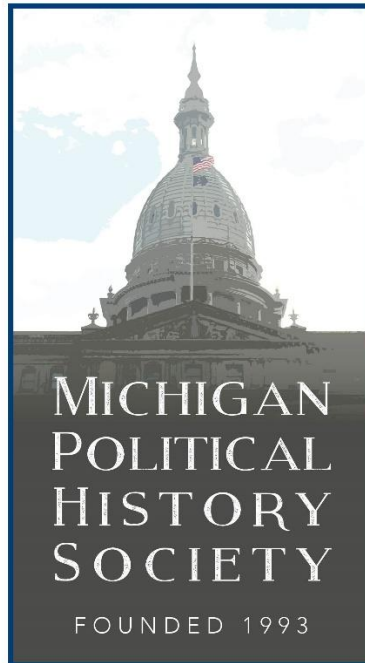


GREGORY EATON

Interviewed by
Tina Miller
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Tina Miller:

Hi, my name is Tina Miller, and today, we are here with Gregory Eaton, longtime mover and shaker, Lansing lobbyist with many stories to share with us today. So I think what we'll get started with is why don't you tell us a little bit about growing up in Lansing, Michigan?

Gregory Eaton:

Well, my family's been in Lansing since 1882. My grandmother came from Chatham, Canada, so we had a great relationship in this city. My name is Elbert Gregory Eaton. I was named after my father, Elbert Wesley Eaton, and his first two names, my grandmother's brothers never had kids, and she gave him that name, so that's how I ended up with Elbert Gregory Eaton. She loved Gregory Peck. He was a star back in the '30s in the movies, and she liked the name and she wanted to keep that, but the rest of my name, I was named after my great uncles.

Tina Miller:

So tell us a little bit about family growing up here, your brothers and sisters, a little bit more about your mom and dad.

Gregory Eaton:

I had three sisters. Joanne Eaton, my older sister, Joyce Eaton was the second oldest, I was the third, and Brenda Surae Eaton was the baby. She was 10 years younger than me, so I changed a lot of diapers, and we didn't have Pampers back in them days.

Tina Miller:

Tell me a little bit about your work ethic that you earned from your parents, what you learned from them. You've talked a little bit about that being a major part of your success.

Gregory Eaton:

My grandfather lived in Lansing. He was born in Detroit and moved to Lansing in 1903 and met my grandmother who she came in from Canada from Chatham. So I had good work ethics because both of them taught me and my dad was the best. He was the best at everything. He'd read three or four papers a day. He was a porter in a private press club, was a press club where I end up join where the business people had right downtown Lansing. Archie Tarpoff did all the food catering there for us because we building right next door to them.

So I got to be around a lot of exciting people, and the people that knew him respect my dad. The more they respect my dad, when I started my janitorial service in 1960, I was 20 years old, and I got a lot of the clients through my father because they knew my father. They worked with me when I'd go help tend bar for him. I learned how to tend bar before I even knew my name. So that was a good relationship, and if it wasn't from my dad, I probably wouldn't have known as many people or met as many people or been as successful as I have. It was through my father.

Tina Miller:

You often bring up a quote, and I think a lot of people around you have kind of taken on that quote something that your mother always told you. What was that?

Gregory Eaton:

You're as good as anybody, but you're not better than anyone. She really held us kids to that, and I live by it. I live by it every day.

Tina Miller:

So I have been told by your sisters that you just always had money, and sometimes you would hide it. Do you have a little story about money at home?

Gregory Eaton:

Yeah. My mother, in our dining room, we had this beautiful chandelier, and I'd hide it from my sisters, anybody. So they had a party that day on a Sunday, and the people says, "Lela," that's my mother's name, "That's some money." "Oh, that's just Gregory. He hides it already. He always has money." And it was really true. I've always had... I mean, back in the day, it wasn't credit cards then. So anybody in Lansing at night, if at the country club or anywhere we've got gambling, "Call Gregory. He's got cash. He's got cash." I've been a cash guy most of my life. Yeah.

