

Christian Owens (Class of 2018), interviewed by Erisa Apantaku and Olivia Obineme.

Erisa Apantaku (EA): What is your name?

Christian Owens (CO): Christian Owens.

EA: And can you spell that for the record?

CO: C. H. R. I. S. T. I. A. N. O. W. E. N. S.

EA: Thank you. When did you start attending Robeson?

CO: My freshman year in 2014.

EA: Why did you attend Robeson?

CO: I have no idea. I did not even know I was going to that school until my dad went up to Bogan and they told him, cause my elementary school did not tell me what school I was going to.

EA: So what, I guess where did you go to elementary school?

CO: My first elementary school was Guggenheim, but it had closed and so I had to go to Bond for my last two years.

EA: Okay. And talk to me about like how you found out you were going to Robeson, you said your dad had go, had to go ask them or what?

CO: He went to every type of high school to see if I was on their list because Bond did not tell nobody what high school they was going to. So I find out in the middle of my freshman year that a who graduate from bond my eighth grade year, everybody had go to Robeson.

EA: Oh so you didn't really choose Robeson?

CO: I did not.

1:13

EA: You just found out one day that you were going there...

CO: and I even hear about Robeson.

EA: You didn't know anything about Robeson?

CO: No.

EA: Where um, do you live in Englewood?

CO: I do.

EA: Um, but you had heard nothing about Robeson before?

CO: No, I find that when my granddad was driving me to school one day, cause I asked him “how does he know where it's at?” he said “my uncle went there when it was first called Robeson.”

EA: Okay. And so that's really interesting cause I dunno the fact that you didn't, you didn't know anything about it and suddenly you're there. Talk to me about freshman year you were there. Did you want to, did you like it? Like did you, were you sort of like, Oh why am I here?

CO: It was a new experience because is kind of weird because you're not used to places that you never been before, but the route most of the days, you know by their first name, last name, what rank they are, things like that.

EA: Are their staff or teachers that stand out to you?

CO: Uh, yes there were because some of them have stayed and others had left a little bit of my freshman year. Talk to me about your favorite ones. My favorite one was Mrs. Jones. She was a computer teacher and she reminded me a lot of my mom. So I always called her Mama Jones.

EA: Why did she remind you of your mom?

CO: They had this specific feel about them where you could tell them everything. They just have a mothering nature to them.

EA: That's cool. And you said that she left your freshman year?

CO: Yes.

EA: Do you know why she left or where she went.

CO: Uh, I do not know why she left.

EA: Do you know, are there any other teachers since your freshman year that you really felt attached to?

CO: There has been a couple but you I did not know them that well or like everybody else did because they left the beginning or the middle of my freshman year.

EA: Okay, so after freshman year you didn't really like any of your teachers?

3:26

CO: It was okay because it was going by so fast you could not get used to any teachers because at first there was no teachers and then close to the end you have teachers so you ain't really get a good connection with them unless you had them again the next year.

EA: Oh I see. So sort of like the fact that every year you would keep getting new teachers because you were going into a new grade or because they were leaving the school?

CO: Both.

EA: Okay. That's kind of unfortunate. What about this last year did you, did you make any kind of connections with the teachers since it was your senior year?

CO: I did with a lot of teachers because everybody knew me cause I had stayed at that school.

EA: Can you talk to me about some of your favorite teachers or staff?

CO: One of my favorite teachers was Ms. Larry, who she was an English teacher. She was a teacher that is like a mother on one side, but if you get on her nerves. She will talk to you like a mother, not like a teacher.

EA: That's nice. That kind of discipline.

CO: Right.

EA: That's cool

CO: Cause you don't see that in a lot of the teacher there.

EA: Was there a favorite assignment you had ever in any of your time and your four years that you really liked?

CO: Uh, it was one in my, in my junior year. It was in chemistry where we had to blow up balloons with baking soda and water and a test tube and we put the balloon on there. They had the baking soda in there and when we flipped it over the balloon just inflated.

EA: That's very cool. Yeah, I feel like I remember that one from high school as well. And you're studying chemistry in college, right?

CO: Yes.

EA: Can you tell us where you're going?

CO: I'm going to Iowa Wesleyan in Mount Pleasant Iowa.

EA: Very cool. Um, describe your group of friends at Robeson. What did you do in school or out of school?

5:28

CO: During school I mainly was a peace ambassador my first three years before Ms. Reyers had left. And so I just been helping out with everything. But outside of school I've been just staying at home. Talk to us about what a peace Ambassador does. Peace Ambassador helps out the communities, start

fight in schools, help out around the blog piece march and everything to either keep the school open or stop the violence on the neighborhood.

EA: Can you talk to me about a specific time during when you were a peace ambassador? Like either a march or something you did?

CO: Um, one of the times we had went to the DuSable Museum, it was a Hero In the Hood awards ceremony and I had never heard of it. So we just took the bus there we walked around the lake and everything. It was kind of nice. What does hero in the hood is where everybody in the community is helping out. It's like being a peace of ambassador, but it's also helping out with more. So there's a group where about two women who lost their kids to gun violence connected together and try to get guns to stop shooting young kids.

EA: Very cool. So you guys all met at DuSable Museum to talk about kind of have a big conference talk about the work?

CO: Yes.

EA: Cool. That's awesome. Can you talk to me a little bit more too about um, Mr. Meyers?

CO: Mr. Meyers was, at first he was in my freshman year and I thought it was kind of weird because his whole name was Michael Meyers. It reminded me of the movie Halloween, but I decided to sign up for it because at first I signed up for it for the service learning hours. But Dad throughout all my three years before he had left my junior year, I realized being a peace ambassador was really cool.

EA: What do you feel like you've learned by being a peace ambassador?

CO: I learned that instead of just standing by and watching fights happen you could tell people before it started, like a week before that there's going to be a fight happening between these certain people.

EA: What do you mean? Like you would sense that they would have a fight or like what?

