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Oral History Interview

with

David Spencer

Interviewer: Francesco De Salvatore
Narrator: David Spencer
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Summary:
Mr. David Spencer is a long-time resident of Alexandria, living in Fort Belvoir and Seminary. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps during the Vietnam War. He is the author of detective fiction featuring Black PI John Badd

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General	Segregation and racism; serving in US Marine Corps and Vietnam War; living on Seminary; racism, segregation, and integration; writing detective fiction
People	Mackey, Otis; White, Ted
Places	Seminary, Fort Belvoir; Vietnam; The Chicken Shack; St. Joseph's School; Hammond High School

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:02] You can go.

David Spencer [00:00:03] David Spencer. I'm at the Lloyd House. Today's date is June 22nd, 2026.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:12] Great, and my name is Francesco De Salvatore and we are at Lloyd House at 220 North Washington Street, Alexandria, Virginia. And I am with Mr. Spencer here and today is June 22nd, 2026. Great. So, I want to start Mr. Spenser with, let's start with your childhood. And what are some of your earliest memories that come to mind?

David Spencer [00:00:36] Well, it started, my earliest memory started in Fort Belvoir. That's where we lived for a short period of time. I can't remember. I must have been like maybe six or seven years old. And we had a garden. I remember going into the garden. And then from that point, it seems like we ended up here in Alexandria, where the house that we lived in used to be a church. It was a long house, a single floor, wasn't upstairs or downstairs, but had two fireplaces, one on the outside, one on the inside, back to back. A big, long porch; lots of property in front. We had apple trees, grapevines, and behind the house was a wooded area that led to, back then, was called Shirley Highway, which is I-95 today. So, we had plenty of playroom, plenty of backroom to a wooded area where you could be Robin Hood or whatever. Alexandria, that's great times.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:01:59] So this is the house in Seminary.

David Spencer [00:02:01] Yes, it is.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:02:05] Yes, you mentioned your first home and the garden. Can you talk more about that garden? What do you specifically remember that that was planted? What did it look like?

David Spencer [00:02:16] What I remember, very briefly, was that we went into the garden to pick something--vegetables, you know, it was just like a flash memory, that's about all I can remember about Fort Belvoir. And, like I said, I don't know how long we were there, because it was just the three of us--myself, my sister Judy, my brother, Lee. The twins came after we came to Alexandria, being Jerry and Joyce, which is the two twins. We had to raise them, change their little diapers. And he's all grown up now, so I remind him, "Boy, I changed your diaper. Don't you sass me."

Francesco De Salvatore [00:03:12] How much older were you then?

David Spencer [00:03:16] Ten years; ten years older.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:03:17] So, what are some of your favorite memories in the home in Seminary?

David Spencer [00:03:27] Yeah

Francesco De Salvatore [00:03:27] Are there specific rooms that you remember that bring memories?

David Spencer [00:03:31] Yeah, we had a three-bedroom--mom and dad, me and Lee, and then my sister had her room. And the most fond memories I've had of back then was the fun we used to have in the wooded area behind the house. There was this tree that had a rope hanging from the tree. And then it was like a valley. You go up this hill, you swing on a tree like Tarzan, and you drop to the ground, right? After you swung back and centered. Well, one time, Otis' friend that we grew up together…

Francesco De Salvatore [00:04:22] Otis Mackey.

David Spencer [00:04:27] Otis Mackey, yeah. What happened was I decided I was going to take this rope, go as high up this hill and swing as far as I can to the other side. But what happened was it got centered and the rope broke. It was on a tire, you know, a rope around a tire. When I hit the ground, the tie was under me, and Otis and Lee started laughing. I said, choice words.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:04:58] Right.

David Spencer [00:05:00] That was the most fun time that I can remember being in Alexandria.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:07] How did you meet those two friends you said Lee and Otis?

David Spencer [00:05:12] Lee's my brother.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:13] Right; Lee's your brother.

David Spencer [00:05:15] And Otis, we went to St. Joseph together and St. Joseph went from grade one to grade nine. All of us, the three of us, Judy and Lee, and Otis, we all graduated from the same school. And back then, St. Joseph had two classes in one room. So, the nun had to teach two classes in the same room, first and second, third and fourth, and so on and so on. I failed the first grade. You know, I was playing around, you know. And then I got serious. I said, "hey, how come I'm still here and they're going someplace else?" I said, "Oh no." From then on, I was into the books and classes and I made sure that I made my grades come up because I didn't want to be left behind and my friends going ahead of me again. And I was considered to be the dumb one. I said, "Nope, don't want to be proven to be the dumb one."

Francesco De Salvatore [00:06:26] Right, right. What do you remember in terms of teachers at St. Joe's or staff, anyone stick out? Remember?

David Spencer [00:06:35] Yeah, Sister Margarita, we used to call her Margarette. She was like five four, five three, whatever, tough. I mean, sisters, what it was called, Oblate Sisters of Providence out of Baltimore. And she was the main nun of all the other nuns. And Sister Elizabeth, wow, I remember that name; Sister Bernard. They were some tough teachers, you

know. They would discipline you. Well, you know nuns, well, maybe you don't know, but nuns back in the day, you act up, you got that ruler on your hand [makes a smacking sound] or on your legs. And I was always the clown, so, I got my whippings. But then the church and the school were on the same property. So naturally, we became Catholics, the three of us, you know, my siblings. See, I don't remember Otis becoming a Catholic. Maybe not. But we had to go to Mass, you know; during class time, you know. I thought I wanted to be a priest until I went to a military academy, boarding school. I said, “No. I can't do this. I can’t be a priest.” Too many restrictions on how to be and how to act. St. Joseph. I think the school is still there, but I don't know what it's being used for.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:08:41] Yeah, I don't think it's an active school.

David Spencer [00:08:43] I know the church is still there. Maybe I ought to drive-by there on my way out.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:08:48] Yeah, have you not been there?

David Spencer [00:08:50] No. What street is that on anyway?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:08:56] I don't know the exact street.

David Spencer [00:08:59] I can Google it.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:09:03] You said that you were a clown, so can you say more about that? What do you mean by that?

David Spencer [00:09:08] I always liked to sit in the back of the room and then I would get on the floor and crawl around and tap people and say something, and then crawl back to my seat before the nun could catch me., I don't know why I wanted to be a clown; maybe because I like to see people laugh

Francesco De Salvatore [00:09:31] Yeah. Is that how you would describe yourself as a kid?

David Spencer [00:09:35] Yeah, I like to see people laugh and I do stuff to make them laugh.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:09:41] Where do you think that came from? Did it come from your family?