Tina Miller:

You want to talk a little bit about some of the jobs that you started out with, and then you obviously talked a little bit about the janitorial service, starting that at a young age.

Gregory Eaton:

Yeah. Most of the jobs, my first job was Norris's Grocery Store. It was a grocery store two doors from my house. I was eight years old. I'd put bottles away and do things like that. Then, I'd go out and hustle bottles. Like I said, I always had money. So that was nice. That was really good. And bartending at parties with my dad, extra money. I mean, it's just always about money. I mean, I think if you had money, you could buy what you wanted to do. I could go to the movies when I want to do, and most of my money went for clothes at Kositchek's. I had an account at Kositchek's at 13.

Tina Miller:

Oh my goodness. Really?

Gregory Eaton:

Yeah. You could buy and put it away and storage, so that-

Tina Miller:

Always been a sharp dresser.

Gregory Eaton:

When I walked by that store today... My dad dressed there. My grandmother dressed there, so they went back when Kositchek's came in. Kositchek's first was in Eaton Rapids.

Tina Miller:

Okay. Okay.

Gregory Eaton:

Eaton Rapids had a big factory there that did woools and things like that. So that's why Kositchek's, when they came in from New York, they moved into there and then ended up in Lansing for a hundred and something years.

Tina Miller:

Yeah. Yeah. Wow, so interesting.

Gregory Eaton:

It was clothes, cars. I mean, I just like to dress, and I like cars, so that made me work harder.

Tina Miller:

Yeah, yeah. So we're here to talk a little bit about Michigan politics, and you got into Michigan politics at a very young age. You want to tell us the story of kind of what led you into becoming a lobbyist?

Gregory Eaton:

Well, first of all, Michigan Auto Dealers Association was on Townsend Street, right down the street from the Capitol. So I was 16 years old, and I'd run it and get the box and take it back to the office for them to go through. That's all I did, just run back and forth, back and forth and do that for Gil. And then, when I graduated from high school, I went to California for a year. I was going out for a football scholarship. I got there late. So I hung around California. For fun, I was shining shoes. A guy says, "Gregory, what are you doing here?" He says, "I went to school there, your dad, your family. Why are you here? California people take care of California." I got plane fare. I had money. I didn't run out of money. Flew back to Lansing, kissed the ground, and never left. I spent the rest of my time in Lansing building my name, reputation.

Tina Miller:

I love it. So tell me a little bit about your relationships with some people that are associated with Michigan politics because I know that Dick Whitmer has some early stories while you guys were in school together.

Gregory Eaton:

Yeah. With Dick, we played football and basketball and stuff, but Dick didn't come to Lansing till the late '60s. I started with the auto dealers, like I said, at 16. I had an uncle, Uncle Jack Young. He was the first Black state rep out of Flint. So my aunt worked for him. So when I come through there, I'd stop by and see her at her desk and stuff, so I hung around that Capitol since I was 16.

Tina Miller:

Wow. Wow. I hear a little story about maybe playing football with Dick Whitmer.

Gregory Eaton:

Yeah. We played football against each other, and he said he ran over my chest with his big 13 shoes or 14 he wore. But you know what? How could you? I was a sprinter on the track team, and so I had no worry about him catching me.

Tina Miller:

I love it. I love it. So becoming a lobbyist, did you ever think at a young age that you would be in politics, you'd become a lobbyist?

Gregory Eaton:

Well, it started with Gil Haley, like I said. He says, "One day." He recognized we had 15 Blacks in the Senate and the House, two in the Senate and 13 in the House, all of them out of Detroit but Basil Brown, and he was representing Highland Park, which was just [inaudible 00:09:18] so he realized that the Democrat was in control. So he realized he needed somebody that looked like me, and that's how I started with him-

Tina Miller:

Tell-

Gregory Eaton:

... lobbying for the Auto Dealers Association-

Tina Miller:

And so tell me a little bit-

Gregory Eaton:

... so the dealers in every city around the state. So not only I got to know them, I got to know dealers and their kids and the families and stuff at conventions, the Grand Hotel, and things like that. I've been around that. See, back then, the Grand didn't have any colored people staying. They could not stay at the Grand. The help like me and the waiters and the staff, we stayed over at the horse barn.