CO: Because we will have like a meeting up in there, a peace circle and we will talk about certain conflicts, how they're feeling and if it's a bad conflict we will tell the Dean. But you have to allow us to tell the Dean and the Principal about how you feeling.

EA: So basically you'd be able to talk, talk it out before it got to a physical fight? Yes. And you said you were peace ambassador for three years?

CO: Yes.

EA: And senior year. Was that because it was no longer a program or why?

8:13

CO: Um, Mr. Meyers had left because there was no budget in the school for the peace program to stay.

EA: How did you feel about that?

CO: I was a little bit mad because that was where I spend most of my time talking about problems, helping people out and things like that. And then so my senior year, like close to the end, we find out that it's going to be a new person, but it's like close to the last week of school where they, we find this out.

EA: So the last week of school, the school is closing. So there isn't going to be, it's going to be a new program, but in a school no one can go to, no, none of the current students can go to.

CO: Correct.

EA: So it's sort of like why does it matter to you guys?

CO: But, why now? You should have did this at the beginning of the year, not close to the end.

EA: Yeah, that's sounds kind of rude. Um, I also want to ask, um, so you talked about how you helped other people as a peace ambassador. Did you feel like it helped you at all being a peace ambassador? Was there ever a conflict you were having that you used your training for?

CO: I have never had a conflict before because if I had a conflict, everybody at the school wondered who made me mad cause I'm not a person to get mad.

EA: What do you think your peers in your class think of you? What would they say you are?

CO: I'm quiet. We had a "Most likely to" lunches and at this one at the luncheon we had the awards. And so, Mr. Mckinnie had said, if you think you know who won this award, say the name, for teacher's pet. Everybody say my name, and i was the one who won the award,

EA: How does that feel to be called the teacher's pet?

CO: I wondering why do I have to be called the teacher's pet? Everybody is cool with their teachers. I'm the one that does the work. That's it.

EA: Can I just say it? Just you to me, I also was labeled teacher's pet, but I think that anybody who's, you know, high achieving is going to be labeled that because you want to do really well. And teachers like kids that want to do well.

CO: Yes they do.

EA: You should wear it as a badge of pride. Um, let me look back at my notes and see what other questions I want to ask. Um, what has been your favorite class or extracurricular activity at Robeson?

CO: My favorite classes, it was my ally health class. It was for nursing and I had never heard of an ally health class before.

EA: Can you talk to us about that? I don't know what that is.

CO: Um, your sophomore year you're in a biology class and it's close to being in an ally health class. And then junior year you get two classes of the code. For example, for if you're a sophomore you get one class that's biology. If you're a junior you get two classes of it cause everybody has seven periods of classes. So he get to classes like sixth and seventh period of that same class. So dealing with nursing, I was in my junior year, we learned about blood pressure, height, weight, pulse, everything.

11:26

EA: That's pretty cool. Did you also learn about like, so you learned how to like take those measurements?

CO: Yes.

EA: Wow. And did you also learn about like how to like live a healthy lifestyle or?

CO: We learned a little bit about it until when it came to my senior year and we had a new teacher and we did not learn nothing.

EA: You learn nothing?

CO: In that year. So I had to get my classes changed cause I did not need that to graduate.

EA: What do you mean you learned nothing? What were you, what were the assignments each day?

CO: The assignments were really not good assignments. Just asking us like regular class course and not nothing about nursing.

EA: I see. So it didn't interest you anymore?

CO: No.

EA: It's part of why you took that because you want to pursue nursing?

CO: I did not even know about ally health and some people who wants to do nursing. They did not have that class so everybody's wondering how did we get this class and everybody else didn't?

EA: And when you say we, you mean?

CO: Like everybody who was up in that class,

EA: You were just put into that class?

CO: Yes. Half the people who was put up in there, they did not want to do nursing. They wanted to do something else.

EA: That's weird that you weren't able to choose which class you wanted to do?

CO: No. Unless they had changed your schedule and then it'll be too late because they wouldn't not be no room up in that class.

EA: Actually that makes me interested in like how, how did you go about, I know when I was in high school, like we pretty much got to choose all of our classes. There were certain things you had to take each year. Like you had to take a history by your sophomore year, but you could kind of choose if you wanted to take a certain kind of history. Can you talk to me about how you chose your classes or how classes were chosen for you while you were at Robeson?

CO: How classes were chosen for me was based on the credits I got. If I had a credit up in all three of my math, I did not have to take in my senior year. But if I didn't get a credit for what am I maths, I had to take it my senior year.

13:40

EA: And so that's with math. What about like history, English? Is it the same kind of thing?

CO: English and the four years. So you take it all your years, but if you miss like one or two of English, you had to take it the year that you're in.

EA: And then, um, what about like languages any languages?

CO: Uh, we had Spanish, I was in in my junior year because I was supposed to be in, in my freshman year, but the teacher had left. There was no teacher sophomore year, so I got into junior year and senior year.

EA: Very cool. Um, what about, did you have any favorite extracurricular activities at Robeson?

CO: Define extra curricular

EA: activities, like things outside of classes. So like, um, some alumni I've talked to said they really liked being on the cheerleading squad or being on the basketball team or--

CO: None. Only one I liked was being a peace ambassador.

EA: And that counts. Yeah, definitely that's extracurricular because it's outside of, you know, schoolwork. How did you get to school?

CO: My parents drove me.

14:51

EA: Cool. Awesome parents you have. I just want to give a shout out to your parents who are also in this room. Thank you parents. Um, what was the learning environment like at Robeson?

CO: It was very quiet and calm once you, once it's a work day, everybody know and they could get into it, especially if it's a substitute. We, as long as we could get into the work and have fun doing it, we're okay. But if it's a work day were bought up and we already know, we just leave the classroom.

EA: Leave?

CO: And go to try to find someplace new where we could work at. Some people go to the Gear Up office, other people, they listening to other people classroom to see what they're learning about.

