

STUDY ON WHITE PEOPLE

The Reminiscences of

Billy Minder

INCITE

Columbia University

2018

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Billy Minder conducted by Samuel A. Lutzker on May 5, 2018. This interview is part of the Study on White People.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that they are reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

ATC

Session #1 (video)

Interviewee: Billy Minder

Location: Windsor, CO

Interviewer: Samuel A. Lutzker

Date: May 5, 2018

Q: Cool, all right, great. I think we're good all around. Can you speak a little bit just so I can see how this going for the levels?

Minder: [00:00:09] Good afternoon, how are you doing, one, two, three, four, five, six.

Q: Great. So, you can count.

Minder: Yes. [Laughter]

Q: You've done it. Cool. Well, thanks so much for joining me today, Billy. I guess, I'll give a quick intro here just so they know where we are, who you are, da-dat-da-da. So, this is Sam [Samuel A.] Lutzker from Columbia University. I'm here in Billy Minder's apartment in Windsor, Colorado, and it is May 5, Cinco de Mayo. We are here, and we're going to talk about his life story and stuff, so great.

Minder: Sounds good.

Q: Yes, awesome. So, you know, there's not really a set format to these interviews. It's similar to what we did last time where you're relaxed, talking, kind of, about your story. But I usually like

to start out, at least chronologically, with your early life and where you were born. So, do you just want to talk a bit about your early years, and where you were born, grew up, your family? Go ahead, and you can really talk as long as you like.

Minder: [00:01:12] Okay. I was born in northeast South Dakota, in a very rural farming community. My dad was a farmer. And shortly after I was born, he was having health problems and the doctor said farming was causing him stress, so he had an uncle who had to move to Tucson, Arizona. And so, the first five years of my life, we lived in Tucson, but I have very vague memories of that. And then my grandfather's health got bad, so we had to move back to South Dakota, and so I grew up on this farm in South Dakota near a town of about five hundred people.

When I was in high school, we moved off the farm, sold it, and moved to a little larger town, Huron, South Dakota, of 13,000, which had stoplights, and McDonald's, and stuff I've never been around before, so that's pretty cool. And I went to a Christian high school at a class of thirteen, graduated from there. And then I went to a bible college in Kansas City, Missouri, and graduated from there, and then moved back to Huron, and took a job as associate pastor, which I did for about seven years before I moved out to Wyoming—married my wife and moved out to Wyoming. That's pretty short and sweet.

Q: Yes. Well, you really just hit all the stops there, yes.

Minder: Do you need more details? [Laughs]

Q: Not at all. Yes. No, we can end it right there. That's it.

Minder: Okay.

Q: Yes. [Laughs] Let's go back to the first town. You said this was a really small town. There wasn't a McDonald's or anything like that.

Minder: [00:02:39] I think people that grew up in large cities, metro areas, they have no concept of what rural is and rural America. I mean this is a town of five hundred, and you live four miles out in the country, related to half of the people in the area. Generations have grown up there. I think it's a great place of Americana. All my grandparents have retired and lived in town, and we lived out in the farm. And my cousins were around, and we had cousins in Minnesota, and it was very white. I mean there were Native Americans in the area. There is a reservation nearby. The town I was born in, that was a reservation town, but there was not much ethnic diversity other than the white people and Native Americans.

Q: And you said the town was like five hundred people, and there were generations there.

Minder: [00:03:30] Mhm.

Q: And talk to me a little bit more about specifically with regard to your own family, what generations were there?

Minder: [00:03:36] Well, at least, me, my parents, my grandparents, and then my great-grandparents, my great-grandparents and my great-great-grandparents probably homesteaded in that area. My memories as a kid, the old, high school building was an old, classic, three-story brick building – a big, square, brick building. And up on the second and third floor, they had all the class photos from, you know, 1900 all the way up to the current. And I remember walking the halls up there, and I could see my grandparents in their graduating class, and my aunts and uncles in theirs, and my mom and dad’s graduating class. So all the photos—class photos of my ancestors were hanging on the wall in the school I went to. So, three of my grandparents were in the same class. It was the class of 1929, I think, and then my dad’s graduating class, and my mom’s graduating class, and then a bunch of other relatives. And for me that was normal, you know? I don’t know if a lot of people grew up that way, but I sure—you know, I did

Q: And what were your relationships like with your grandparents, and did you have a relationship with your great-grandparents too or—?

Minder: [00:04:47] Well, my great-grandma, she was a widow. My great-grandpa got gored by a bull, and died. That was the story we were always told. And there’s a giant, big, old white house at the end of Main Street in Wilmot – they used to have a dairy there. And so, I grew up knowing my great-grandma, mowing her lawn. I’d stay with both sets of grandparents. My dad’s folks and my mom’s folks got along great. It was great. To me, I’d think back, it was Americana, you know.

Q: Yes.

Minder: [00:05:16] There were a couple of times when a blizzard would hit in the wintertime. We'd be at school in town there, and a blizzard would hit, and they'd say, "We can't run the buses," and so I'd go stay with my grandparents. And like for Christmas parties, they always would be on the same nights, my two different grandparents. And so we'd go over to one set of grandparents, and open presents, and have a big meal, and then we'd go over to the other set of grandparents. Literally, I think it was two blocks. The town was little. The town is like four blocks by four blocks or six blocks by six blocks. Go two blocks down, and go to the other set of grandparents.

And one thing I remember struck out a lot is my parents grew up in different economic statuses or whatever the word is. My Grandpa Will [phonetic] on my mom's side was more successful and wealthy. And so, she was one of five sisters, and they just were more middle-class people. And then we'd go over to my dad's side, and he was the second of fourteen kids.

Q: Wow.

Minder: [00:06:18] And Grandma was very, very poor. Grandma and Grandpa were very, very poor on my dad's side. Old house, and I just remember dozens of cousins running around and rougher people, harder drinking, a haze of smoke in the house, cigarette smoke. That was before when you smoked outside. No one knew, you know?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [00:06:40] And I just remember the contrast, and my mom being more middle class, and my dad being from a more rough, poor family. That stuck out as a little kid.

Q: Yes. And then that contrast too, did that—how did those two sides get along?

Minder: [00:06:55] They all knew each other because a lot of them went to high school and grew up in grade school. I mean, this is a town where you started kindergarten together and all the way through twelfth grade together because there was one elementary, one junior high, and one high school in the same building.