David Spencer [00:09:45] Well, you know, we live up on a hill, in which there's only like three families on the hill. The only interaction we had was among ourselves. And the neighbor that was ahead of us, they had daughters, but only one son--maybe five daughters and one son. We didn't put really play with them. It was me, Judy, and Lee. We play amongst ourselves and make up stuff. We were good at that; you know just make up staff to have fun with.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:10:27] What do you remember making up?

David Spencer [00:10:31] I built a tree house, in back of the house.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:10:35] How old were you? Do you remember how old you were?

David Spencer [00:10:40] Yeah, about 12. It was a nice tree house too. I mean, until my sister one night.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:10:44] You built it?

David Spencer [00:10:45] I built it, yeah; built a tree house, back of the house, and my mother made us try to take it down because my sister Judy, one time she decided to take a candle one night, and then the tree got on fire, come on, caught on fire.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:02] Whoa, okay.

David Spencer [00:11:05] So then, after that, I built this plane, with wings and a box and some wheels. I was good at imagination, you know.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:20] Yeah; it sounds like you were you're handy

David Spencer [00:11:23] Well...handy, but more imaginative. You know, like, okay, I can do this. How would I do this? The task was, I want to do this, but how do you do this? You take it and you visualize it and then you just build it up, you know? And this plane that I built, it was a box, a wooden box and some kind of way I was able to attach planks for wings. It looked like a plane. And I put wheels on the bottom of it, but that didn't last long either, so I don't know what happened to the plane. I was 12, so.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:12:06] That's impressive. Yeah, it's impressive for a 12-year-old.

David Spencer [00:12:11] One of the things I always amazed at myself was that at night I would look up into the sky and I said, "You know, you can't tell me that we're the only beings in this whole vast space." I said, "I can't just believe that." And I thought I wanted to be an astronomer because of my interest in galactic things that, you know. But that didn't last either. But I still love science fiction. Because I believe that we have been visited by aliens and some of the technologies that we have like the pyramids. You know, it's mystical.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:13:12] Could you see, like what, I mean I imagine Seminary at that time, it must have been pretty dark there at night, right?

David Spencer [00:13:17] Oh yes, you can see the stars at night because there were no city lights, so you can clearly see the stars and at one time I studied them where I could tell which was the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper and this, that, and the other. I was into the books about what's up in the sky. Science fiction. When I was in Vietnam, I did see a UFO, definitely, twice.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:13:55] Where do you think you're interest in the sky and in space you think? Where did that start? Just naturally you became interested or do you feel like you're influenced in some way?

David Spencer [00:14:08] I think I must have been like maybe eight or nine. I always thought that I was from another planet. And I was sent down here to observe. And I, and I would say to myself, "Okay guys, come get me now, because I'm tired of being on this planet. You know, this is some dumb people down here." Maybe it's a part of my imagination, but that's what I would say, you know. And then I grew up and I said, well, "Yeah, well, I guess I'm here forever till the next transition."

Francesco De Salvatore [00:14:44] I mean, that's interesting. I mean do you feel like where you lived at that time in Alexandria, did it make you want to leave this place, or do you think it was just purely an imaginative?

David Spencer [00:15:03] Imaginative, yeah. Because like I said, it was only the three of us and we had to entertain ourselves, but I really didn't have that much in common with my sister

because she's a girl. And my younger brother, who's two years younger than myself, we didn't think alike. Anytime I can get away from him, I used to tell my mother, “Would you tell Lee to stop following me?” Because he would just follow me everywhere I would go. She said, “That's your little brother, you got to take care of your little brother.” I said, “Yeah, but, jeez.” He just followed me like—"Get away from me.” And he always wanted to be like me, but I said, “Look, you can't do what I do and make it work. You got to do what you can do to make it work for you.” He said, “I said the same thing to this young lady, and it don't work for me as well.” That's what when we were teenagers, you know what I'm saying?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:16:07] What are some of your favorite memories with your siblings? I mean, you mentioned playing on the rope, but are there other memories that come to mind from your childhood?

David Spencer [00:16:16] Yeah, bicycle. I was the only one that had a bicycle. English racer. I don't know where my brother got his bicycle from. Yeah, riding our bicycles up and down the Seminary Road, Braddock Road, King Street, Duke Street. Even to Green Valley; I don't know if you're familiar with Green Valley in Arlington.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:16:48] Yeah, yeah.

David Spencer [00:16:49] Yeah, that was some good memories.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:16:55] Where where'd you go right now; you seem to have gone somewhere? What were you thinking about?

David Spencer [00:17:03] Yeah, because, you know, where Seminary is and, you know, what's that, Green Valley. From Braddock Road, and I forget the name of the road that takes you to I-95, there's a hill, and I would ride my bike down this hill with no brakes. The only brakes I had was the sole of my shoes. You know, a little dangerous.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:17:42] Is it the hill with the cannonball at the bottom?

David Spencer [00:17:46] Yes.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:17:51] Yeah, okay, I can't think of that. Yeah, I know what you're talking about. What's it like for you to think about some of these memories and kind of walk down these memory lanes?

David Spencer [00:18:05] You know, I have different flashes of different things, so they'll al like collide into one thought, going, oh yeah, I remember this, oh yes, I remember that. But being at this age that I am, some memories, it fades out. And sitting here thinking about it, and I say, “Oh, forgot about that. Oh, wow, that and the other.” Otis, we're like brothers. He's a Cancer, I'm a Cancer/Leo. People say, “Well, you're either one or the other.” I say, “Yeah, I thought so too.” But someone did a horoscope of me in detail and said, “No, you’re on the cusp of both Cancer and Leo.” Even though I didn't really believe what the signs say that you are, but then you start thinking about, yeah, that's me. Yeah, I feel this way. I think this way, and these are the signs of both signs, because there were times I felt like Cancer. Cancer people don't want to argue, don't want to complain, you know, they're very humble. You know, they'd rather do anything to not be involved in a conversation that's, you know, heated. But the Leo person will join the battle and I find that the Leo will protect the Cancer if Cancer's being beat up by a situation or other people. Because I felt, well, I feel like, I don't want to be, you know, bothered with this,

that, and the other; but if I'm being bombarded, then Cancer. And then Leo steps up and says, look, so-and-so, then you see a different person. So, I said, well, maybe the sign is true that I'm on the cusp because Cancer's docile, Leo's very aggressive. It's a balance.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:20:31] How did you and Otis, what's your first memory with Otis? Do you remember?

David Spencer [00:20:36] Yeah, let's see. Going to his house, he come in--because he lived off of King Street. He lived off of King Street—no, i was it Braddock Road?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:20:54] I think he's across, he lived across from where T.C.

David Spencer [00:21:04] Yes, T.C. And his father would always take us for a ride, you know, the three of us. Lee, myself, and Otis, right?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:21:17] What was his dad's name?