EA: Talk to me about that. Can you tell me a specific day where you guys left the classroom? What class was it?

CO: Um, it was mainly my drama class. I'm in there with freshmen and you know how freshman is a, I can't say cause I was a freshman before, but my class never acted like that. The first one I had my senior year for drama, they was throwing books, throwing everything in there. So the Dean was up in there and he told me from now on I'll just get your attendance and go through the Gear Up office. So I just got attendance and went on down there to do my college class.

EA: Wow. What um... Gear Up? Can you explain that?

CO: Gear Up is where they help people from freshman year all the way up to senior year, pick out colleges, go on college tours, things like that, helped them out with college curricular activities.

EA: That's actually something, um, principals Sylvia mentioned. Um, and also I've heard from other teachers and students that there were like college tours and stuff like that. Did you ever go on those?

CO: I went on so many from my freshman year. I lost count.

EA: Can you talk to me about where you went?

CO: Uh, we had went to NEIU. That's where mainly everybody in Gear Up goes to. That's what I realized my senior year because they're telling you there, that's the main trip day Gear Up takes you and you hear about the Gear up Program there, everybody from Gear Up's up in there. It was a lot of fun.

EA: And you said NIU?

CO: NEIU.

EA: Oh, North Eastern... Northeastern Illinois University,

CO: Yes.

EA: Cool. Um, okay, so you went to NEIU and were most of the trips just going back to NEIU, or did you also go to other places?

17:20

CO: Most of the trips was going to NEIU other places. We're going straight to the city colleges, like Kennedy King, Malcolm X, um, Olive Harvey.

EA: Very cool. How did you, did you work with the Gear Up, um, group to choose going to Iowa Wesleyan?

CO: Uh, I did not. They had college tours at the place where we had, um, colleges from all over the state just come into the lunchroom and we just walk around and we just fill out information cards and Iowa Wesleyan was there.

EA: I see. And this was at Robeson?

CO: Yes.

EA: Okay, cool. Very cool. That's awesome. Um, so back to the learning environment. Um, it sounds like when you were in a class with other people who wanted to get work done, it was fine, but if you were in a class with people who didn't really care, it was not fine.

CO: It was not good. You just wanted to find a class where, you could actually learn something new.

EA: Did you ever go anywhere other than Gear Up? Did you ever go to like an actual other classroom where something else was being taught?

CO: Uh, I did not cause some classrooms where teachers keep their doors locked out of classrooms. Where did you say we cannot have no visitors? It might be somebody walking around. There's like that. So I mainly stayed within the Gear Up office.

EA: Cool. Um, besides the drama class, which other classes were really, um, we're not really great.

CO: Um, it was my Spanish class. It was fourth period because he said that he is first period is good because don't nobody get there early. So that's why it's a good class. Both fourth period is a mixture of seniors and juniors. And you know how we get everybody together. It goes crazy. Like a volcano getting ready to erupt.

EA: How many kids were in that class?

CO: I have no idea. Probably like 40 or 52.

EA: In a Spanish class?

CO: Yes.

EA: Wow. Do you know how many Spanish classes he had? That teacher?

CO: Um, he had Spanish 1 and Spanish 2? He probably had six or seven classes.

EA: Whoa. Wow. That's a lot of people. I guess not all of them had that many though because there were only like 129 students in the school.

CO: Yeah.

EA: But still to have only 129 students. And then one of those classes is you said 50?

CO: It felt like it was a lot because it was new people up in there and some people said that they need to Spanish 1, not Spanish 2 somebody. Just put them in Spanish 2.

EA: Okay. Were there other classes that had a lot of people like talk to me. Your senior year, which classes were you taking?

CO: I was taking English, Spanish, oral history, financial literacy, um, drama and media studies.

EA: And how many people would you say were in each class?

CO: The shortest classes were first and eighth period. Case, my eighth period class it hey, seven or eight people at first period some people come in late, so we don't really know.

EA: And those were your, which classes were those?

CO: My first period grade was world history and my eighth period class was media studies.

EA: Cool. And the other classes? The middle, would you say roughly like 20, 30, how many people?

21:10

CO: Uh, you had no idea because my second period class was in environmental science. I don't know if I said that. We had a sub in there, so we don't know how many people was up in there because everybody come into class in where the sub is. So you lose count of how many classmates you have.

EA: People just came in?

CO: Yes.

EA: Did they do the work or they just came in to talk to their friend?

CO: Came in and talked to their friends. But they grabbed the work to pretend like they was doing it in case somebody was walking around.

EA: And the sub?

CO: uh, he checked the roster. He says some people are not supposed to be in here. He kicks him out. But there's another way for people to get in. Oh, it's another door. It's the first door when you walk in to go to your class and there another door, what is like a little maze. But he had it blocked off so some people would try and come in the other door.

EA: So you were saying that, um, people would just?

CO: Try to find a way to get in through that door.

EA: If you had to describe that learning environment in a couple words or one sentence, what would you say?

CO: I would say that was funny and crazy at the same time because some people don't come to school but if they do come to school they try to sneak into another classroom instead of going to their own.

EA: Yeah. It's just seems so interesting.

CO: Mmm.

EA: I want to know, I want to know a story about a time when you like really enjoyed something you were learning at Robeson.

22:51

CO: I gotta take a guess on this cause I got to go through all my years there. So I would like to say my junior and senior year cause we was always doing papers that year. And so my senior year I find out that we're supposed to be doing, for seniors and juniors were supposed to be doing APA, not MIELCon. And so we were doing that my senior year and my junior year, we was doing mail cons for papers that we had to do.

EA: Can you explain what APA and Milcom mean?

CO: APA is for like, not just AP classes, but APA format where it's a college base, right. In and MIELCon is main idea, evidence, link and conclusion. That's the simplest version.

EA: I see. Um, can you describe one of the papers you wrote or one of the assignments you had?

CO: Oh, for my junior year I did paper on heartbreak.