Tina Miller:

That's crazy.

Gregory Eaton:

They would look at me like, "Who is this guy Gregory Eaton?" But they called me Elbert because that's what's on, "Elbert." My boss, she lines as a cook, "Elbert, come do this. Elbert could do this." The pecan balls at the Grand, that's what I used to make every day. I used the cooler and make them and put them in the cooler.

Tina Miller:

Really?

Gregory Eaton:

So Gil Haley came in the kitchen one day and grabbed me, took me out and introduced me to people. So that was it. I was in Flint because when he graduated, he was a hotel major, and he was night manager of the Grand Hotel.

Tina Miller:

Oh, I didn't know that part.

Gregory Eaton:

So old man Whitfield that owned the Grand, he introduced Mr. Whitfield, and so I was really known through the hotel, too. The governor's son, Gary, and our football team, we had nine of us up there, and all of us had jobs. So during the day, after we get through work, we'd go work out, and then I'd go over to the governor's house or somebody. They say, "Who is this boy? He knows everybody," and I was like, I thought it was natural. So that's how it all started getting into politics.

Tina Miller:

Yeah. So you went from, and I'm going to jump ahead just because it's part of this story, but you went from sleeping basically in the horse barn to your picture is on the wall.

Gregory Eaton:

Yeah, my picture's through the wall, all through the Grand.

Tina Miller:

Grand Hotel now.

Gregory Eaton:

Yeah.

Tina Miller:

What does that mean to you?

Gregory Eaton:

I mean, I laugh at it now. I mean, I never thought that I would be that popular. The one sign, we were there for the big chamber, and they got it, and they kept it. When you go into the bar, you see it. I'm sitting there. You know I was sharp, clean, and they got me right there, and it's been there since the last 50 years.

Tina Miller:

Wow. Wow.

Gregory Eaton:

So we'll go kind of back to early age stuff and tell me a little bit about joining the firm and back in the day, what that was like, the guys that you were working with, lobbyist firm, let's talk a little bit about that.

Well, we had a great team. Jim Karoub was sharp. He's one of the sharpest legislators and guys I know. We had all the racetracks. We had state troopers. We started building a big clientele, and we were one of the first big lobbyist firms in Lansing. So that took to us another level, and it was fun. I mean, we threw the best parties at the Red Room. We were the best lobbying firm that I think ever been in Lansing. It's different today, but it was tough then. I mean, Gil had made me join the Michigan Republican Party. I wrote checks up to them until a few years ago because you need to work both sides

out. I had great relationships with Republicans in the Senate and House because I think it's my personality, and it just worked out. Some things will work out for you, but you have to work at it. This doesn't happen. I didn't brag about it. I just done it. I wasn't married. I was single, so it helped, too.

Tina Miller:

What would you say was kind of the largest win for the firm? I think we've talked about it a little bit.

Gregory Eaton:

I think when we got the contract, the Blue Cross Blue Shield, that was one of the biggest contracts that we got, and that was big for us. Dick Whitmer came in later. McQuade was... He had a Blue Cross Blue Shield back then, and I had a good relationship with McQuade, so that worked out well.

Tina Miller:

So your time in politics and you're young, you're starting to meet people, you're being introduced, you're getting some big wins with the firm, and we're talking to you today, and I think before we started this interview, you looked back at the wall and said 10 governors and-

Gregory Eaton:

I worked with 10 governors. Yeah. Yep. That's kind of nice, too.

Tina Miller:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. We've been recently interviewing some of those governors for your letter to your grandchildren, your book, and so they've been sharing some great stories. I think-

Gregory Eaton:

You did a good job because they really talked. They talked to you. Yeah, so-

Tina Miller:

I think Engler said that you were always his go-to guy. If he needed to know information, Gregory knew it whether it was public or not, and he really depended on your judgment. And so, that speaks volumes when you talk about meeting these people, but when we're interviewing them and they talk so highly of you and that you have not changed in all of this time and everybody has the same thing to say, how does that make you feel really coming from where you came from, starting pretty much on your own paper route, janitorial service?