Q: In same building. Wow.

Minder: [00:07:07] So, you just moved from the elementary wing over the junior-high wing, and high-school wing, and then the high school. So, a lot of them knew each other. My mom and one of my dad's sisters were really, really good friends. A lot of them were friends and just knew each other their whole lives, so they all mixed together. And as a little kid, I noticed that difference in economics, but I would bet, to an outsider, they all looked the same economically because there was not crazy, rich people there with giant mansions. There wasn't super poor people that were living in shacks. Looking back now as an adult, there was kind of a sameness to the economic stratus. There—you know?

Q: Less of a difference.

Minder: [00:07:53] Less of a difference than you'd see in a town like this or whatever. [clears throat] But they all got along.

Q: But the cultural differences too, you said that like the drinking was harder, there was smoke inside—

Minder: [00:08:08] Or more smoking. Well, they did on my mom's side too. But in my mom's side, one guy was a banker, one uncle was a banker, one uncle was a colonel in the air force, a successful farmer. And then my dad's side – farmers . And some of my younger uncles, the ones that were younger—not much older than me actually—had been in the Vietnam War, and got into drugs, and that really messed them up. All hard working people, just—I just noticed the economic difference. My dad's mom didn't have much money, and my mom's mom and dad did comparatively.

Q: Interesting. Yes, the description of your dad's house with the smoke and the drinking reminds me of my mom's family.

Minder: [00:09:07] Yes?

Q: Yes, but that's one of fourteen you said though, right?

Minder: [00:09:11] He was the second of fourteen.

Q: That's crazy. My mom's one of seven but—

Minder: [00:09:14] Yes, that's a big family.

Q: But that's like the closest thing I can think of is seven. And then you're talking about fourteen here.

Minder: [00:09:20] What's crazy, my Grandma Minder, she had seven kids with Grandpa Minder who I never met. He was a womanizer. He'd always go out and cheat on her, but she didn't believe it. And she had friends tell her and stuff, and she wouldn't believe it. And one night, the—her friends knew he was at a dance in the next town over with a woman, so they went to my grandmother and said, "Hey, let's go out tonight." So, they took her to the dance on purpose, so she'd see him there with a woman.

Q: Wow.

Minder: [00:09:50] And the story is they get there, she sees him with this woman. She walks up to him and says, "We're done." She kicked him out, and then he moved to Oregon and never saw him. And then I don't know how much later, but she's got seven kids, and my dad, she passed off to one of her sisters. He was eleven years old. It was like 1941 when divorce is a big scandal. Especially in a small, conservative, rural farming community, divorce is unheard of. This

childless couple that couldn't have kids raised my grandpa—or raised my dad, more or less, in the same town, and I grew up thinking of that couple as Grandpa and Grandma also.

And my grandma remarried a guy, a really strong Norwegian—thick Norwegian, Grandpa Anderson, George Anderson. So, growing up, it was Grandpa Anderson, and I didn't have a Grandpa Minder. It was Grandpa Anderson. I just knew him as my grandpa. They had seven more kids together, so my grandma—so she had seven kids with Grandpa Minder. She remarried George Anderson, and he took in these seven kids like his own, and they had seven more kids.

Q: Wow.

Minder: [00:10:58] Cool guy. He was a—drove a landing craft in WWII in Iwo Jima. You know, memories of going fishing, a lot of lakes around there near Minnesota, so—I had a great childhood I thought.

Q: And Grandpa Anderson, too, you said that he was Norwegian or—?

Minder: Yes.

Q: Was he actually from Norway or—

Minder: [00:11:29] I don't think so. You know, nowadays, I kick myself that I didn't ask my grandparents more stories about their lives, even get an old cassette recorder and record stuff,

because, I guess, I wasn't that curious. I don't think he was from Norway, but he had a thick Norwegian accent. He loved his coffee thick as motor oil, you know, like a lot of Norwegians, I guess, do. He'd tell me stories about World War II, and he's a good guy.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: That's really interesting. So, the two things I wanted to talk about—well many things—but two came to mind right there. You said he was Norwegian, and that was something that, obviously, came up in your mind in some way. Did you experience any elements of that Norwegian culture or anything like that?

Minder: [00:13:08] Well, yes, there was a lot of Norwegians where I grew up and a lot of Lutherans, and you know, the old jokes about lutefisk and lefse. [clears throat] Whenever I'd listen to Garrison Keillor, of *A Prairie Home Companion*, which I don't know if you even know what that is?

Q: Yes, I know what that is.

Minder: [00:13:27] The radio show?

Q: Yes, yes, yes.

Minder: [00:13:29] When he talked about “[News from] Lake Wobegon,” and made jokes about them, and the Lutherans, and stuff, this—he’s describing where I grew up in Wilmot to a tee. He really nailed the cultural aspects. His observations of the culture, that’s how it was with all the Norwegians—Norwegians and Germans where I grew up. My dad’s side—my Minder is German. My Grandpa [unclear] on my mom’s side was English, and Welsh, and stuff. So, I didn’t think much about it other than I just knew he’s Norwegian. He had an accent. He was a neat guy.

Q: Cool. And you also talked about—saying Americana, too, that this town was like really a slice of Americana. What do you see as Americana, you know? Like what is that exactly?

Minder: [00:14:22] Yes. Right. Well—

Q: Because that conjures up things in my mind, but what does that conjure up in your mind, you know?

Minder: [00:14:27] To me, it’s like red-white-and-blue patriotism, everybody knows everybody. You know, the old TV shows like *[The] Andy Griffith [Show]*?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [00:14:42] I could identify with a lot of that show how I grew up. The parades, Fourth of July parades, Memorial Day parades, Memorial Day services in this old auditorium where the

old man would talk about people that passed. Going out to the cemetery for the twenty-one-gun salutes, you know, all the white crosses from—people from our town. Seeing the names in the cemetery of my classmates and my family’s names. Going fishing, coming into town and going to the little—it wasn’t a Dairy Queen. It was a little—Don and Dell, this couple—this old couple owned this little ice cream shop where you just walked up to the window on the sidewalk.

Driving Main, driving your car up and down the little Main Street, which would have been like five blocks. Turn around and drive another way, turn around and drive another way, and doing that for hours on a Friday night, a Saturday night. -

Hopped-up cars—you know, in my day, you took your Nova, or your Chevelle, or your Mustang, and you jack up the rear end. And you just put lift spring—I’m losing the term—and put wide tires on the back, fifty series, sixty series. Hop up the motor and put loud exhaust on.