EA: Okay.

CO: So I was talking about how there is a disease for heartbreak syndrome. What sounds people listen to, how they really feel, like what emotions they're going through when they try to hide it from their friends, things like that.

EA: That's cool. That's cool. Um, yeah, I guess just thinking about writing, um, one of the things that really struck me was how powerful your commencement speech was as Valedictorian. You gave a speech at graduation and yeah. And I'm just wondering if, I know you don't have a copy of it, but I'm wondering if you could tell us a bit about what you wrote in it and why you chose to write what you wrote?

CO: What I wrote in that speech was how I felt throughout all my four years at Robeson. What I have seen what was going on outside of our building. Definitely because, well we will try to learn in classes you always feel the ground shaking. You always hear a big boom in sound going on outside. You think that wrecking ball was gonna come through the classroom because that's how loud the construction was.

EA: When did that start?

CO: It started like a few days in the beginning of my senior year because we knew the school was closing but we just didn't they they will do construction early.

25:05

EA: Okay. You're saying a few days into the start of your freshman year you started hearing--

CO: Senior year.

EA: I'm sorry, your senior year you started hearing construction?

CO: Yes.

EA: That's so interesting because it wasn't for sure going to close technically until February with the board voted on the plan

CO: [inaudible] but they were just starting everything. They, some of the juniors even said while they taking their SAT there that they heard a lot of booming so they had to move to another classroom away from there.

EA: Wow. How does that make you feel?

CO: It made me feel like the schools are ready closing, we know this, but can you at least give us some time to think that it's still going to be opened without all this construction going on around the ground shaking. We even had, one of my teachers had taught to us about OSHA or I say about how you feel sick during all this commotion where you feel because before all the years there nobody feels safe. But when they did the construction you feel back aike fell sick, throwing up headache, everything

EA: People were throwing up?

CO: They was feeling sick from all that vibration and banging.

EA: Wow.

CO: So they gave us a number to call.

EA: The school gave you a number to call,

CO: Gave us a number to call to talk to the people at OSHA and tell them about how all the construction making us feel.

EA: Wow. Do you have, do you have the, like the letter or the message that said call OSHA?

CO: No, it's at home.

EA: Okay. I, I'd actually like to see it though. If you could even just snap a picture of it and text it to me.

CO: I dunno.

EA: All right, cool. Cool. Um, cause I'm curious, so that was the school gave that to you or was it as teacher who gave that to you?

CO: The teacher gave to us. The school gave it to us. Everybody.

EA: Wow.

CO: Well even talked about it to some of our classmates.

EA: Yeah. That's very interesting. I didn't know that. Hmm. Mmm. When you found out, when did, when did you find out the school would be closing?

27:09

CO: Throughout all my years there. When I walked in my freshman year they say the school closing, and they say that sophomore year, they said it junior year. Now finally come down to senior year it's actually closed. So I'm like, Oh okay then, so are you sure that it's closing or are you just making another joke? Until I heard all the construction down realizing like "okay it's real."

EA: Your freshman year when you heard it was closing, what did you think?

CO: I thought that here goes another school where I could not finish all my years again.

EA: And you're talking about Guggenheim?

CO: Cause I was there all my years from preschool all the way up to sixth grade because it was gonna close my fifth grade year, but then we had dead little march and they say they won't keep it open, come to my sixth grade year. They said they closed it. So at the end of sixth grade year they close it. So I had to go to the Bard for my last two years.

EA: Wow. Um, when you heard for sure that it was closing, I guess because you heard the construction and you knew, okay, this means it's for sure closing. How did you feel?

CO: I felt a little bit sad because at first I heard that they was keeping the other schools open. But they closed it down, Robeson. I'm thinking, why can't our school be open for three more years and

then closed at the same time as other schools. But then I find out when I graduated that TEAM Englewood was closing this year also.

EA: Yeah. I guess as a senior it's a little different because you don't, it's not like you have to change to a new school, like you were able to graduate somewhere that you went all four years, but does it still, I dunno. Does it still feel bad knowing your school?

CO: It's still feel bad because my freshmen and sophomore and junior year, I'm thinking when I graduate, I want to come up to the school and visit and talk to everybody. But now in my senior year, hearing it is closing down. I'm like, okay, I can't talk to the school no more.

29:11

EA: Yeah. I'm going to just check out my notes one more time.

CO: Okay.

EA: How are you doing?

CO: Good.

EA: Good. Yeah, you're good. Was there ever a really negative learning experience you had?

CO: Uh, none whatsoever. No negative learning spaces. Everybody tried to keep a positive attitude. So even if somebody was mad in the class, we always try to have fun and try to make them at least smile or something by just bug them every now and then.

EA: That's cool. Um, what do you plan to do next year?

CO: Next year I'm going to, Iowa. So I put into see if I could try and get some afternoon classes. Cause I'm tired of waking up in the morning.

EA: Yes. Earlier you told me that you, you wake up, you would wake up at 6:00 AM every day?

CO: Yes, because my body is not used to waking up at another time. He's used to waking up at 6:00 AM straight. It's not used to a different time of like 12 or 10 o'clock.

EA: Can you tell me what a typical day was for you? Like you know, beat by beat each day, um, throughout the day. Um, while you were going to Robeson.

CO: While I was going to Robeson. I will wake up, shower and everything. And then in certain cases, since we have cats now, if my brother's not home, I would go downstairs and tend to them and everything. But since my brother's home, he tends to them and then I just wait to 7:20. And then just go on to school.

31:28

EA: Your parents drive you to school?

CO: Yes.

EA: And then talk to me about, you know, what would happen at school and then after school,

CO: As school you get in a course, you go through the metal detector and everything and if you keep beeping and you got to go back and forth. They ain't go to the back. If you early you go to get their breakfast. But if you're late, you gotta go straight upstairs, and then for first period they don't really be nobody there yet, , ait till, well you don't really have to wait till everybody there you got to wait until your teacher is there to be able to open the door. So you just walk around a little bit, see who's coming or just sit in another classroom until your teacher is there. And it's the same way for other classes. And then at the end of the day, now since my junior and senior year, they being collected phones at the front door. So at the end of the day we get our phones and then we just go on about our business.