David Spencer {00:21:19] Otis. I mean, Mr. Mackey. That's all we know him, Mr. Mackey only. I don't even remember his first name. He was always Mr. Mackey.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:21:25] You didn't probably use his first name.

David Spencer [00:21:26] You better not call him by his first name.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:21:27] Yeah, exactly, yeah.

David Spencer [00:21:32] I would go by his house. He would come to see us. We would just pal around together. When he went to college to Howard University, I thought I was going to lose him as a friend, because I said, I was not one to think that I could make the college thing, because, I, was at the age of draft age, and I said, “Well look, I'm not going to be, let myself get drafted, I'm just going to go in and okay. Sign me up.” And when I joined the Corps, we got separated, you know, so, Paris Island, and then from Paris Island I went to Camp Pendleton, which is in California, and then from California went to Hawaii for six months. Then the whole base was moved. We were all on a ship crossing the ocean to Okinawa and from Okinawa to Vietnam. Yeah. I just knew I was going to die. I said, “If I hit that beach, I'm going to be a dead person.”

Fortunately, I didn't have to hit the beach. You know, because I saw them hitting the beach from the ship. And when we did, the rest of us did hit the compound that we were protecting--the Air Force base. They had prefabricated buildings with air conditioning, grass growing, and they had a security gate that we could not go past that security. But I had a chance to, for some reason, I was able to go past that security. That's when I saw the green grass and running water, because I spent my 13 months in a tent, a big tent on a cot. And, well, I don't want to talk too much about Vietnam because it just brings back stuff that, you know, emotional stuff. But...the one thing that I can talk about is that when it got to be like 80 degrees, I caught strep throat. Because we were used to 130 degrees. And when it got to be 80 degrees that's during the rainy season, you stayed wet for 30 days. Everything you put on was wet. And so, I had to get shots because I had strep throat and jungle…What do you call it? Rot was... Your feet stay wet all the time because you was i crossing rivers--jungle rot, that's what it was called. Your feet was jungle rotted. I think that's what today that I have fungus in the toenail because I never got over that. Okay, let's go past Vietnam.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:25:13] I kind of want to go back to still the early years. I mean, you've talked a little bit about your parents, but can you share more about who they were.

David Spencer [00:25:25] Yeah. Sarge that's what they always called him—he was retired Army engineer person. We called him Sarge, even my mother. Yeah, well not my biological dad but yeah, my dad because he raised me just like I was his own and treating me like I was his own. But you know, I never gotten a lot of wisdom from him Not at all. But I looked up to him. I know one time…I remember my mother telling him to not lay a hand on me. She was the one that's going to whop my behind, and I never could figure that out until later on, because I was the first born, and then Judy came along, and then Lee came along. When I heard her say that, I said, "Why would she tell him that, you know?" But he would intimidate me with his belt. You know, that army belt with the buckle. And because when he swing that belt, you could feel the wind from that belt. But I did learn some stuff from him just by observation. And when I got to be like a teenager, I challenged him. I don't know what we were arguing about. I said, "Okay, old man, let's see what you got." I'm dancing around here and I'm...I said "Ooh, snap. I said he's a bigger person." And I ran. Because I came to my senses realizing that I got to live here. I'm going to challenge this man? But he never chased me down, and he never punished me for challenging him. I guess maybe he looked at say, now he's growing up. Because he probably did that same thing with his father. But one of the things I learned from him was that, one time he said to me, he said, and I know I'm jumping around a little bit. He said, "You never know what you will eat when you're starving." He said, "You might eat dog." I think I was 14 when he said that. But later on, in years, I learned that it was another different kind of a message. It's like you never know what you would do under situations, whether it be hunger, self-defense, you just don't know what you would when the pressure is on. That's one thing that I did learn from it.

But you know, one of the other things I remember about him was, I used to have curly hair, right? I mean, really curly hair. And he used to keep my hair cut all the time. He used to say, "You look like a sissy." And he just kept cutting and cutting until it looks like this now, right. Not great, but you know. But I think that's one of the reasons why I joined the Corps. Because I wanted to show him that I'm tough. Because I knew that you join the Marines, you go through that boot camp, you are tough. And so, I wanted to prove to him that I was tough, and I was not a sissy. And I don't think he's even acknowledged that I even, you know, joined the Marines and came out okay. Because I've seen guys wash out. I mean just totally watched it; just couldn't make it. Because it's tough training.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:29:38] Yeah, it's hard to be a Marine.

David Spencer [00:29:39] And I don't know about today, because they can't do certain things that they did back in the day that I was in the Marines. I mean, you got your ass kicked if you messed up. That was to make sure you had the right discipline. Yeah. Marine Corps.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:30:08] So, your family moved to the fort, Fort Belvoir, but why did that happen?

David Spencer [00:30:16] Well, I think he was getting ready to retire, and that's my thought. From Fort Belvoir, we went to Alexandria, because he ended up becoming a foreman of a nursery. So, I know he was not in the military anymore.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:30:38] But you guys first moved in this area because of his work in the military?

David Spencer [00:30:45] Yeah, I think so. Yeah, because he was in the Korean War. And I remember when he left, he says, “Dave, David.” He said, “David, you're the man of the house now. I'm going to be gone for a little bit.” I said, “I'm 12 years old, what you mean I'm a man at a house?” Took that seriously. But when he came back, he was different. And the relationship between him and my mother was different. Because I saw the two of them argue one time. I saw her running through the kitchen with a knife in her hand, blood on it. I don't know whether…after that he became born again Christian. Never know what happened, what they were arguing about, but she was running through the kitchen and with the knife and the blood on it. That was spooky. Yep, my mother was a tough bird. Kind of reminded me of Dee a little bit.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:32:06] What was your mom's name?

David Spencer [00:32:07] Della.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:32:08] Yeah.

David Spencer [00:32:09] Yeah, in fact, I'm named after her maiden name Spencer

Francesco De Salvatore [00:32:14] Oh, okay, I didn’t realize that.

David Spencer [00:32:18] My siblings were named after Young, Jerry Young, Judy Young. And the twins are Youngs.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:32:31] What do you remember about your mom? What are some memories that come?

David Spencer [00:32:35] She was a nice-looking woman. I would hate when guys would be whistling at her when we were walking on the roadside going home. She was like five four, maybe five five, if she was that tall. Strong. She didn't have much of an education, but she believed in reading, and she took a correspondence course in nursing. Did good. She always made sure that I got the best of everything, you know, like education. She paid for my music. It was flute. She saw that I had talent in art, so she paid for an art course, you know--correspondence art class. I did that for a little bit. I felt like I failed it because I didn't do much of any of those completed. And one time I had a scholarship to, at that time, during racism. There was this high school, I forget the name of the high school, but it was near where we lived. All I had to do was pass the entrance exam. I didn't pass. I felt bad about it. I'm smart, you know, I should've passed it. But I felt like I let her down because she wanted me to get in that school. I would've been the first Black kid in that school.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:29] And you remember what the school was called?