Gregory Eaton:

I congratulate my parents, like I said, and my dad especially. I mean, he was a hard worker, worked two jobs. Back in them days, two jobs and sending my three sisters to college, and I'm the only one in my family without a college degree, but I've helped my sister and then helped my sister get to med school. All of my kids, every grandkid, I have nine grandkids and three great, and each one was born, I started them on a MET program. So they always had money to go to college.

Tina Miller:

Yes, yes. So you have started several businesses, and several of them have been successful and still going today. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

Gregory Eaton:

Yeah. My biggest business is Metro Cars. I started that 40 some years ago with my partner, and we broke up. And then, I got a new partner with Dan Ret for the last 20 years, but we were in Grand Rapids, Detroit, Vegas, Tahoe, Reno, and Southern California. So that really, boom. That really put me up to really big things. And then, when the disease came in, we had to pull out of Vegas, and it really hurt us. We lost probably about \$20 million in Vegas to shut all everything down. And then-

Tina Miller:

Wow, during COVID.

Gregory Eaton:

... "Hey, that's bad. So what? Move on," and now, we're probably the finest ground transportation company in the United States.

Tina Miller:

Yeah. I think that's been the theme of your life is you really are definitely a half glass full guy. You're always on the positive. Nothing gets you down. You see, if you get some bumps in the road, you figure it out. You don't let anything get you down too much. That's-

Gregory Eaton:

No, I don't. I mean, my dad used to worry about me because I dressed so much, and all my cars were expensive cars. I mean, when I represent the Auto Dealers, Wayne Williams has the Mercedes dealership. So I bought my first, it was a convertible, and I fell asleep. It was the same week my dad died of a heart attack. I hit that bridge in Brighton and slid down, and the state troopers come. They said they saw me running down the highway. I thought it was going to blow up.

Tina Miller:

Oh my goodness.

Gregory Eaton:

I slept. I fell asleep all the way to the state troopers, and I called Dick, and Dick came and picked me up. Whitmer came and picked me up.

Tina Miller:

Really?

Gregory Eaton:

And I slept all the way home.

Tina Miller:

Oh my goodness. I didn't know that.

Gregory Eaton:

So Jack Schick... I had some hockey tickets in my car that Jack wanted. I said, "Jack." I said, "Barnum and Tenny's Body Shop. I got in a little accident." When he came in my door and he looked at me, he said, "How are you alive? Did you see the car?" I said, "No." I said, "My neck's sore though." They totaled it. So that was a wake-up call for me too, driving tired or having two minutes to drink, and now, you get one of them in a lifetime. I stay all night or-

Tina Miller:

It's a wake-up call, yeah.

Gregory Eaton:

... when I go to Detroit now later... I'm a member of the athletic club in Detroit, so I always had a room there. I kept a room there, and so it all works out when you have to think about it, but I've been blessed. It's just like somebody's looking after me. You know?

Tina Miller:

Definitely. So when you talk about Dick Whitmer, he comes into a lot of your stories, and at a very early age, obviously, back to high school and high school sports, I know that you told me a little story about a three-legged race with somebody that might be part of Michigan politics now.

Gregory Eaton:

Yes. I had his daughter on my team, and he had Darren on his team, so we ran against him. We beat him.

Tina Miller:

So you did the three-legged race with Governor Whitmer. How old was she then?

Gregory Eaton:

She was three.

Tina Miller:

Three.

Gregory Eaton:

Darren was four.

Tina Miller:

Oh, wow. Oh, wow. What has your relationship been with Governor Whitmer?

Gregory Eaton:

She calls me Uncle Gregory, and we have a great relationships. We're at the NAACP dinner. It's a big dinner for us at Lansing Center, and I introduced her, and I said, "This is going to be our next state rep, and I'm supporting her, and I want everyone in this room to support her." So I took her around everywhere and white friends, and she won.