EA: Cool. And getting home. Would you get a ride with your parents too?

CO: Yes.

EA: And I assume you get home. Do the homework.

CO: We don't get homework.

EA: No. Did you ever get homework?

CO: No. We always get class work and if it's in some of our classes they give us work to force a finish. We finish in another classrooms and give it back to them that same day.

EA: Wow. That's very interesting. And actually it's like the, they was a push to eliminate more homework because it's, but anyway, this is a different, different conversation. Um, what about um, um, oh, okay. So, uh, I asked you what do you plan to do next year, you said? Uh, Iowa Wesleyan. And can you talk to us about why you chose Iowa and what you plan to study there?

33:17

CO: My first choice with college was actually Tuskegee University. It was nice and small except the school right here, but there's no place else around in all the places for your classes are spaced out, so you don't need a bike to get there. You need the car to get there fast. And so I chose Iowa Wesleyan because it's a small nice little community everything is there. There is a nice small town, all your classes are there. And it is just in one building.

EA: Are you, how do you feel? Oh, I'm sorry. And what do you plan to study there?

CO: Chemistry.

EA: And what would you like to do after graduating from college? I know that's like way down the line, but you have kind of thoughts of what you want to do?

CO: I had no thoughts at all. Cause my thoughts always changes throughout a time when I say I want to do one thing and then I say I want to do something else when the time comes.

EA: Why did you choose Chemistry?

CO: I chose Chemistry because I love mixing. It's strange weird items together. Not like baking because I cannot cook. So I chose something that's very fun. I want to see what type of experiments I can make, but I had to stop it at the house.

EA: You're like ready to go mix up chemicals that can explode. But you're like, I can't cook. No, I get it. Um, are you, so going into college from Robeson, do you have any, I mean, are you concerned at all that maybe Robeson, has it prepared you enough or are you, are you excited about potentially, I don't know. Um, do you know what I mean?

CO: Yes, I do, and Robeson has prepared you plenty enough, especially when one day one of our teachers had said, that, the teacher's not gonna tell you what to do with your work or when to put it in. So they had, they just sat in one of my classmate ask, why did I get this grade? The teacher say, well, you did not turn in the assignment. The students said you did not give me a date. I said, that's not going to happen in college.

EA: That's a very good point. So it sounds like, and I've heard this from a couple other alumni, that Robeson, you had to be, to succeed at Robeson, you had to be very like independently determined, right?

CO: Yes.

EA: Like no one was going to hold your hand through like this is what you've got to do,

CO: That's correct. They gave you a lot of chances, but on your final chance you got to work with what you got.

EA: That's cool. Last question I have actually I have two more. Um, describe your Robeson experience with five words.

CO: Funny, crazy, weird, environmental, and nice.

36:21

EA: Environmental. Why do you say that?

CO: Because it's a lot of people from different backgrounds. You think it's just one background, people from different type of background, not just different races, but how they grew up and everything. You find out a lot about them.

EA: Like what sorts of backgrounds did you--

CO: I found that a lot of people grew up with no parents. Other people did grow with parents, but they had just, uh, they weren't there or things like that.

EA: Yeah. What about you said crazy?

CO: Crazy is where the fights come in. So it's crazy because it's a school where you fight in everything. Well, not fight every day, but just to get out something here because now my senior and junior year, if you have a conflict with somebody, you just go into another room for and you just fight for two minutes. Sometimes the person and the other person want to fight. Other times the person is just scared, like I don't want to fight. So that's why I say it's kind of crazy.

EA: People would go into another room?

CO: They will get on boxing gloves and tell him just, just fight. But some people just say no, I want to talk it out. Then all of a sudden they was starting.

EA: Literal boxing gloves?

CO: Yes.

EA: Which room?

CO: I have no idea. I don't know if it was a room or not, but I had no idea what room they went in.

EA: Whoa. And like students would do this on their own or teachers would say go.

CO: The Dean was, the teacher would call the Dean and the Dean would say, come on, let's go put you in some boxing gloves since you want to fight.

EA: Whoa. Which Dean was this?

CO: It was Coach Miller.

EA: Cool.

Olivia Obineme (OO): And the students would fight each other if they chose to do so.

38:08

CO: Yes. To let them get it and you're out and everything instead of just arguing back and forth because this is the person you have to see every day. So they decide to let them get the anger out if they want to.

EA: Did you ever see kids more than once, like fight each other?

CO: I did, my freshman year. It was a freshman versus every grade level. So that was kind of weird because I'm thinking of where they throw pennies at the freshman, it's a fight thing but the freshman beat up everybody. But one crazy thing happened my freshman year where it was a fight. I don't know what grade level, but the person was there one day and the next day he was not there at the school?

EA: And did he ever come back?

CO: No.

EA: Did anyone ever try and fight you?

CO: No, cause that's the thing I say if anybody tried to fight me, some people would try and figure out what made you want to fight this person? Then everybody, even teachers would want to fight that person.

EA: You were like the untouchable.

CO: Yes.

OO: Was that even in the freshman year? Because people didn't know you in freshman year.

CO: Even in freshman year because I was the quiet one. I was the one that was by myself. Everything. If you had not seen me up in the principal office talking to the principal or anything or against suspended, then that means I'm the one that's not in trouble.

EA: What's one of the most striking memories you have of Robeson?

CO: It was so many memories at Robeson. I cannot count on even one.

EA: The most striking the one that pops into your head the most?

CO: Um, I will have to say my senior year because it's the last year everything was going down. And so the striking memory was at prom because you've seen a lot of people who you thought was going to be there.

EA: Like who?