Being proud of your country, being proud of your hometown and sports. When I was in fifth and sixth grade, we had a really good basketball team, and it made to the state tournament for two years, and just being so proud to be a Wilmot Wolf—the Wolves you know?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [00:16:22] So to me, that’s what I mean by Americana. I don’t know if that makes sense?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [00:16:29] You know, in '76 when the bicentennial year was, I was a sixth grader, and our town made a huge celebration of the two hundred-year bicentennial. Then in '81, our town turned a hundred years old, and we had a big, centennial celebration, and parades, and lots of stuff. I don't know. You know, apple pie and Chevrolet [laughter] is kind of what I think of when I say Americana.

Q: Yes. And do you think like this area where we are now, does it have Americana?

Minder: [00:17:06] It's a lot more diverse, and it's so much city life compared to what I grew up, the traffic, the crowds, the—but I guess so. You know Windsor is a town of 25,000, and I came down here Labor Day weekend, and they have a harvest festival. And right out here in front of my apartment on First Street and Walnut, they had a parade on Labor Day. Pretty much for an hour and a half, pickups and tractors pulling floats of different civic organizations, and school clubs, and lots of young families in this town lining the streets for five or six blocks. And that felt a little bit like where I grew up only bigger, like ten times bigger. So, it does feel a little bit right here like that, but it's so urbanized and developed compared to what I grew up with. So, it does feel like Americana, but Americana 2018 I guess. I don't know.

Q: And what about Cheyenne when you lived there?

Minder: [00:18:13] As far as?

Q: Americana.

Minder: [00:18:18] I think so. I mean, it's very western from where—where I grew up, it was farmers, and here, it's—in Cheyenne, it's more western and cowboys, and they play that up. They have that – Cheyenne Frontier is the world's largest outdoor rodeo, and they play that up. But it's still a small town where a lot of people know each other. And some of my friends in Cheyenne that grew up in Cheyenne, they talk about their childhood, and it sounds a lot like mine, except it was in a town and a city instead of out in the country.

One of my friends, he's a funeral home director in Cheyenne, and the movie *The Sandlot*, which I don't know if you've ever watched it. It's about a group of kids that played baseball and got into—they had a little adventure and stuff. He says, “Our childhood was just like that movie *The Sandlot*, playing baseball, and breaking windows, and having fun.”

Q: I can relate to that. Though sometimes, I feel like I'm just looking back at it with these rose-colored glasses you know?

Minder: [00:19:18] You have fond memories and stuff?

Q: Yes. That's what I've kept in a way, but everything else about it that was not as fun or anything like that, I just buried.

Minder: [00:19:29] Well, I had that, too, because then there were a couple of guys older than me, they were bullies. They bullied me and stuff, but that was before what you see now when you talk about bullying. I think the other thing that influenced my growing up is it was during the Cold War with the Soviet Union [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics]. You know, America is best, America first, that was influenced by the Cold War thoughts. And I think most of us probably thought that someday, we'd have a nuclear war with Russia and that there's a good chance we'd all be killed, you know?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [00:20:06] That was always in the back of your mind about having—that nuclear war could break out. My folks remember the Cuban Missile Crisis [of October 1962] was the year before I was born. And there's those duck-and-cover videos that are really funny to watch now, but it was serious stuff back then.

And so, we were proud of our country. We were so strong against communism and socialism. And I remember my mom, I remember as a little kid asking her, “What's communism?” And she says, “It's when the government tells—comes and tells you, ‘You are going to be a farmer,’ and you have to be a farmer.” That was how. She goes, “It's like the government tells you what you're going to do. You don't have the freedom to do what you want to do. You can't worship God the way you want to and—” so that was—you know? I don't think someone—and you're what—twenty-eight? I forgot what you told me.

Q: So, or so.

Minder: [00:21:00] Or I mean you didn't tell me but I'm guessing.

Q: Yes. I mean you're not far off, so I'm just going to let that go there.

Minder: [00:21:06] Someone your age, I don't know if you could appreciate what it was like to grow up during the Cold War thinking, "There's going to be a nuclear war someday." You know, we were scared of the Soviet Union. That influenced how we thought, in my mind. [Laughs]

Q: Now, how you thought of yourselves as Americans or—?

Minder: [00:21:33] That we had freedom that other people didn't have. That we were the best because we were America. You know, I realize now that's not accurate, but I grew up in that era where we were the best. We did the best. We're the biggest. We went to the moon. I remember watching the moon landings as a kid, very proud of our country, so that all is rolled into how I grew up and what I thought.

Q: Yes. And you said that you realize now that that's—some of that is not the case. How did you come about the realization, and what have you realized exactly?

Minder: [00:22:14] Meeting people from other countries, being curious of other cultures. I love meeting people from other cultures, and hearing they grew up and what they did. And I've

become very good friends with some. About ten years ago, I've now become very good friends with some people from Australia, and they farm in Australia outside of Sydney. And hearing about their culture, and how they do the education of their children, and—I don't know. The more aware of the world you become, and reading and studying other cultures, and watching stuff, you realize that we don't always have the best ideas.

When it comes to like racial stuff, I get the impression like in England and France, the racial division isn't as strident, or harsh, or bitter, or strong as it is here in America. I don't know if that's true now. I just had that sense when I read stuff, watch TV shows, watch the news, things. You don't hear about stuff you hear about happening in the US with racial riots and stuff like that. Maybe it's going on. I just don't know about it.

Q: Yes. Are they thinking about it differently or what? Because you said—

Minder: [00:23:27] Other countries you mean?

Q: You said they may have better ideas or ways—

Minder: [00:23:29] Or different ideas?

Q: Yes, yes, yes. What exactly do you chalk that up to? What's up with America's racial problems?

Minder: [00:23:39] What's up with America's racial problems? I don't know. I don't know if I have an answer to that. I mean, slavery was awful. It was brutal. It was horrible. It's not that long ago. I mean, when I was a little kid, it was a hundred, hundred and ten years ago when the Civil War happened. And there's just a lot of difficult things that happened that I don't know if other first-world countries like in Europe that had happened there like happened in the States I guess. I don't know. That's part of it, I guess. I don't know if that's a good answer or not.