Tina Miller:

That's awesome.

Gregory Eaton:

And then, she won the Senate, and then she won the governorship. So we really was like family. We went on vacations together. You know?

Tina Miller:

Yep.

Gregory Eaton:

Yeah.

Tina Miller:

What would you say is the difference, because we talked about this with a few of the governors that we interviewed, difference of politics back then and what has changed? What are some of the differences? I know that when we spoke with Engler, I think he talked about at the end of the day, you guys would all come together. It didn't matter what political party, and that's when decisions, that's when relationships were made, and that it's really lacking that now. What else would you say has changed?

Gregory Eaton:

It's ugly. It's really ugly today. Look at what's going on right now, and I don't know how we can bring that back. The news people got to do better. The people got to do better, and the country's got to do better. Everybody got to play a part in this. Everyone owes them, you and me, everyone. If we don't, it's not going to get any better. It's going to get worse before it gets better.

Tina Miller:

Yeah. Out of everybody that you worked with in the Michigan politics, who stood out the most and why?

Gregory Eaton:

Probably Jacobetti. Jacobetti was chairman of the conference committee, so he ran all the money, and he was the funniest guy in the world.

Tina Miller:

Really?

Gregory Eaton:

I mean, he says, "Let me tell you something. Jim Karoub is not my friend. Jim Karoub is my buddy." And he was well liked. He probably was the most popular legislator we ever had, and the UP was different. They voted always with Coleman Young, Detroit. See, mostly all Democrats up there, and it's changed. It's not that way anymore.

Tina Miller:

Yeah. So we've talked a lot about Lansing. So let's talk a little bit about Detroit and the legislators that you've worked with in Detroit.

Gregory Eaton:

Well, the famous one was Coleman Young, and he was a good friend. His sister was a good friend of my aunts, and I've known Coleman all my life. He was a strong man. I mean, he said in my office at the restaurant downtown, he was still a senator, and he says, "I'm a runner for the mayor of the city of Detroit." I says, "You're majority floor of the Senate, man." He said, "I don't give a damn." He said, "I'm going to run, and I'm going to win." He said, "I want some damn money," and that's the way he talked. So we started raising money for him. Basil Brown was one of my idols. He was probably the smartest man to do the law better than anybody at that Capitol. When he took the microphone, he knew about it. And then, this happened to be both of them being Black.

I had a lot of confidence in him, and that was meant a lot in them days. I'll say like Jacobetti, Tommy Costello was another great friend of mine, and he was in the House and the Senate that I could depend on. Let me see. Art Miller, all of them were great friends of mine. I go to the office. I need something. They could take a walk or didn't vote. I had a lot of good friends on both sides of the aisles, and I think that's where you treat people right, you get that, but sometimes they couldn't vote in their district, it would hurt them. Why would I hurt somebody in the district that couldn't get reelected?

Tina Miller:

Yeah, yeah.

Gregory Eaton:

So that's where I stood on that, and my word was always good.

Tina Miller:

Right. I know that we talked a little bit about the Red Room, and you guys said that you could always kind of read the way people were going to vote when they left there and that-

Gregory Eaton:

The speakers of the house, every time, a new speaker got in, I had a good relationship, Republican or Democrat because they were the speakers. You respect the title of the job, and you went and got votes, helped them out, and that's the way I worked, and I still work out that way today.

Tina Miller:

I know you talked a little bit about Blue Cross Blue Shield and the accident fund. Any-

Gregory Eaton:

Well, Blue Cross Blue Shield was such a big contract for the state of Michigan and everybody because insurance, everyone needed insurance, and that was a big one. McQuade was there, made it happen. Then, Dick took over and kept it happening, and it was a good contract for recruiting associates.

Tina Miller:

So what do you want to see for the next generation coming up and going into politics? What do we do to encourage them?

Gregory Eaton:

We need it. We need new politicians. We need that. We need that on both sides of our Republicans and Democrats. I don't know what the Democrats is going to end up like and I don't know what the Republican end, whoever wins.