David Spencer [00:34:35] Something about Ascension or something. It was an all-boys school

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:40]. Okay. That sounds familiar.

David Spencer [00:34:52] And then the thing in between, like I said, when he came back from the war, they were different.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:58] How long was he gone?

David Spencer [00:35:02] Gee, I don't know how long the Korean War was.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:35:05] Oh, for like, most of the, yeah, most, okay.

David Spencer [00:35:09] Yeah, because they were different, you know. He slept in one room and she slept in the other room and she called him Sarge and he called her Suge, I guess short for Sugar. And sometimes he'll call her Miss. I used to talk to her, I says, “Why you let her beat you around like that?” He says, “Son, I just want to keep the peace.” I said, “But you're the man, you know?” He said, “You'll learn one day.”

Francesco De Salvatore [00:35:48] What about your--you've talked about your siblings a little bit, but can you share more about your siblings?

David Spencer [00:36:00] Well, you know, I was always a loner, so don't know why. Maybe because I felt different than they were

Francesco De Salvatore [00:36:11] Yeah, you said that earlier.

David Spencer [00:36:16] Yeah, I was more of a thinker, than a doer. And sometimes I find that when people see that you are different, they treat you different. So, in order to keep from being treated differently, I've always liked to be by myself. That can be “David,” you know. Because people sometimes, my mother used to always say, “David has always been ahead of himself, beyond his time.” At that time, I didn't know what she meant. But I'm always thinking about things that are going to happen before they happen. Give an example, AI. I always knew that AI is going to be what it is today, back in the [19]80s. Whoever thought about AI, you know. I used to do a public access TV production in Maryland. And one of my segments was robotics and AI. And so, I would take my camera and go out in the field and I did a segment of a high school student who had built a robot. And then I interviewed a company that was involved in AI ventures. I got to find that. It comes from when I was young, I always looked into the sky, knowing that there was something more than just us here. And I'm always believing that what would bring world peace is if the aliens would come back and every, you know, we become united because we got a different enemy. But that's not going to happen.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:38:11] Well, sorry, maybe I'll stay on your siblings for a second. So, it sounds like you didn't spend a lot of time with your siblings it sounds, or did you?

David Spencer [00:38:28] No more than just day to day stuff, because I was always the one that had to do the laundry, do the cooking, even before I was a teenager. I used to tell my mother, I says, “Look, why am I washing and ironing clothes? This is not man's work; this is woman's work.” You know, back in the day, you had those status things, you know. She said, “Boy, nobody will marry your ass. You better learn how to do this now for yourself.” Cook, Clean, wash. I always thought I was supposed to be out mowing the lawn, but she taught me that, hey, get out of your head that this is woman stuff or man stuff. It's stuff that you got to do, learn to do it. So, I learned how to iron and press a shirt, still today, but now I don't. I just take them to the cleaners.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:39:33] Let someone else do it.

David Spencer [00:39:34] Yeah, no more of that stuff. But yeah, as far as my siblings, yeah. My sister and I, we were very close. Whenever we used to go to parties, I think we were in our 20s then, right? She would walk in, I remember one time she walked in and she says, “Hey, everybody, I want you to know this is my brother, don't mess with him.” “Sis, hey we just come to party. Why you got to do all that?” Right. And Lee, oh he was much bigger than myself. He

would not let anybody mess with me. And Otis, he's the same way. I said, “Hey, I can take care of myself.” But I guess they felt like they needed--even when I was older--that they needed to cover my back. But like I said I didn't spend a whole lot of time with the two siblings.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:40:51] What are your memories of Seminary, of that area? And you mentioned that there was, maybe let's start with, there was three neighbors you mentioned. Like who were those families, do you remember?

David Spencer [00:41:05] Okay, there was a--imagine this, this is our house. There was a house in front of our house and in front their house was another house. So, there was three houses on one side and the other side of the road, I guess, there was two houses there. One was a White family and the other one's a Black family. All of us were Black families except for that one house was White. The house that we lived in, we had a long driveway. I mean, it was long, it was dirt, but it was long before you got to Braddock Road. I remember my mother had this Nash car, right? And I decided to take a fingernail file and pick the ignition. And it was a standard shift, right. So, what we would do, we would push the car out halfway through the driveway so she wouldn't hear the motor kicking in. I would pick the ignition and drive the car down Braddock Road. And one time I decided go to the gas station. Couldn't turn the motor off, right? Because then I had to really pick the--got gas and brought it back. So, one day, Lee decided that, hey, I'm going to take the car out. I said, “I got a bad feeling about this one, don't do it this time, that's it.” Because I always had these intuitional things that always came to be true. If I had a feeling about something happening, it happened. So, what happened was he took it out. One of the wheels fell off of it. He had to call my father to pick him up. I said, “I told you not to do that.” He said, “There's something wrong with you.” I said well, “If I get a feeling, if I tell you about something, you better believe it's going to happen.” And another situation where one winter, I would predict each time that it would snow. And it would snow. He said, “Oh, that was luck.” He says, “Is it going to snow again?” I say, “Wait a minute. Yeah, it's going to snow again. It's snow.” He said, “Something wrong with you. I'm scared of you.” I say. “You ought to be scared of me.” I had a way of intimidating him because like I said, I could see things happening, even today. I used to always be afraid of it; I could always turn it off because I didn't want to see it. I didn't want to certain things come to pass; you know. But then again, I said, you now, I always want to be prepared, so why stop it? Next question.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:44:15] So you mentioned those neighbors; do you remember their last names?

David Spencer [00:44:23] Yeah, the Belks.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:44:25] The Belks, yeah.

David Spencer [00:44:26] Yeah, and then in front of the Belks was a man and woman, they didn't have any kids. And I forget, Edmunya, I think was the lady's name, but her husband, I never saw him, but whenever we would pass their house at certain times of the day, we could hear her beating him. And I said to myself, that I said, “Whoa, I hope I don't get so old that they take advantage of me.” That stuck with me, I said, “Take care of yourself, because you don't want to get old where people are taking advantage of you.” And the people that were parallel to us, I think they rented the house because her husband was military and he was away or something, but she didn't have any kids.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:45:30] Is this the White family?

David Spencer [00:45:34] No, this is the Black family. No, back then, you don't associate with the White people then. Because bad things can happen. We're talking about in the [19]50s. And then there was a house kind of like off into the woods, that we had to go through the woods. I don't remember them, because we didn't really talk or associate with them. I think, the last name was Jackson's. There were some twins there, twin sisters. That's all I remember about them.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:46:21] For those who've never seen, who were not there when you were growing up and said like what did Seminary look like he described How it was laid out? What was the landscape like?