Q: No. I mean there's no right answer to that. I was curious because you said you had this impression that in other places were just dealing with it better in a way.

Minder: [00:24:29] And I could be totally wrong but—

Q: Oh, okay. So just kind of an impression?

Minder: [00:24:32] It's an impression, oh, definitely, yes.

Q: Oh, interesting. Yes. Going back though, you said that—I want to talk about some of your early experiences with race and ethnicity. You said that it was pretty much an all-white town except for there were some Native Americans there, right?

Minder: Yes.

Q: And what was that like?

Minder: [00:24:51] Well, typically in South Dakota, a Native American if they lived on the reservation then they could get the government benefits like housing, commodities, or boxes of food, a welfare check, free medical care. And my understanding was if they moved off the reservation, they couldn't have access to the housing and stuff because that was on the reservation. [Clears throat] What was your question again?

Q: Oh, just kind of generally, what it was like growing up with Native Americans, and is that like being the other racial group in a sense?

Minder: [00:25:28] That was the other racial group, yes. We might have made fun of a Norwegian, or a German, or something else, but it wasn't because we didn't get along with them, or despised them, or thought less of them. I definitely grew up feeling—how do I word it—that we looked down on Native Americans because I think there was a cultural thing where you couldn't trust them. They were poor on the reservation. They might be dangerous. There's a lot of alcoholism. They might go through with school with us because like I had a class of thirty, and there were probably seven Native Americans in my class, and we're all friends, and play together, and stuff. But when they got to high school and they graduated, they would go back to the reservation, and they wouldn't do anything with their lives. They wouldn't go become an engineer or become a lawyer. They would go spend the rest of their lives on the reservation and drink. That was kind of the feeling of a lot of us [had] towards Native Americans.

Q: Yes. Yes. And what do you think informed that feeling? Was that personal interactions, or just what you saw? Was it ideas, like people saying things or—?

Minder: [00:26:54] It was stuff we saw, stuff my personal observations, stuff my family, you know, people would say in my life, white people. There were not a lot of Native Americans that grew up and went on to some kind of a career in my area. There was one guy Ron Doleski [phonetic], he was a politician in South Dakota, a Native American, and he was one of the very, very few that got off the reservation. And a white woman, a rich white woman in Huron took him in, and basically raised him, and paid for his schooling, and stuff. He was a state senator. I think he ran for governor, but those kind of people are very far and few between.

And when we—my wife and I were living in Huron, we became friends with this native girl off the Pine Ridge [Indian] Reservation. Gosh, I forgot her first name. I think the last name was White. I can't remember. But she came off the reservation, and was going to the university in Huron, and we would have these talks about it. She goes, "I have to get off the reservation. I have to do something with my life. If I don't, I'm just going to stay there, and have babies, and do nothing with my life." And we really tried to encourage her, but one day, her mom called and said, "I'm sick. You need to come home," and her mom really pressured her and guilted her in going back to the reservation, and we never heard from her again.

A lot of these Native Americans were very good athletes. In high school, their basketball teams from the reservation basketball would dominate. They would crush the white schools. But they almost never won the state tournament because they would go to Sioux Falls for the state

tournament, a three-day tournament, and they'd—the first night, they'd blow out whoever they're playing, but then they'd all go, and get drinks, and drunk, and stuff, and then they would get beat the next two nights for the challenger game.

You could probably find this out for yourself. There's very few Native Americans in professional basketball or in college basketball. There's a strong a cultural pressure to stay on the reservation. And I feel this—again, my opinion. I think part of this is because the government provides housing, and money, and food, there's no incentive to do anything with your life. It's too easy just to live that way. And so, I remember playing against them in high school. I think it's Crow Creek in high school, and they were intimidating because they were so good. But you didn't see them going to college. It was sad. It's always sad to me.

And when I was in high school, I worked at a bible camp outside of Huron, and for two weeks, one week, one week, we would have Native American camp. And we'd send vans and buses up to the reservations, and we'd bring in Native Americans to the camp for a week. And there would be families, and kids, and teenagers, and we'd have a hundred, hundred and fifty natives in the camp. And just rough people, not—no—hardly any hygiene habits. The camp owners that ran the camp for decades since the '40s, and in the old days, they said, “The first thing we do when the natives would show up, we'd take them to the lake. We have a big old bar of lye soap, and we'd scrub their heads to get—kill the lice, so we didn't have lice problems in the dorms.” And things have improved over time. It wasn't like that when we were there, but they were rough kids. And here's this little, white, farm boy trying to be a camp counselor to teenagers that were from the reservation, and they were rough, rough kids that had seen a lot of bad stuff.

Q: Yes. Growing up, did you have any like personal interactions? I know you're saying you were a camp counselor for a while, but before that, any friends?

Minder: [00:30:53] Yes. Well, in grade school and in junior high, you know, the native kids in my class were friends. And one of them, his family lived in town—which was unusual, because most live a few miles around the reservation—Lloyd [phonetic]. Typical grade-school stuff, we're joking around in class, getting in trouble in class. PE [physical education], having fun at PE, the playground, playing basketball together. And matter of fact, Lloyd just died a couple of weeks ago, and another guy from my class, Gary, another native, he died a year or so ago, and probably because of the poor health they had because of the way they lived. There's a lot of diabetes in the reservations because of the alcoholism and that kind of stuff.

But at the same time, [sighs] it was nothing to use racial slurs. You know, I'm being careful to use the phrase Native American, you know, because that's the PC [politically correct] phrase. We called them Indians back then, just pure Indians, and there would be racial slurs. And we would stay stuff, and they're—I wouldn't do it with my classmates, but I would hear it on the bus. I'd hear the older kids, and I was a younger kid. You hear stuff, you know, and they might get in arguments, and maybe a fistfight once in a while. I think there was always an underlying tension there, but it never got out of hand where there were stabbings or gunfights.

Q: Yes. And you said that that was in like grade school.

Minder: In junior high.

Q: Moving up into middle school and high school, did those friendships last or—?

Minder: [00:32:30] After my freshman year, we sold our farm, and we moved into a town called Huron, and there weren't—hardly any natives there. We were far enough away from the reservations there. You know, back to this white people, white farmers.