CO: Was there one of my classmate who has a disease who stayed in the hospital cause she had water in her lungs. She had a cancer and everything. She made it to prom.

EA: That's amazing. Was she the one that was absent at graduation?

CO: Yes.

EA: What is her name?

CO: Laquisha.

EA: Cool. That's amazing. She was able to make it. Can you tell us a little bit more about prom? How was it?

CO: It was. When you hear about prom, you always see a lot of people at the school, but you realize in my class it was only 30 of us and only some of us came and those that did come, half came with dates, half came by themselves, but it was very nice.

EA: Was there music and food and what?

CO: It was music and food and everything.

EA: It's cool. Were there teachers are too

CO: Yes, it was a couple of teachers. Even some people who said they wasn't going to prom, they even said this so many times throughout all our years, whenever we asked them, they was there.

EA: Okay. What do you hope the new school has?

CO: I hope it will be able to let some people who wasn't able to graduate or some of those in the lower level to at least be there to at least experienced that school. Even if they combined all the schools together or not, they still should let them be up in there.

EA: You mean people like a freshman at Robeson now should be able to go to the new school?

CO: Yes.

EA: But do you know they can't.

CO: They should be able to at least let them do or at least let them visit it.

EA: Or taking part in some programs, maybe some after school programs that happen there

CO: Yes.

EA: Stuff happening in the community like it's, it's a, it's a part of the community. It should benefit the community.

CO: They should be able to at least help out until people, um, some history about the Robeson that they went to.

42:08

EA: It's true. What um, how do you feel about the fact that current students can not go to this school?

CO: I was a little bit mad because this is a school that they came to. They came here willingly, not forced, but you won't let them to come to the new school. So it was a little bit mad.

EA: The reason we got from CPS, why they won't let, you know, old Robeson students go to the new school is because they said they want to build up a strong community around the new school. What do you think about that response?

CO: Oh, let me see if I could find the nice word. Because you want to build a strong community, but this is the community that brought everybody together at Robeson. There was an elementary school back there and the elementary school always came to Robeson, always checked out the inside, especially when it was time to go home. They still came up there for basketball, and so that's the school day by wants to go to, even if they was in first grade, they still wants to go to Robeson.

EA: Yeah. Just backtracking, where did you want to go when you were, I know you didn't really choose Robeson, but where did you want to go if you could have chosen where to go to high school?

CO: I don't even know. The main high schools that I knew about was Hyde Park, Simeon and Simeon. I did not know about other schools. I did not choose Hyde Park because my brother went there and there was a lot of craziness going on. Lindblom and Simeon, my two cousins went to Lindblom and so I wanted that or Simeon. But I cannot be up in there because my test scores were kind of low and my GPA.

EA: Okay. The new school is hopefully going to be a neighborhood school. That's what CPS is saying. I mean, does that make you feel a little better about the fact that although current high school age students can't go there, it's not going to be like a specialty school. It's not going to be like a, um, a magnet school. It's not going to be selective enrollment. Does that at least maybe feel good that anybody can go once they're a freshman and opening it?

CO: It feels a little bit good that, it's going to be a neighborhood school, but it just a little bit bad because everybody who went through Robeson a freshman, sophomore and junior, they can't go back. That's what is kind of crazy because you making it a neighborhood school, but you're not making it a school for everybody who was there.

EA: Okay. I think that's all the questions I have.

OO: When you answer questions from me. Just continue looking at Erisa.

CO: Okay.

OO: Um, so you said that you couldn't go to Simeon or then because your test scores were a little bit lower. Um, but your elementary school, everyone in your elementary school had to go to Robeson, right?

CO: Yes.

OO: So do you think that, do you think, and now, I mean obviously you graduated with the highest GPA at Robeson Valedictorian. Do you think your elementary school prepared you for high school?

CO: It prepare me a little bit for high school because at Guggenheim it definitely prepared me because my fourth or fifth grade year instead of just saying in one class when we had to transition the classrooms, like how you would do at high school. So that really taught us.

OO: How did you feel about this? Like the teaching aspect of it.

45:44

CO: It was very good. It was normal stuff that you learn in elementary school with a little bit of maturity.

OO: Elementary school goes from what grade to what grade?

EA: Preschool to eighth grade, depending on how it is, cause some people go to like a preschool school or they go to a kindergarten school and they just go to middle school.

OO: Can you talk about graduation a little bit? Um, so you had 30 people in total in your class? The class of 2018.

CO: Yes.

OO: Did the other people, I guess the other four people, did they end up dropping out or do you know what happened to those kids?

CO: A couple of people they had to go to CYDY. It was like an alternative high school for those who didn't have enough credits so they had to go there. Other people were sick or in a hospital because one of my friends was pregnant at the time so she wasn't able to make it to graduation.

OO: But she should have graduated with you guys.

CO: She was in top 10 as well.

EA: Oh that was the person who wasn't at graduation.

CO: Another person also.

EA: Oh, so there were two people missing.

CO: Yes.

EA: There should have been 27 of you at graduation.

CO: There should have.

EA: Because in the program there was only, there were 26 names in the program.

CO: And it was more when I saw my report card, cause it said 20, it said 30. So I'm thinking what happened to the other people? Cause I went back through the program and the report card and then I'm thinking about the other people who had to go to the CYDY for their credits. So they graduated from there.

EA: Oh, so there were 30, technically it's 30. There were 30 on your report card that it said we're graduating from Robeson.

CO: Yes. But on the program it had 26 of those who stayed at Robeson.

EA: Because four of them or three of them went to CYBY.

CO: Yeah.

EA: Okay. Interesting.

47:45

OO: So, um, and tell us about the about the process of graduation, so I mean, how did, how did that day feel free you? Um, what did your day start out like?

CO: My day started out because it felt a little weird because it was my graduation I had, I was getting everything ready, my robe was in the bag still and we did not get our sashes or everything yet. We had our cap and gown and our little thing at the top of the head what's that called?