David Spencer [00:46:33] Braddock Road was a two-lane. Two lanes and there weren't many houses then until later on. Yeah, two lanes, and mostly on the side of the two lanes were dirt, dirt, you know, hill embankments. Very quiet, don't remember any winters there, even though I don't remember any snows. You know on our property we had like I said, we had an apple tree a long grape vine and then the neighbors had a pear tree. Yeah, it was like country, really country. It was a good place to grow up.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:47:39] Did your mom do the gardening? Because I remember it way earlier you were talking about.

David Spencer [00:47:44] Yeah, that was Fort Belvoir. There was no garden.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:47:48] But then, yeah, in Seminary?

David Spencer [00:47:52] No garden. On our property we had like two--I call them slave houses--on the property. I think my father rented out one of the houses to an old gentleman. The thing I remember about him was, he had some kind of a bag hanging off of him. And so, I looked, and I said, “You know, if looking old is going to look like this, I'm going to do whatever I need to do to not look this old.” I'm 80 years old now. I don't want no bags hanging off me. That's it. People get old when they start thinking old. You grow old by not hanging on to things that don't work anymore. That's what happens to people when they get older, and they really are old people because they still hang on to things that don't work anymore. Because the world changes. And if you're not ready for the changes, you're going to always be in that era where nothing moves. And you can't keep up because…. For example, you go to the grocery store, right? And a little old lady's still writing checks. They can't get out of it. Because that's what they're comfortable with. People stay in their own comfort zones, but they're not willing to venture out, because they are comfortable right here.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:49:49] Why do you think that's the case with you? Why do you think you're able to adapt?

David Spencer [00:49:55] Thinking that I was from another planet.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:50:00] With the sky, yeah. You mentioned the you I forget what you called them the slave homes. Why did you call them that? Were they actually…?

David Spencer [00:50:15] I don't know. It's just they weren't that big. They didn't have any toilet facilities. It's just two buildings. In fact, my father on the property, we had two what I call slave homes back-to-back. And then on the side of the house, we had this long building which he stored a lot of stuff in. All kinds of stuff, you know, it's just... It was spooky at night going in there

because the stuff started looking like individuals, and I used to be afraid of dark, so I didn't like to have... I didn't like to have a weakness about me, and I said, “You know something? I'm going to get over this fear of darkness.” So, I would go in at night, walk around till I got that fear away. Because I don't want to be hindered by something that's imaginary, so I would face--I call it face your fear. And I always kept that in my head, that no matter what the challenge is, face your fear. Once you face it, you look at it and say, “What is it to fear about?” As you get older though, you know, sometimes you don't want to face the fear, you know.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:51:49] Right; it gets harder.

David Spencer [00:51:53] It's like, people don't go to the doctors because they face the fear that maybe they might find something wrong. And then when they do go, it's too late. I get a sensation; I'm going to the doctor.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:52:08] Right away. That's good. Do you remember when they started to build the high school, T.C. Williams?

David Spencer [00:52:25] Yeah, you mean T. C. Williams

Francesco De Salvatore [00:52:30] Yeah. What are your memories of that period?

David Spencer [00:52:33] I was going to Vietnam then. I mean, I joined the Marines then.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:52:39] Because that was like early sixties, right?

David Spencer [00:52:41] Yeah, they used to call that area Mud Town, only because it was muddy. When it rained, it was mud. Me, Otis, and Lee, one year during the 4th of July, it was a fun time. We had our explosives. And so, the people that lived in that area, we were like throwing cherry bombs and blockbusters at one another, like it was a war time. It was really a fun thing. Nobody got hurt. But we were just throwing, boom. Boom. boom, boom, boom! All over the place, and because we were considered on the hill people, that when we came down, all the people that lived in this area, were mostly all related, the Wanzers, the Turos, and…

Francesco De Salvatore [00:53:49] The Casey’s.

David Spencer [00:53:50] The Casey's. And one time I was by myself and a bunch of guys decided to gang up on me. I mean, they surrounded me and ganged up on me, but then, like the Hulk, I busted out. He says, “Oh, this man is strong.” Not man, he says, “He's a strong somebody.” I guess because I showed I wasn't afraid of them and I would go to battle, they respected me and left me alone.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:54:29] So your family wasn't directly impacted by T.C. Williams?

David Spencer [00:54:34] No, but my father had to end up buying a house, which is still there now, behind the school. Because when they redeveloped that whole family, he bought a house there. So, I don't know what made him move from--maybe because historically it was going to take over the park, Fort Ward. By that time, I never lived in that house. I was on my way to the Marines.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:55:16] We haven't talked a whole lot about your dad's businesses. Can you maybe talk a little bit about that?

David Spencer [00:55:23] Yeah, it's called the Chicken Shack. I asked him later on, I says, “Why didn't your business succeed?” He said, “I had a partner that was stealing money from the company, from the restaurant business.” Because I remember going in and getting free stuff, you know, popsicles and whatnot, and it was right off of US-1, somewhere in between Fort Belvoir and Alexandria. I can't remember exactly what the spot was, but the Chicken Shack.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:56:01] Yeah, so did he own it and also work in it or did you?

David Spencer [00:56:05] Man, he was a part owner. Yeah, he was part owner. I told him after I became an adult, I said, “You know, can you imagine if you had been successful, we would be the Colonel Sanders of the world.” I said, “We would inherit the business.” That's when he told me that his partner was stealing money from the company and they couldn't make it that way.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:56:38] Was he a cook or was he more on the on the business end of things?

David Spencer [00:56:44] Business end. He was a smart guy, even though he didn't graduate from high school. But he could build anything because some kind of way, he became a staff sergeant in the engineer corps. He could build everything. Smart man. Sarge. In the neighborhood, they called him Sarge, too. Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:57:14] I’m also curious to hear about--You've touched on a little bit about sort of race relations in the city. But you're coming up as integration was starting to roll out, right? Well, what are your memories about race relations, you know personally and growing up in Alexandria at that time?

David Spencer [00:57:36] Well, I know that we couldn't go in certain places to eat, and I remember one time I was walking home on Braddock Road. A bunch of school bus kids were passing by and they yelled out, "'Nigger!” And so, the next day I was ready for them. I had a rock in my hand. And as soon as one of them said, "'Nigger,” I threw that rock right at the bus. I said, “Whoa, damn, did I just do that?” That's the Leo in me.

Salvatore De Francesco [00:58:22] Absolutely right; that’s the fire.

David Spencer [00:58:23] I didn’t care. They could have, you know, stopped the bus and ganged up on me, but I didn't care. I was ready for them. I hauled in, hit the window, bus kept right on going. But when the integration happened, I was the first Black senior to graduate from there. The only Black senior to graduate there.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:58:50] From where?