Q: And before we talk about Huron, I wanted to ask about your family's interaction with Native Americans too. Because I know you guys owned a farm, didn't—

Minder: [00:32:56] Yes. Very rare. We went to church, but there were no natives in our church. But some of my perceptions about natives and some of the stuff—the negative stuff I'm saying comes from some of my observations. Like in the summertime when it was time to bale hay and stuff, I remember a couple three summers where a carload of natives—they seemed like men to me as a kid, but they were probably teenagers or early twenties. Four, five, or six of them would pile up an old beater car, and I would be scared because I was like, Are they going to beat my dad up? You know I had these thoughts. They wanted my dad to hire them to throw bales, haul bales. And they would work for a day, and Dad would pay them, and that's—Dad would say, “Well, they're just going to go and get drunk tonight with that money.”

One time when I was a kid, Dad was off somewhere in a field with no way to get a hold of him. This was before cell phones. And I was a little kid, we were at home, and a carload of Indians

broke down out in front of our farm on the gravel road in front of our farm. And that's exactly how we would say it, "A carload of Indians." And I remember my mom being scared. There's a bunch of guys in the car, and a tire went flat or something, and they're sitting out there just sitting in the car. My mom was so scared, she gathered me and my two little sisters up, jumped in the car, and we went to a neighbor's house, and stayed there, and then tried to find where in the field my dad was. I remember we drove out to the field and told my dad, and he might have went or some—one of the other farmers might have went and tried to help them or something. I don't know. But there was a fear of them that you weren't safe in that situation. But I never remember anything happening. Never heard any stories of anything happening.

Q: Yes. Where do you think that fear came from?

Minder: [00:34:45] I suppose just a few decades and generations of bad experiences of what the government and white people did to the natives where they gathered them up and put them on the reservations, of little wars they had.

When I was a kid in 1973, there was the Wounded Knee takeover in Pine Ridge South—you know I got Tylenol if you want some Tylenol.

Q: Oh, no, no. I was just like stretching my neck.

Minder: Okay.

Q: I'm a sore mess, but I'm used to it.

Minder: [Laughs] Yes, yes, yes.

Q: I know it's a little distracting. I was like, you know, I got a crank in my neck.

Minder: No, no, I got—

Q: I just have to stretch it for sec.

Minder: If you want some painkiller, I got painkiller.

Q: No, that's great, but thank you for that.

Minder: [00:35:17] So, I think that just episodes from the past. In the '70s, there was a lot of Indian activism with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the—what was the Indian movement called? AIM American Indian Movement with Russell Means and Dennis [Banks] somebody. They were kind of the equivalent of the Black Panthers [Party] in South Dakota only with natives. And they would make threats, and they would do stuff, and they took over this little town of Pine Ridge, and they sieged it for—I can't remember how long now. But the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and the U.S. Marshals [United States Marshals Service] surrounded them, and there were shootings, and the rest, and stuff. That was in the '70s. I was in grade school. So that's kind of in your mind.

Q: Do you remember how people around you were reacting to that when it was happening?

Minder: [00:36:04] Oh, they'd be really negative about Indians, you know?

Q: Yes. Essentially [phonetic] you mean because people, they have these negative perceptions of Native Americans, and they're like—but at the same time, you talk about like a sympathy, and feeling sorry, and understanding in some way that the situation on the reservation is partially the fault of—

Minder: [00:36:39] Large fault of the government—

Q: Yes, the government.

Minder: —I feel.

Q: Yes. How did you reconcile those two feelings?

Minder: [00:36:47] I'm a kid. I didn't do anything about it. I was friends with my Indian friends in school. And I remember thinking very early on, probably in junior high, and I just remember thinking, the stereotypes that we had of Native Americans of being lazy, and alcoholic, and blah, blah, blah, blah, all these negative stereotypes. I remember thinking very early on that that's not because they're Indian. It's because of how they've been treated. And if you take any

human being or a group of human beings, and do that to them, really, I think you'll get the same result whether they're white people, or Indians, or black people, or whatever because it kills the human—it destroys any incentive when we provide everything for them I think. I don't know. Maybe I'm totally, totally wrong but—so in that sense, I had sympathy.

And, you know, I had mentioned before over the years driving from Cheyenne up to where I'm from in South Dakota, you drive through reservations, and have to stop, and get gas. I've noticed that their lives, there's most wealth, there's more—they seem more mainstream than they used to be. I would guess that the Internet is a part of that, and satellite TV is a part of that. That they see more of the outside world, which they never got to see before the Internet age. And then the state allowed them to do casinos, so there's a lot of wealth coming in through the casinos. So, you'll see these houses that the government built, and there'll be these brand new cars all around. But I don't know.

Q: Interesting. But when you were a kid growing up, did you spend much time in the reservations besides just going in for gas or—?

Minder: [00:38:37] No. There's nothing to do there.

Q: You played on the basketball team, correct?

Minder: Yes.

Q: What about playing basketball games, did you guys play at their school or—yes?

Minder: [00:38:47] Yes.

Q: What was that like?

Minder: [00:38:49] I remember feeling a little bit of fear, I guess. Are they going to attack our bus, and then sometimes, they would throw stuff at our bus. I think they knew we were scared, and they liked playing on that. We stayed together. We got in, and got out. Maybe sometimes during the game, our bus will have a window broke out or something.

Q: Yes. Wow. Do you remember a window being broken out or—?

Minder: [00:39:08] Yes. But when I was a kid in grade school, not playing on the basketball team yet because I was too young, there was a time when that happened in one of our buses. And that would have been in the mid, early '70s when a lot of this stuff was going on with the American Indian Movement, and so. Nothing bad ever happened, but the town I was born in was a little bigger town, and so they had an A&W [Restaurants, Inc.] in the hospital that we'd go to, so we would go to that. We would go to that. Sisseton is the name of the town, Sisseton, South Dakota. We would go to that town for stuff because it was fifteen miles away, and I don't know.

Q: Interesting. And then what were your relations like with your parents growing up?

Minder: [00:39:54] Good. My mom and dad were very supportive and encouraging. My mom was very outgoing and friendly, and my dad was very friendly but an introvert. And my dad was very emotionally closed because of stuff—you know, the divorce as a little, eleven-year-old kid. I think that affected him. My mom, years later, told me that he was engaged to a woman before her, and she dumped him, broke off the engagement and that really hurt him. And then some of it, I think, is culture. He's just a typical, American male where you don't share your feelings or show emotion.