EA: Tassel?

CO: Tassel. They gave us all that at very close to the end of the day. The other day, it was like four or five o'clock when they finally gave us our stuff and we still didn't get our tee shirts. And so on that day of graduation, I'm thinking it is finally time, it's already here because throughout all your years of high school, you pray for it to come in now it's finally here you thinking this is too fast. Can we just go back a little bit? And so at the graduation place I saw, cause they took us to a holding room. I saw all the people I will graduate with but we had to wait on because everybody was there. We just have to wait on three more people. So that's what took a longer time. And so when we was getting ready to walk in my heart started beating a little bit fast because it's finally time we're finally here, but I'm just a little bit not ready. So I had to breathe in out and just think about all the times I was at Robeson, all the days I was there and all the stuff people was talking about. And so when we walked in, because I was the first one to walk in because top ten they had to walk in first. So I was at the head of the line. So when I walk in I'm looking at my, I see everybody who used to work at Robeson, those who still do everybody up on stage. And so when we had to sit down and we heard all the speakers from everybody including me, I'm thinking this is really the end. I'm not going to see nobody unless we have a reunion.

49:51

OO: And how well for us. And so we received a quote unquote yearbook from Mr Alexander. Um, did you receive any yearbook or anything that was like that?

CO: We received a memory book cause we had a photographer for our prom and graduation. And so I'm looking back on it and I'm thinking is was a lot of people at those places but I'm thinking again is going to be like from all the years there. So it's gonna be a big book. It was just a little picture book of just prom and senior graduation.

OO: And how did that, how did that make you feel with all the stuff that you've did? I mean, you were a peace ambassador so you would expect to be, you know, maybe some photos from that. What a usual yearbook would look like?

CO: At first I was a little bit mad because I'm thinking all those pictures we took all my years there are not in there. But then I thought about it. We had a photographer at prom and graduation, but we did not have one at those other places. So I'm thinking they just going to take photos off the phones or something. But they just took it from the photographer.

OO: And when did you receive the memory book?

CO: We received it on the last day of school because we had to wait a long time for everything. And we still did not get those shirts because we asked them about it. They said they going to mail it to us.

EA: What shirts?

CO: It's our senior shirts. We been, we were supposed to get them June 7th they say we're supposed to get in June 7th we did not get him. We were supposed to get them the last day of school. We still did not get him. We even thought it was going to get on the day we was getting our cap, gown, and tassel. We still did not get them so they had to get our phone number, our name and our addresses.

EA: Do you know what the, what the shirt looks like?

CO: I do not. They just asked us for our shirt sizes and then that was it.

EA: Can you text me when you get your shirt?

CO: I will

EA: And text me if you don't get your shit.

CO: Okay.

OO: Um, how do you feel about what the future holds for the rest of your, your peers that graduated with you?

CO: I feel like the future, so it would be really good because some of them decide to stay in Chicago, like half of us, including me, cause I'm leaving Illinois. But some people are going to the city colleges like Malcolm X, Truman, Olive Harvey, Kennedy King is basically where basically the first half of my class is going. So the future should be good for them cause some of them are either just going to work or help out at home with some of their, cause some of them have kids now. So the future should be helping out good for them.

OO: And I want to clarify the, the I guess quote unquote remedy fighting that was had at school. So that, the boxing gloves, uh, stuff that wasn't a like formal official sporting thing that was literally just as a method of, not punishment, but a method of, of remedy for, resolving fights and a conflict in school.

CO: Yes. Because everybody at school is wondering why don't we have a boxing club here or something after school? Cause that's what everybody do. So they just bring out the boxing gloves and say "all those who liked to fight, raise your hand. We'll see what we could do."

EA: Do you, did the, your, any of your friends ever, um, partake in the, in the fighting, the boxing?

CO: They did not partaking in boxing, but they partook in the fighting and the arguments. That's it.

EA: So, and just to clarify the fighting and the arguments, but with the gloves on to get out the aggression, is that what you're saying?

CO: Uh, half of them, they do the boxing. Others just argued in a classroom. Even when we tried to calm them down, they just could not calm down. And so they just started fighting, even if it was a same gender or a different gender.

EA: Do you have, do you know the names of any people who were in the, in the position where they were starting to have an argument? Dean Miller was called Andy Miller said, "let's go put the boxing gloves on."

CO: I do not because I think it was my junior year where they talked about it. But some of them had either graduated or they just left the school.

EA: So that means that, um, Mr. Meyers wasn't there at the time?

CO: No.

EA: Well, junior year?

CO: He was, but that was like the beginning. But at the end where he left, that's when the boxing gloves came out.

OO: And were you still, even though Mr. Meyers had left, were you still doing any, whether it was informal, um, peace ambassador duties?

CO: Um, I did a little bit of it, but every classroom ever since we found out about peace circle, that's what we have at the school now. In every classes with my teachers, like one class where we have peace circles next class we have a peace circle. I'm like, we learned about it already and we talked about in other classes, can we at least take a break or something?

EA: See, so you didn't really like always doing the peace circle?

CO: Not in every class.

OO: What does the peace circle piece?

CO: Peace circle is where you sit around. What if, if you're in a class where you sit around and chairs or if you're in a peace where we sit around on those wooden boxes and you have a little piece of rock is a little rock and it has peace on there. Whoever has the talking piece as it's called, their the

ones who talk. Whoever don't have the means. You have to stay quiet and just wait patiently until it's your turn to talk.

OO: And that would happen during every time during class.

CO: Yes. We always find a way to have something to have as a talking piece or anything.

OO: Mm.

OO: Do you plan on keeping in touch with any of your Robeson teachers despite not having a school to go to?

CO: I am keeping in touch with some of them. Some of them are still do have a CPS email, email. Others gave me their phone numbers.

EA: Which teachers are you keeping in touch with?