David Spencer [00:58:52] Francis C. Hammond.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:58:53] Yeah, from Hammond. Okay

David Spencer [00:58:56] Yeah, and I met an instructor. She was my speech instructor. And one day she gave me a ride home because you know, from the school which was not far from where we lived. “If you share with me,” she said, “I love teaching so much.” She said, “I used to be a racist.” “So not you because you don't act like a racist.” She says, “No, I Realized that I love teaching and people are just people.” I said, “People can change.” And during that time, I hated White people. But when I joined the Marines, was this guy named Ted White. We were in Okinawa, Marines. And I liked him. Didn't see color. And then we were talking about racism,

and he says, “Why do you hate White people?” He said, “Have I ever done something to you?” I said, “No.” Oh, light bulb went on. I said, “You know something? Only reason I was like this because I was the way I was treated.” So, I said, “Well, he's right. Why I hate everybody because of a few individuals.” And I think I must have been like 18. So that changed my whole perspective about people in general.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:00:28] What are your memories of, so you transferred, so you went to St. Joe's and then you went to the...

David Spencer [01:00:37] Saint Emma Military Academy.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:00:39] The military academy, and then you went to Hammond for your senior year.

David Spencer [01:00:42] Well, I actually went to Parker-Gray first.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:00:44] Oh, oh, before Hammond.

David Spencer [01:00:46] Because my mother couldn't afford the tuition at St. Emma, which was a boarding school. In fact, I even registered myself at Parker-Gray. I'll never remember, Mr. Pitt was the principal. I had an attitude. I mean, I had real attitude. I had anger issues. I mean bad, I mean I get angry in a minute, right? So, when I went in to talk to him, we had words. I walked out of his office. I said, “You know, you better get you’re ass back in there and get yourself into school, because your mother is going…” She didn't take me down there. I had to register myself. So, I went in and I apologized. I said, “I'm sorry, sir. I lost my temper, blah, blah. This and the other. We became the best of friends. Then he made sure that I had a free ride to the school and meals when I got to school. But because of my grades from St. Joseph and the classes that I took in St. Emma, I skipped a whole grade.

I only went to Parker-Gray one year and then the following year I was a senior at Hammond. Because what they were teaching, I had already learned. In fact, I was an A student in algebra. That was another thing, that was in St. Emma. The priest that taught me the class, I says, “Look,” I said, “Who's your smartest person in your class?” He says, “You are.” I says, “Yeah, but I said I don't know what the hell I'm doing.” I said, “I think I need to be evaluated. Can you send me to a psychologist and figure out what's going on inside my head?” So, he made an arrangement and I only had one visit. But I said that to say that I always did good in math, science, and English. And because of those grades that I was good at, I was advanced way above, you know. And that's how I ended up in Hammond. One year after that I joined the Marine Corps and the rest is history.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:03:18] What do you remember about going to Hammond? What was the process of them transferring you to Hammond; can you talk about that?

David Spencer [01:03:30] You know, my favorite subject was speech, which is that instructor. And I would give speeches that would enlighten the White people about my culture. Those are the kind of speeches I would give. I wasn't afraid of giving those kinds of speeches. And my writing skills was good then because I always would write all my feelings. I used to have a beaver book, right? You know, black and white beaver books. And it was not, I didn't consider it a diary, but it was just thoughts. I was always a deep thinker. And that's the only class I really remember taking. I mean, I know there were other subjects, but I think because that teacher impacted.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:04:26] This is at Hammond. So how many Black kids were transferred to Hammond?

David Spencer [01:04:34] Gee, I don't know. Let me see, there was... I know there was one. Maybe a handful, because everybody else went to T.C. Williams.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:04:49] What was the atmosphere at the school when you went there that year?

David Spencer [01:04:56] Didn't experience anything negative. Yeah, and I didn't even attend my own graduation. Yep, didn't attend graduation. I just joined the Marines and like I said, the rest is history

Francesco De Salvatore [01:05:19] I do have some questions about the Marines but please let me know, if you want to pull back a little bit. Can you talk about how you decided to go into the Marines and what did that decision-making look like?

David Spencer [01:05:50] I always liked the uniform. I thought about the Air Force;I liked their uniform too. And I said, “Navy, eh, don't like the uniform.” But then like I said before, it was to prove something to my dad that I could be tough. And plus, I knew that the war in Vietnam was there and I said, “Well, if I'm going to go into a battle zone, a war zone, I want to be trained to be able to take care of myself. I want to be with guys that you would think would have your back because we all wear the same uniform.” Was I wrong! Yeah, because they have me on point. You know what being on point is, right?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:06:50] No; explain it.

David Spencer [01:06:51] That means when you're out in the jungle, you in the point, you're the first person that the enemy's going to see. So, they put me on point at night. We're going through the jungles. And I said, “Okay, I know what this is all about.” But fortunately, nothing happened.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:13] Who are some of the guys that that fought side by side with? Do you remember their names?

David Spencer [01:07:28] Well, the ones I had went to boot camp with, didn't see them anymore, but the ones that... because from Hawaii, that's when we transferred to Vietnam. There was one guy, I can't even think of his name now, but it's been so long. When I first got to the base, he was a big guy, he was big, strong guy. And he came up to me and said, “Hey, what's up little man?” I said, “Don't fuck with me.” Excuse me. Can I say that?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:08:05] You can say anything, yeah.

David Spencer [01:08:07] I said, “Don't fuck with me. You think I'm small, but,” I said, “You don't challenge me.” He said, “Oh well, you got some balls on.” I said, “Yeah, try me.” We became buds. And I remember one time somebody, we were in the field and we were going up to get our dinners. Somebody bust in front of me, he says; “Little brother, is he messing with you?” I said, “No, I got this.” He would always protect me. He was a good guy. One time he went out on a mission and I got word that he was dead. Oh man. But then I saw him, and we were at this barbed wire fencing. I looked, I ran towards the barbed wire, I got all stuck in it because I was so glad to see him. Just great to see him.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:09:06] You don't remember his name?

David Spencer [01:09:08] I can't think of his name now because we're talking about 50 years ago. Because after Vietnam, we didn't see one another anymore.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:09:24] What was it like transitioning back to civilian life? What was that experience like for you?