I'd hang out with him a lot. You know, I'd ride the tractor with him when I was a kid when he was working the fields and stuff. I had chores to do. I spent a lot of time with him, but we never talked about anything. There was never any, "Son, let me tell you this life lesson," or whatever. [Laughs] There was nothing like that.

My mom and dad's relationship with each other was very unromantic. They just lived together, but from what I observed from my friends and relatives, my cousin, all the other marriages, it looked like every other—all the other marriages. I never saw affection or—and I think part of that is that German, Lutheran, Norwegian culture were you don't express affection in public. I mean Garrison Keillor would joke about that in some of his skits, you know?

Q: So, you said your dad was the typical, American male in that he didn't show his feelings or emotion.

Minder: Or talk about them.

Q: Yes, or talk about it.

Minder: [00:41:50] I saw him cry one time.

Q: When was that?

Minder: [00:41:53] When the grandpa that raised him after the divorce—he went to live with this couple that couldn't have kids, Grandpa Irving [phonetic]?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [00:42:00] Grandpa Irving—Grandma Sydney [phonetic] when I was a little kid, but Grandpa Irving died, and I was in high school, and he died. We had to clean up the house and sell it. And I remember coming out of the house, and Dad turned to pull the garage door down, and he started crying. That was the only time I saw him show emotion.

Q: How about yourself with regard to that? Do you think you're like him in that way or—?

Minder: [00:42:29] No. I just choked up telling that story, so I'm not like that at all. I cry really easily.

Q: And what do you attribute that to?

Minder: [00:42:40] I think I'm more like my mom that way, and I don't know.

Q: Have you always been that way?

Minder: [00:42:44] Yes. Yes.

Q: Interesting.

Minder: [00:42:49] And as a pastor trying to preach, it would be tough sometimes not to get choked up when you're telling a story, telling something from your life or whatever. So, it's tough on your kids.

Q: Yes. And so, you guys eventually moved and—?

Minder: [00:43:07] Sold the farm. We moved 140 miles in South Dakota to Huron, a farming community.

Q: Why did you guys move?

Minder: [00:43:14] Dad was tired of farming. He never really wanted—he wanted to be a businessman, so he worked for a—he worked for a co/op. It was like a big gas station convenience store that served farmers and stuff. And so, he got into that. That's why we moved.

Q: And you said a little bit before about what Huron was like. There was McDonald's and stuff like that, but more—do you remember your reactions or—?

Minder: [00:43:38] I was excited to move there. I wanted to move to a town like a bigger town, and there's a Christian high school there I wanted to go to. Because I had worked at that bible camp in the summer, and, like, this Christian school is right next to it, and I got to know the superintendent and some other kids. Some of the guys from the school in the night would come over and play basketball, and I'd go play ball with them so I got to know them and was like, "Man, I want to go to school with these guys. I want to go there." So, we moved off the farm to the town of Huron.

And you've got to understand this rural—in rural South Dakota, or Wyoming, or whatever, a town of 13,000 was the hub for fifty miles around and then there would be another. Aberdeen, and Watertown, and Brookings, and Sioux Falls, and Mitchell, they're all towns of, you know, ten to 25,000. And the people in the little towns of five hundred, or two hundred, or whatever, they would come to those towns for groceries and gas, and go to a movie or—I don't know if you can grasp that concept, but that's rural. I mean we're talking rural.

Q: Yes, it's interesting.

Minder: [00:44:46] Sioux Falls is 100,000, and that was like a metropolitan, mega city, which you never went to because it's so far away.

Q: So, you moved to Huron in high school and you finished—

Minder: [00:45:04] I didn't go to the public school in Huron. I went to this Christian school.

Q: And what was that like?

Minder: [00:45:08] I loved it. It was a lot of fun. Small, 13 in my class, good kids, got along great, come from Minot [phonetic], a lot of them from Minot, families, good, solid families. And I happen to fall into a cluster of classes where I have good athletes, so we were really good in basketball and—is that a bug or—?

Q: I don't know.

[INTERRUPTION]

Minder: [00:46:51] This is all really interesting to talk about, but it feels kind of boring because there's nothing dramatic or—help yourself. There's nothing dramatic or—

Q: No, no. I think that that's exactly where we thrive as sociologists is in the everyday life and the traditions of places, and communities, and such, so you know?

Minder: [00:47:13] And I don't think we can appreciate as humans growing—when you grow up, you don't know any difference, so you think that's just the way life is.

Q: Yes.

Minder: [00:47:19] Like one thing is where I grew up, the winters are bitter cold. And we'll have a cold snap, and it might be twenty below or thirty below for two or three weeks wanting to get to zero for an all-day high. And now, I can't imagine living back there for winter. I'd hate it. And my wife from Wyoming, she—they don't have that kind of bitter cold around here. And when we married, she moved out there to Huron with me, and she hated the wintertime. But when you grow up in it, it's all you know.

[INTERRUPTION]

Minder: [00:48:07] Okay. And you grew up in California, right?

Q: Yes, I grew up in New Jersey and California, so I used to just own California, and say I'm from California, but I really should just own both now.

Minder: [00:48:25] How old were you when you got to New Jersey?

Q: I moved to New Jersey when I was like three, I think, and then I was in New Jersey until I was eleven. Yes, and then I lived in California after that, so.

[INTERRUPTION]

Minder: [00:49:09] Well, that's interesting.

Q: Yes. So like you're in Huron. You know, I totally forgot that [unclear] the last time we were talking. Here, I was thinking that you really just did the small-town, K [Kindergarten] through twelve and then you went to Kansas City.

Minder: [00:49:25] We moved into Huron when I was a sophomore, so I spent three years there and then I moved to Kansas City in college, so—

Q: Oh, I remember that.

Minder: —I've been here a long time.

Q: I remember what I'm going to ask about. You said you're really excited to go to this Christian school.

Minder: [00:49:40] Yes, and move to a town [crosstalk]—

Q: And move to a town, but excited also for a Christian school.

Minder: Yes.

Q: Wait. What was your faith at that point?

Minder: [00:49:50] I would say for far back as I can remember, I've always had a faith in God and Jesus, how he died on the cross for our sins, and that he—God loves everybody. I think my mom and my church instilled in me that we're—God loves everybody, and it doesn't matter if you're Indian, or black, or white, or anything. I think that got instilled in me through my faith, and my church, and my mom. And I bought into it hook, line, and sinker. You know what I mean? And I still believe it.