Tina Miller:

So we know that Lansing, we can't go without talking about Michigan State and your involvement and support with Michigan State. We've interviewed Izzo and Dantonio talking about you've been just a long supporter of all the Michigan State Spartan sports and-

Gregory Eaton:

Well, my dad and mother, Black athletes and Black students and stuff back in the '30s and my grandfather in the '20s, take them to church, come and get them barber to get haircuts and things like that and feeding them because we were so proud when Black students came to Michigan State back in the '30s and '40s. I was running with most of them by the time in the '50s. I'd hang out. I was still in high school. I'd hang out every Friday night at the campus at the parties. So I got to be a known route, and I did a lot of recruiting. I bought a lot of winter coats. The kids from Florida came up with windbreakers. I probably bought, over the years, a hundred coats to give out to them, to help them out. I was always been that way because I've always had money. I had worked and made money to help others, and that comes from my parents' giving back.

Tina Miller:

You just reminded me of a story. We're talking about businesses and Michigan State. I know that there was a failed attempt at a business one time that somebody told me about with some visors. You want to talk about that story?

Gregory Eaton:

Yeah. Joe Ferguson and I, we came, and we're going to make these sun visors with the old Sparty with the mustache, and you put them up, and that was a second game. Wind was blowing, and everybody says, "No, you just keep them, huh?" Me and Joe, I had to pay the bill because we didn't make no money because Joe didn't have no credit. So I didn't want to mess up my credit. So I had to pay the bill, and he still didn't pay me back.

Tina Miller:

Didn't you sell one, but then the guy said keep the visor?

Gregory Eaton:

He gave me back the-

Tina Miller:

And keep the money.

Gregory Eaton:

He say, "I don't need it."

Tina Miller:

That's funny. That's funny. So now that we're into sports a little bit, there is somebody that you've been mentioned several times as being his mentor along with Joel Ferguson, and that's Earvin Magic Johnson.

Gregory Eaton:

Yes. Earvin lived a block and a half from me. I remember when we was born. In the seventh grade, he was 6'6". The time he left there, he was 6'7", big Afro, and he started working for me in my janitorial. He cleaned up the Michigan Auto Dealer building, and he'd be there at night. So I came in, and he had his feet up on my desk, some size 15s or 16s. I says, because I never call him Magic, I call him Earvin, "Earvin, what are you doing?" He said, "I'm pretending I'm you. I want to be in business." I knew he stayed there all the summers working with Buss that he would be in business. You know what I call him now? A twofer. You know what a twofer is?

Tina Miller:

I think you told us.

Gregory Eaton:

He's worth two billion instead of one billion now.

Tina Miller:

That's crazy.

Gregory Eaton:

And that's because his businesses. He always said I was one of the guys that he wanted to be like to be in business. He says, "You make money when you sleep."

Tina Miller:

Yeah, yeah. I think didn't he send you a picture of his first car and-

Gregory Eaton:

First car, everything.

Tina Miller:

... maybe some shoes that he was wearing just like you?

Gregory Eaton:

In front of the Breslin because the first time they got, they went and bought Mercedes like Gregory and two of them, convertible and a hardtop like I had, so I laughed at that. Matter of fact, I got a picture at the house what they took of it. Yeah.

Tina Miller:

That's funny.

Gregory Eaton:

So I've had a great life. Like I tell you and people around me, if I leave here tomorrow, I had no regrets. I've had more fun than the barrel of monkeys. It's just the way this has happened.

Tina Miller:

Yeah, yeah. Well, it's because you're a giver, and so I mean, you enjoy giving, and you've had the ability to give, and you've done that. I think when we talked with Nick Saban and asked him to tell us a little bit about you, he said, "I will never measure up to Gregory Eaton as far as giving back and the person that he is." He said never.

Gregory Eaton:

Yeah, I remember. Yeah.

Tina Miller:

Yeah, yeah. And then, he also told us a little story about being on the pontoon boat. What was that story about and who was with you?

Gregory Eaton:

He had a cottage up there, and we were water-skiing there. I had the wheel, and I flipped around, and he fell off, and I almost ran over him.