David Spencer [01:09:35] Well, my last duty station was Quantico, so I told my staff sergeant or whoever was in charge, I said, “Look, I'm getting ready to get into the civilian world.” I said, “The only thing I've been trained to do is kill.” I said, “I need a skill.” The only thing they had to offer me was in the cooking field. Butcher, and then a baker, because I didn't like the butchering part, because there's blood everywhere. You know, it's just tearing up meat. You know it's just butchery, and just ch-ch-ch. It's not, no, let's, you know, let this be a, so. I did that and came out, couldn't get a job. I said, “No, I went to fight a war. I can't get nothing beyond a GS2.” And then Vietnam was not a favorite war because people thought, I mean, they booed us. So, I said, “Well, you know, this is a double whammy. I'm Black. I'm a former Marine. And you're boing us? and I'm Black.” And then still, you know, racism is still pretty high. I was angry.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:11:09] When you say booing like was it was a specific situation that you’re talking about?

David Spencer [01:11:14] Well, people didn't welcome Vietnam veterans. They thought it was, why were we over there? And I said, “Hey, we had no choice.” Some wars, you know, like maybe World War II, they welcomed their soldiers back home. Maybe Afghanistan, you know, things changed, but Vietnam was not a very popular war.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:11:45] Do you remember specific situations where people said something to you negative about your service or about the war?

David Spencer [01:11:55] No, it's just a general sense in the news, you know, they talked about that war and how the returning soldiers were treated.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:12:09] What's it like, you know now in 2026--what's it like to kind of look back at that time of your life, you're serving in a war that was unpopular. What's that like for you to look at that moment in your life?

David Spencer [01:12:31] Repeat that?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:12:32] Just looking back now, 2026, you know what's it like for you to kind of look back at that, that moment in your life, serving in the Marines, being in what you call l an unpopular war. What’s that like for you now?

David Spencer [01:12:46] Well, I'm way beyond that now.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:12:47] You've kind of moved on from it.

David Spencer [01:12:50] Yeah, grown up. I'm all grown up. You know, I value the experience. You learn not to be judgmental. I learned a lot about people because growing up in Alexandria, you only found a certain group of people, you know, the neighborhood. But then joining the Marines, I had a chance to see part of the world, you know. See how different people were, the different cultures. I don't question why people do what they do, I just try to understand why they

do what they do. I have that expression that says, “Just because I say I understand, doesn't mean I condone or accept or condemn. Just means I understand.” And the analogy I like to always use is that we understand why junkies do what they do. It's a disease. You don't like it. You're not saying you condone it, or you accept it. You're just saying you understand it. And when you understand something, you can tolerate it better. When you don't understand something, you can't tolerate it. So, I always try to seek understanding about anything that seems a little foreign or strange to me, and try to figure out, okay, why is this happening? Don't have to like it, just understand it and tolerate it.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:34] And so did you end up finding a job? What was that? I mean, it sounded like it was pretty challenging for you.

David Spencer [01:14:43] Yeah, because of the discipline and training in the Marines, you learn no matter what job you're doing, do the best you can. So, I ended up working for the government for the Department of Labor. And they put me in a copying room. Back in those days with Xerox copies and press copies, pressing machines.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:15:07] And what year was this from? Do you remember?

David Spencer [01:15:14] [19]68, [19]69.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:15:15] Okay; so, you're out of the Marines by that point.

David Spencer [01:15:21] Yeah; from [19]64 to [19]68. I got so good at what I was doing that they put me in charge of the people that was in the same department that I was in. Because I was always making sure that things got done right. Always create a method of making things more efficient. You know, they gave me a team of people to work, you know, says, “You're in charge of these people.” That's part of what the Marines teach you, you know, it's just to lead. Sometimes they don't want to lead; let everybody else lead unless I get to the point where they're leading me in the wrong direction, so I need to go lead someplace else or be someplace else.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:16:12] And were you living in Alexandria? Or were you live…?

David Spencer [01:16:16] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:16:17] At your family's house?

David Spencer [01:16:19] Well, my mother's, in my parents' house and then later on, you know, my own place.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:16:29] I mean, there's a lot happening in [19]68, [19]69, in terms of the Panthers, Civil Rights movement. As you came back, did you involve yourself with those movements?

David Spencer [01:16:45] I've seen enough of fighting.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:16:47] Yeah.

David Spencer [01:16:49] I just want to get along.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:16:52] What did you think of this?

David Spencer [01:16:54] The Black Panthers and all that?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:16:55] Yeah, the Civil Rights movement, like what...

David Spencer [01:17:02] I saw it as a movement that had to happen, especially with the Black Panthers, you know. Too bad they're all gone, for whatever reason--age, murder, FBI. And then you have the Ku Klux Klan still existing--that's classified

Francesco De Salvatore [01:17:44] Do you remember anything in Alexandria? Do you remember any protests, any sort of organizing happening?

David Spencer [01:17:50] No. Were there ever protests?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:12:58] There were things, yeah, yeah. Especially just because of the proximity of D.C. But I'm just curious if you remembered anything.

David Spencer [01:18:06] No. I was never part of a march or anything like that.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:18:11] So you end up becoming a manager, it sounds like. Can you talk more about where your career goes after that?

David Spencer [01:18:21] Let's see. From a GS2, I wanted to spend a year there. I said, you know, I can't do this. I need to make some money. So, then I had a job as a bookkeeper. Did that for a little bit. I went back to school to get my degree.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:18:43] What'd you get your degree in?

David Spencer [01:18:44] Business administration, or was it business management, one of those. Anyway, so I was a bookkeeper, and I hated that job, not because of the work, but because of the people that I worked with. I used to sit outside in the parking lot, waiting for the last minute to go in to work. I said, 'You know something, I can't do this.' So, left that job. Got another job working as a manager at this retail place. Then they had a reduction in force. So, I got another job being a manager of a limousine business. So, you know, small business, prominent business, but then he decided, you know, to close up the business. Here we go again. So, then I ended up having a job with Pepco. I was a customer complaint rep. I'd go out and investigate bill complaints, read the meters, talk to the customers, explain why their bills were high. I liked that job. And something happened. Oh. The manager at this Pepco was gay. He called me into his office. I was a hothead, right? He called into his offices and says, "Look, if you don't know how to play ball around here, I can make it really miserable for you." I know what he meant. He wanted me to be, you know. You know what I mean? Yeah. I said, "You don't have to worry about me," I said, "I quit."

So, I quit that day. And I ended up selling life insurance. I did that for three and a half years. I didn't think I could sell anything. If you could sell life insurance to people, you could sell anything to anybody. But you're not selling a tangible anything. You're selling death insurance, right? So, you're going to have to right words to say to people to get them to buy life insurance, I said, "I'm pretty good at this." So, from that, life insurance, where did I go from there? I sold shoes at a shoe store. And then another job in sales was title insurance company. I had to sell. title insurance to real estate brokers to do their title searches through this company. So, I will go around town to different offices to get them to. But then there was this counterpart person who left a position. I figure I'm supposed to get that next position but because of racism…And I

already knew what they were going to say to me when I said when I applied for that position, I had my resignation letter and when they told me I wasn't going to get this position, she says, I said, “Well.” They said, “This is your last day.” I said, “I already know that.” I said “Here's my resignation.” I left them. And what was the next job I had? Can't remember. So, I had my jobs.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:22:35] I mean I don’t know what year this happened, but even then, you were in some ways you're experiencing racism on the job.