My faith hasn't changed at all. My faith is very similar to what it was when I was a little kid. I was like growing and understanding God more and closer to him. And then go through this divorce last year, I've seen a whole new side of God I never expected, and that'll choke me up if I go to that. But I think my faith and what I believe the Bible says about we're all made in God's image, that one race is not better than another. We're just different in the way God designed us because God is so creative. There's so much diversity, and he's made a huge diversity in people. So that's always been what I thought and believed, and I credit my mom and my church as a kid to that, so—

Q: Interesting. Yes. What kind of church was that?

Minder: [00:51:13] It is like an independent church, Independent Methodist. And they felt the Methodist were getting too liberal, and so they left the Methodist, and they were just an independent community church. So, they weren't in any denomination.

And that was weird because when we moved—I was always growing up believing, I'm a Christian, I'm a Christian, go to church, I'm a Christian. We moved to Huron when I was a sophomore, and my dad didn't have much faith, and my mom was looking for a church. She chose a Baptist church. On Sunday, we're going to church and instead of the pastor saying, "As a Christian, we should live like this, as a Christian," blah, blah, blah, he would say, "As a Baptist, as a Baptist." And it was a weird—I don't know what the term for that is, but it's like, I don't like this you know?

Q: Yes. Yes.

Minder: [00:51:57] So it's—

Q: What did you not like about it?

Minder: [00:52:01] I don't feel God is calling us to be Baptists. When I was a pastor in the Baptist—I've been in Baptist churches, and I'm like, "We're not here to make Baptists." The church I became lead pastor of in Huron or in Cheyenne is called Meadowbrooke Baptist Church. And one of the first things I did is started by, "Let's just drop the word Baptist. Let's take it off our sign. Let's not use it because we're not here to make Baptists. We're here to help

people learn about Jesus and become followers of Jesus.” And for a lot of people, Baptist is a negative connotation, and they’re going to see that the B word, right, or maybe I would say—I’d call it the B word. “They’re going to see it on our sign, and everybody will run them off.”

And I would have people come that have been attending in our church, and they go, “I’ve been here six months, and I just found out this is a Baptist church. And if I had known that, I never would have come here.” I’m like, success because that’s not what we’re about.

Q: So, is there something specific about Baptists who—oh, no, I’m not going to go there.

[Laughs] I got to get dinner at some point today, you know, down in Fort Collins something like, you need some [crosstalk]—

Minder: —[crosstalk] [00:53:02] some extra.

Q: Yes, yes. I mean, it doesn’t need to be cool. It just needs to be better than Cheyenne. That’s the way—

Minder: [00:53:08] That sounds like some bias right there.

Q: No. I’m not biased. I think there’s—

Minder: —[crosstalk].

Q: —some—okay with—you know, I can—Mary [phonetic] and I go to Cheyenne, as a quick
aside—

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: So, yes, you have an idea of like—you know? Is that specific to Baptists, or is it like—

Minder: What is it?

Q: The thing that you said about saying like, “I don’t like the idea of people becoming Baptist. I I
want people to become Christians.” Is that something that—and you had this experience with
Baptists, and then you had—you’re technically a Baptist church and you, kind of, were like,
“Okay, let’s drop this.” Do you have that same kind of feeling towards other sects of Christianity
like Catholicism, people wanting to make a Catholic or something? Was there something specific
about Baptists that—?

Minder: [00:54:31] Well, I think this is the specific thing, is the hellfire-and-brimstone stuff that
Baptists have a reputation for. Some of it is the Westboro Baptist people in Topeka that [unclear]
at funerals and synagogues hates fags, and all that kind of stuff. To me, those people are mentally
ill. Those Baptists are—and I want nothing to do with that. And so—

[INTERRUPTION]

Minder: [00:55:32] So, that was part of the reason.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Yes. So, do you have any moments when you were a kid that your faith, you just—like clicked for you in a way?

Minder: [00:59:19] Where it clicked for me.

Q: Or maybe not clicked. I mean that's my own, kind of, term there. How—

Minder: [00:59:26] I can tell you a story where my faith really clicked, and I don't know if you'll understand it. I grew up in a church that believed the Bible is God's word, and we take it literally but not hyper literal. We just take it like you would take out other literature literally if that makes sense?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [00:59:50] So, like when Jesus said, "I am the door," we don't believe that he would be a piece of wood—

Q: [blows nose]

Minder: [00:59:58] —[unclear]. You know, there's expressions, idioms, or something. So, I always believe that we're—you know, God made us and loved us. He made us in his image, but we're sinners. We've done things we shouldn't have done. We've broken his rules. We all have. The wages of sin is death, and that's why he sent Jesus, his son, to die in the cross and pay for our sin. And we need to put our faith in what he did as our substitute. And that's what saves us from our sin, not our being a goody two-shoes, or being super holy, or religious. It's that faith in Jesus being our substitute.

And I remember, as a kid, always worrying that I didn't pray the prayer right about believing in Jesus, and that I was going to die and go to hell because I didn't pray the prayer right or whatever. And I went through a Christian high school, and every once in a while, there'd be a nagging thought I'd have and then I went to a bible college; prepared for ministry. In my freshman year, I remember thinking, "Gosh, Here I'm a freshman in bible college, and I'm wondering if I'm even saved or not."

And so one night, I got my bible out and I just started reading different verses about what the Bible says about being saved or being a Christian, whatever phrase you want to use. And all of a sudden [snaps], the light came on that my salvation is not a feeling that I have. It's based on the facts that God says in the Bible. I believe on these facts, and that's what saves me, not some feeling I have that I'm saved or not. That was a huge light-bulb moment for me, and then from then, I've never struggled with my faith of what's going to happen to me when I die. I believe because of what God's word says. And I put my trust in Jesus and not on myself. And when I stand before God someday, my faith is in what Jesus did for me on the cross not because I was a

pastor, or because I lived a moral life, or because I didn't divorce my wife. It's in what—he's my representative for me. That's been the biggest aha moment of my life. But I've never struggled in my faith doubting if God exists or wanting to walk away from God.

Even through this divorce doing something that I feel is not a biblical reason, and I've got that cognitive dissonance. I don't see God sees me any differently. I think it hurts him like it would if my son did something that I wish he wouldn't do, so anyhow.

Q: Yes. It's really interesting what you said about that it's not this feeling of being saved, but it's factual.