Tina Miller:

So you're still going today, and you're still a mover and a shaker, and you haven't slowed down. What is your secret to getting up and you go from the time you get up to the time you go to bed?

Gregory Eaton:

I can't wait to get up. When I get up, I jump up. I sleep alone now. I'm ready to go because I got a day planned. I got stuff planned. I got to do something, and it's been like that as a kid. I could not stand still and do something. Everybody said, "Haven't you got enough money? Haven't you got enough this?" I said, "What's that have to do with? Life. Get up, move, do something, make somebody up, do something you can do. You feel better, and you'll sleep better, and you act better, and it's healthy."

Tina Miller:

Absolutely. Well, it's working for you.

Gregory Eaton:

Yeah.

Tina Miller:

I think you've met five presidents and 10 governors. Who would you say has stood out the most, influenced you that you thought like, "Okay, they're going to do something good," or they did something fabulous?

Gregory Eaton:

Well, Obama. I never dreamed that I'd see a Black president in my time. I'd been in politics all the time. I follow him all around, boom, boom. I started with him when he was a senator out of Illinois. So I went down and worked on his campaigns there. I met him, his family, and then when he got married, met his family. So I really worked hard for him, and that was really fun. I had a good time. And then, our other president, I thought he was a Black president because he did such a good job that we would call him our first Black president before Obama.

Tina Miller:

Oh, really?

Gregory Eaton:

Yes.

Tina Miller:

So you want to talk a little bit about that?

Gregory Eaton:

Well, he became a friend of Joe Ferguson's, and he put Joel on a couple of boards. So every time, we'd go around. He'd come in town. We'd get with him. I'd get with him, with them, and that was a good relationship because he's just a good guy.

Tina Miller:

Let's go a little bit into something else that you're very famous for, some Super Bowls.

Gregory Eaton:

Yep, Super Bowls. Herb Adderley, out of Philadelphia, he came to Michigan State January of 1957. I was a junior in high school, met him. He came to my games because I'd hang out on campus all the time, and we became good friends. I was at three world championships before the Super Bowl.

Tina Miller:

Wow. What a life.

Gregory Eaton:

But they won.

Tina Miller:

That's crazy.

Gregory Eaton:

And then, when the Super Bowl came in, he says... It wasn't called the Super Bowl. It was called the World Championship. He said, "We're going to the coliseum," and that's what it was. This coliseum hold 100,000. We had 46, 47,000 students. The tickets were 10, 8, and 6. Now, the tickets is 3,500. 3,500 are tickets.

Tina Miller:

At a minimum.

Gregory Eaton:

If you can get them.

Tina Miller:

Yeah, yeah.

Gregory Eaton:

So that's how it changed. It's the biggest sport event in the world. And now, if I survive and get there, it'd be my 60th year.

Tina Miller:

60, consecutive year.

Gregory Eaton:

Consecutive years.

Tina Miller:

You've never missed a Super Bowl.

Gregory Eaton:

There's only four of us left. The three guys, [inaudible 00:35:04] and another gentleman. And once we're gone, it's that.

Tina Miller:

Wow. So I remember you telling me the first Super Bowl that you attended, you had to stay at a different hotel.

Gregory Eaton:

Yes, Hampshire, J.C Watters, insurance guy here, L. Edwards, Max Curtis. We left here together, but I could not stay where they were staying. They were staying in a place like the DAC, Detroit Athletic Club. But back then, down in Florida, Blacks couldn't go there.

Tina Miller:

Wow. Wow.

Gregory Eaton:

So that was just life. But Count Basie Band was playing at the Fontainebleau. So my uncle, Charlie Brown, who went to the games with me, I started taking him with me. I'll call him Uncle Charlie, but he was just a good friend of my dad's and mom's. He took me to all the sports I'd been when I was young. Sinatra came in and got us some tables by back-

Tina Miller:

You went through the back of the kitchen, I think you said.

Gregory Eaton:

Right, back through the kitchen.

Tina Miller:

Yeah.