CO: I'm keeping in touch with Mr. Davis. He was there my sophomore and junior year and then he left the beat before senior year even started. I'm keeping in touch with Mr. O'Brien and Miss Lerahue [?], definitely to help me out with them college papers because they will be asking a lot. Um, there's so many teachers I want to keep in contact with.

EA: Can you tell us what each of those teachers taught you?

57:09

CO: Mr. Davis had taught us biology and chemistry. Mr. O'Brien, he taught us a college career Ready Found [?]. It's a class where you're getting ready for college and he also Todd's world history and one goal. Ms. Lerahue, she teaches English every type.

OO: Cool. Is there anything else that you want to talk about? Oh! Um, oh, I, um, so now you're alumni, now you're part of a whole nother network, right? What do you think about, how were you ever taught or ever saw you ever seen anything from previous years at Robeson?

CO: Uh, define that.

OO: So before your time essentially at Robeson High School, did you ever learn about like what happened earlier on in Robeson, how Robeson came to be, Robeson's history?

CO: Oh, one thing I learned from my brother that he said, that I came in where they was done throwing people off the bridge.

OO: What does that mean?

EA: Like from the second story?

CO: Like, there's a bridge where you go across from the stairs all the way to another classroom. And so my brother said that early on there that he had heard that, people will always fight and they will throw people off the bridge there. So I'm like, okay then.

EA: I feel like I've heard that before too.

OO: But like the bridge,

EA: Like the, you know, the atrium, like when you walk into the school and--

OO: Yeah, but, throw people off?

EA: I feel like I heard that.

OO: Are they okay afterwards?

EA: I think you can die from that.

OO: Yeah.

CO: I don't know. But one of my classmate, my junior year, it was a fight going down on the first floor. He was just on the bridge and he just jumped off to see it and he was okay.

OO: And this was, do you remember, do you know what season that was? Was it during the winter? Was there a lot of snow for him to fall on or?

CO: Uh, no, it was inside. The bridge is inside.

[Laughter]

OO: Mixing different schools. Okay. I see. I know where that bridge is. Wow. That's still high up. Wow. Okay. Um, and when did your, or how did your brother know about that?

CO: I don't know how he knew about this cause he had went to Hyde Park where it was a lot of crazy stuff happening at his school also when he went there his freshman, sophomore, junior year and senior year. And so now I find out it's a lot of stuff because my freshman year I found out that since Robeson had a pool, there was a person who drowned in there. I don't know if that was a rumor, a true or not.

OO: Hmm. So what is it that you learned about, if anything? Uh, did you learn about Paul Robeson? The school's namesake?

CO: I learned that it was called Parker before it changed to Robeson. I also learn from somebody who went there and their youth before he was alumni, that there was an elementary school, then you go from the elementary school from the high school. Then there was a college across the street from there. So it was just in the same neighborhood. So everyone was wondering how come we weren't born in that time so we could get that.

OO: Do you feel like you wish you were born during that time? I mean, what, what, what's the stuff that you wish you could have gotten from Robeson that would make you want to think that?

CO: Um, some stuff I learned from Robeson are new experiments because sometimes I just want to be born in a different time where I was there throughout all the types of activities they had there, because I'm looking through their memory, their yearbook, they, they have so many, so they had a bowling team, they had volleyball and everything. But now throughout my year at Robeson and they just had girls and boys basketball, baseball, football. That's it. So I want the new environment if I was born in that time.

OO: And where did you see this, um, this yearbook and what your book are you talking about?

CO: It was a yearbook for, um, 2005 and 2006 and 2007. We were just up in the Gear Up office, we was looking through things since they was closing down the school and taking out books. So me and my classmate had found a yearbook and we was just going around showing the teachers who was up in there and they started getting emotional.

EA: Can you just say again what you're saying. You were in the gear up office?

CO: Me and my friends being in the gear up office all the time. And so we were just looking through all the photos and everything they had there, all the boxes since the school was closing. So me and my friend had found a yearbook and so it was uh, from 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008.. And so we was just going around showing everybody who was in the yearbook and they started getting emotional looking through all the people who was up in there. I even went to one of my teacher who has worked here and said a lot of our friends worked here. We had showed her the memory book and she started getting sad as well.

1:02:26

OO: When the school had its first class, graduating class, a class of 78. They, we have scanned a yearbook from the Valedictorian that year. Um, and that yearbook showed just even more than what was in the two-thousands at Robeson. Um, and then you have things of like, you know, at the end of their yearbook they had Zodiac signs for each of the students, they have all types of different organizations, different teams, different types of things like dance team

EA: You could take Swahili and German.

OO: Yeah. What are your thoughts on, you know, what are your thoughts on you know, and how do you feel about the fact that um, Robeson evolved so much?

CO: My thoughts on it is that back then in the 70s they had so many stuff, but in the '05 yearbooks they showed them painting inside the school, the murals that they have there and everything. And so I did not know that they had a class where they learned German and everything. I just thought they, he's just learned Spanish and French and everything. I did not know that they had that there.

EA: And Swahili. They had a dance team, swim team, drafting club.

CO: What's the drafting club?

EA: Like, architectural, like designing buildings.

CO: Oh yeah. They definitely need that there. Cause some of my classmates are going in construction.

OO: Any last things that you want to add?

CO: Um, not really because this school I had been to for four years straight, never left, seen so many things happens. Stayed number one for four years, um became prom queen even. So, I just want to say that this school has been such a good experience, means so fun. Even if I thought I wanted to leave, I actually did not want to leave. I just wanted to stay there.

EA: Why?

CO: Because I knew so many people there. So if I went to a new school, I will have a hard time making friends because I stay by myself. I stay so quiet. So most people wouldn't recognize me. But at Robeson, everybody knows you from your first name, last name. Even if they know your middle name. They still know you. Even if you've never been in the principal office or the Dean's office, they still know you by first name.

EA: So it was community?

CO: It was a community. It was family. It was everything.

EA: Thank you.

OO: Thank you so much.

CO: You're welcome.