David Spencer [01:22:45] Yeah, even then. But things are different today, you know, well, obviously; it's who can do the job. And while I was in school, one of the things I'd always was good at was IT stuff. Back in the day we used to do key punch cards to program. People don’t know what key punch is. Are you familiar with key punch?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:23:20] I can guess what it is.

David Spencer [01:23:21] You have these batch of cards, they had key punch cards, you would code your program through this key punch and you take it to the computer and you put this batch in and these punch cards are supposed to produce an output. If you miss one code, your program failed. Or if you dropped the whole batch of cards, you had to find a way to put them in sequence, in order to execute the whole program. That's when I wanted to start my own IT business back in the late [19]80s, that's before micro computers were really successful then. I saw the vision, I says, “If I get into this now, all the small businesses will all be computerized.” But they weren't ready. They would say, “Oh, I got it all up here. I don't need your computer services, dah, dah.” My business was called Paper Chase, Inc., because I would chase their paper. I would do their word processing, their database, their payroll, and... At that time. I had to close up the business because I had people that wanted to be full partners and they didn't have the money into it. I said, “I'll close this puppy before I let you take over my business.” And I just closed it up. Probably I'm not answering some of the questions about growing up in Alexandria.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:25:20] No, you did. Yeah, did you feel like you you've you want to mention something about that?

David Spencer [01:25:26] No.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:25:28] No, you definitely have. Don't feel like you haven't.

David Spencer [01:25:33] Education, family history, military. That's OK.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:25:39] Yeah, we've covered a lot. Yeah, the one thing I'm, so I know you do a lot of, you write fiction, you work on a lot of creative projects, do you want to share a little bit?

David Spencer [01:25:51] Yeah, now we're up to date.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:25:54] Oh, yeah, kind of, yeah.

David Spencer [01:25:55] Okay, like I always said, I always like to write since I could write. As I mentioned earlier, I used to keep a beaver book. I feel that writing helps you to crystallize your emotions, your thought process. Because if you can write in exact words how you feel about something, then you really are in touch with those feelings and those thoughts. But if you can’t pick the right word, because words are important. Well, my book called *Bad Is Good* is about a PI named John Badd. His last name is spelled with two Ds, B-A-D-D. And it's my alter ego,

because I did have a job one time as a PI. Yeah, and I liked that. What happened was I was, reducted…oh, it was when I had that job with reduction in force. I had to go to the unemployment office to apply for my benefit. And so, they make you pick out cards to go check out an interview. I said, “Well, you know something, I need a break, so I'm just getting this money. I'll just take this money until I'm ready to go back to work.” So, I found this card, I says, “P.I. I know I can't do this job.” They going to say, “No, you can't do this job.” I went down there, yeah, I talked, I got interviewed and I was very... Bragging about this and that. He said, “You're hired.” I said, “Well, snap.” I didn't want this job, but I liked the job. But I guess I wasn't what he was looking for because he released me. Even though I felt that the reports that I had to write, he said it wasn't enough into the reporting. Like if I went on a job, I'd have to write down every single thing that happened under that investigation. So that job didn't last very long.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:09] But it inspired this book.

David Spencer [01:28:11] Inspired me, because I've always loved mystery novels. And I said, “You know something? Okay, I was never a PI, but I can be a PI in this book.” In fact, if you look at the image, it’s me.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:23] Right. I was going to say.

David Spencer [01:28:26] Yeah, it's about a PI named John Badd, and he's looking for his buddy named Otis. And there's a sequel to that, so I'm working on that sequel.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:40] Can you talk about your creative process? How do you generate ideas? How do you go about writing a book?

David Spencer [01:28:52] Well, because I watch a lot of how things are written or things that I see in the movies, it's all about character building. When you write a fiction, it's about certain characters. So, in this book, I said I have to have a techie person, cyber security person. I got to have somebody in the police department to give me information. And the character that Otis is the main sub-character because this whole movie is about finding him and rescuing him. But in doing that, Otis was working on something that John didn't know about that led to the whole mystery. Let's see, what else? Oh, I included some of the things that I like, I like Irish coffee. I describe them, one of the sequences about how John gets his Irish coffee. I'm a martini guy. I have that described about the martini, how it's made and served. And then I'm always a person who's interested in recreational vehicles. So, he has a command mobile vehicle that has all the security and surveillance and blah, blah, blah. And then he has a car called Black Beauty which is black Mustang So all that it's a lot of personal material right it makes the whole story click. There's a lotta action in it and you can get on Amazon.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:30:46] I have a final question but is there anything I haven't asked you that you want to mention or anything that we skipped over by accident? Is there anything?

David Spencer [01:30:58] No, I think we covered all the things that I asked you if you could just touch on.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:31:05] I'm just curious; I ask people this a lot to kind of close, but if there's a memory you could hold on to for the rest of your life, like what would be that memory? I know it's hard because there's probably dozens, but what's one that kind of comes to mind?

David Spencer [01:31:23] The conversation between me and Ted, the White Marine that showed me that don't hold on to hatred because of a few people. That's why I've always found people interesting. I'd rather listen to them, observe them without being judgmental or critical. I saw a guy shoot up one time. I was in the Marines still then, the last leg of my Marine Corps. It was here in Washington. I saw him shoot up and he looked up at me and said, “Brother, don't ever do this. I know you're wondering why I'm doing it.” I knew why he was doing it, I understood. Didn't like it, but I understood, you accept people as they are, but you can't change them.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:32:34] Okay, I want to thank you so much for spending this time with me and it really is an honor for me to be able to listen to your memories and stories.

David Spencer [01:32:45] Thank you.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:32:46] You’ve had a big life.

David Spencer [01:32:48] Yeah, buddy. Still going.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:32:48] And you're still going, yeah, I wouldn't have guessed you were 80, I would not have guessed that. But yeah, thanks for sitting here with me today.

David Spencer [01:32:59] Well, I want to say one last thing, then. Mindset. See, where I work, every Friday people look for me to write something inspirational, and one of my favorite ones is called Mindset. If your mind is set one way, be it positive or negative, that shapes who you are. Get your mind set on the positive side, as opposed to always looking at the negative. If you're always looking at the negative side, you're going always feel negative. You'll speak negative, you'll act negative, because the mind is set to be negative. But if you're on the positive side, things happen for you on the positive side.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:33:49] That's great. It's hard to do that, but that's good. That’s a good advice.

END OF INTERVIEW