Gregory Eaton:

And then, we went to Whoopee's, and he told stories. To be in his company was a thrill for me, too.

Tina Miller:

Wow. Wow. Was that the same time you went to see Muhammad Ali?

Gregory Eaton:

No, that was in '64.

Tina Miller:

Okay. Okay.

Gregory Eaton:

That was in '64. I drove down. I just bought a brand new Thunderbird convertible. It was red, and me and Frankie Walker, a friend of mine, drove down. My Uncle Charlie was already there, so we stayed at the Hampshire House, and what's her name? Ruth Brown was starring there at the hotel, so we had a good time because we stayed at... There was two Black hotels down there then.

Tina Miller:

Right, right. So another thing that you were able to attend that is amazing to me was when Obama honored Rosa Parks.

Gregory Eaton:

I was the guest of Carolyn Kilpatrick when she got honored.

Tina Miller:

Okay.

Gregory Eaton:

That was something really special because when she came to Detroit, we all chipped in and helped her. She moved to Detroit, and Coleman Young put her up, and we really took care of her. Detroit did. So I got to really know her real well, and that was a great honor for me.

Tina Miller:

That's wonderful. Wonderful. We were just talking about Muhammad Ali, and what I love is a lot of these pictures that I see, they say Lansing, Michigan under them. And so, I think it was a Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, you and your uncle, Charlie Brown, in a picture.

Gregory Eaton:

See Malcolm X introduced me to Cassius Clay. I did this, and I says, "Hey, I'm faster than you. Plus, I'm prettier than you." He balled up his fist, and I jumped back, and we laughed. We laughed.

Tina Miller:

That is too funny. So as far as what your plans are now, because you have not stopped, what's a day-to-day look like as far as your involvement still here in Lansing, Michigan?

Gregory Eaton:

I'll be here till I can't do it anymore, and I think my body, I think my mind, and everything will force me to do that, but I'm not near there now, I don't think. And if it is, so be it because Gregory Eaton, don't feel sorry for Gregory Eaton because he'll get by. He had a fine life, and I'm waiting to be up there in heaven with my mother and daddy and my sister and looking down at you guys.

Tina Miller:

So some of the interviews that you and I have been doing separate from this, you've been able to listen to the impact that you've made in people's lives. We've talked. Many of them have been governors and presidents and coaches. I know that you always say, "Well, I was blessed. I was blessed." But you have something about you that people remember you, people that you made friends with 70 years ago, 50 years ago, you're still friends with them, we're still interviewing them about you, and they all say that you have not changed one bit. How has that made you feel to hear that feedback?

Gregory Eaton:

I mean, I feel so great about it because I didn't know that I touched that many people. I mean, I know I do things, but I mean, when people talk to you, and I was there listening, and I mean, it made me say, "Hey, thank you, Mom, Dad."

Tina Miller:

And so, I think that your answer to many, many questions that I've asked you and I kind of want to end with this is the quote that your mom said to you because I've said, "Who's inspired you? What words have inspired you?" I know that some of the people that we've interviewed has remembered that quote as well. You want to just talk a little bit, say that one more time and tell me what it's meant to you?

Gregory Eaton:

You're as good as anybody, but you're not better than anybody, and that's from the boss, my mom, and she used this with the kids and herself.

Tina Miller:

So we could use that in Michigan politics and all of our politics right now as people remembered that. Well, I wanted to personally say thank you. Thank you for really being an inspiration for a lot of people, not only in Michigan but all around everybody's lives that you touched. Your stories are amazing, so we

always love to hear your stories, so thank you for sharing those with us today, and we're excited to see what you're continuing to do.

Gregory Eaton:

Well, I tell you, you've really come in and helped me out in a big way after Heath passed away, and I've really enjoyed working with you. I mean, you asked some good questions, and I tried to answer them, but I really, now, I got a lifetime friend in you-

Tina Miller:

Thank you.

Gregory Eaton:

... and we're not through yet. You're going to be doing some more stuff for us.

Tina Miller:

Thanks, Gregory.