Minder: [01:02:45] It's trusting and it's facts.

Q: It's trusting. Yes.

Minder: [01:02:50] I don't doubt that I'm an American citizen. I don't because I've got this birth certificate that says I was born in the States.

Q: Yes, yes. But you don't necessarily also—? That's really interesting. Because you don't necessarily have a feeling of being an American citizen all the time where you're, like, deeply feeling this patriotism and stuff. But you know that you're an American citizen?

Minder: Yes.

Q: It's the same thing with that, with your faith?

Minder: [01:03:11] And sometimes, I don't feel like a Christian. Sometimes, I would love to go out, and find a woman, and sleep with her, you know? And that's not the Christian thing to do. But that doesn't change the fact that I believe in what's God's word says about, believing in Jesus Christ and not in my own self. I don't know if that's a very good illustration. But you asked about my faith, and I can't remember how you phrased the question about—I don't know—how a moment or—

Q: Yes, something like that, yes.

Minder: [01:03:48] Right. That's it for that.

Q: That's really interesting. And tell me a little bit about when you went to Bible College and stuff, what was that like?

Minder: [01:04:03] My mom and my church always, kind of, pounded into us, "Go to a bible college for a year. Learn more about the Bible. Just go there for a year and then go do whatever you want. Go to whatever college you wanted to." I always thought. "Yes, that's a good idea." But then in going through high school and working at that Bible camp in Huron, I thought, "I want to go into ministry of some kind." I don't know what. So, I chose this bible college in

Kansas City. Some crazy stuff happened that I feel God led me to it, and some crazy circumstances.

Q: What were some of the crazy stuff that happened?

Minder: [01:04:36] This is going to sound so stupid. My best friend and I in high school, this Christian high school, I don't know how we ever got into this about teasing each other who's the real communist because it's still the Cold War, okay?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [01:04:49] And then all our classmates got in on it, and they were picking on us, but we would always make jokes. So, if I wore something red, he'd go, "Oh, Billy's a communist. He's got red on." And I was trying to decide what college to go to because I was a senior. And I was coming out of our little school library, and there was a college catalogue from this Calvary Bible College in Kansas City, and it was a red book because their school colors were red, red and white, red and gold, or whatever. I thought, "I've got to grab this book and see what it is, so I can use it against Terry [phonetic], my friend."

I started reading that, "Wow, this college is cool." It's in Kansas City ten hours away. So I had to sneak the book home, so my friend didn't see me with this red book. This is how childish and stupid. You know, I'm talking—looking at it, and I'm telling my folks about it. And they're like, "You know, that's, oh," oh, blah, blah, blah.

So, like the next week in school, the superintendent comes into our senior class. And we always had a senior class trip, but it's usually just like to Minneapolis, four or five hours away. He goes, "Don't get your hopes up, but I'm trying to work it out that we take our senior class trip in Kansas City to go to this seminar." And I almost fell off my chair when he said it, and it happened. We got to go to Kansas City this summer, so I got to go see this college.

One day, he dropped me off at the school, and I spent the day at this college that I thought was really cool. I was really big into basketball. Basketball is my sport. They arranged a pickup game in the afternoon with some of the guys on the team, and I just—everything about the school, I loved it. I just felt like God paved the way to go to that school. It was all circumstantial, but what are the chances that I find this college in Kansas City that I think is really cool and then the next week, the superintendent says, "Hey, we're taking you-all to Kansas City"? You know what I mean?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [01:06:43] You can call it serendipity, or whatever you want to call it, or the universe, but to me, it's God, a personal God directing my path. So, I got there, I loved it. It was a small school, 400 students. I got to start in the basketball team because I wasn't a good enough player. I wouldn't have started at a DI [Division I], or DII [Division II], or DIII [Division III], or any. I wasn't that good. But I was a big fish in a little pond there. I got to play basketball four years. I was there five years, and we had a good team. I was in another good group of athletes where we

were the top in our conference. We're won our conference all the time, and just I loved the environment. I love the people and— you know? It was pretty conservative, and I had to recover from some of that.

Q: Well, yes, what aspects that you have to recover from?

Minder: [01:07:30] That we weren't supposed to associate with other denominations that didn't believe like us, like the charismatics or the more liberal Lutherans. We had a pretty strict dress code where I couldn't have a beard, and just a bunch of dumb stuff. You couldn't go to movies.

Q: Yes. What do you think of those elements, of like conservative Christianity?

Minder: [01:07:55] What do I think of them in what way?

Q: Yes. I mean, how do you reconcile your teachings and what you were taught, I mean? And how did you come to think, as you just said, that it's stupid?

Minder: [01:08:14] Well, there's—

Q: Those specific things—

Minder: [01:08:16] There's—

Q: Some of those yes. Or is it stupid, you know, or is it—?

Minder: [01:08:20] One way that helps me look at it is you look at it like a bull's-eye with concentric circles. And in the center of the bull's-eye are core beliefs that I don't bend on: That the Bible is God's word, that Jesus is God, the son, that we're sinners and we need Jesus Christ. There are some core things there that I don't flex on. And then you go out to the next circle, and there are some other things like I shouldn't sleep around, I shouldn't do drugs. You know, there are some behavior stuff. And then you go out further, and I—a woman shouldn't dress provocatively, or should you wear a tie to church or not? And the further away you get from the core things, you might have your beliefs and opinions, but they're not the core of your belief. I don't know if that, kind of, makes sense?

Q: Yes, that makes sense. Are there any other things that you would say are in your core besides the four or five things you just mentioned?

Minder: Not really.

Q: Interesting. So, let's go back to Bible College. That was in Kansas City right?

Minder: [01:09:23] Kansas City, Missouri, yup.

Q: So, that must have been different?

Minder: [01:09:26] That was huge. You know, I go from a farming community of five hundred people in town to a town of 13,000 to one of the major—I don't know if it's major. Is Kansas City a major metropolitan area in the United States? Probably not to you but—

Q: Probably one of the major ones in the Midwest, I would say. Yes. One of the biggest in the Midwest.

Minder: A couple, three million people.

Q: Yes. Yes.

Minder: [01:09:45] Never been to anything like that, turnpikes, and freeways, and giant stores. And it's really funny, really funny because my best friend, Raymond, Ray—he's a black guy, and he's the best man in my wedding. I took him home to Huron one holiday, and he grew up in Kansas City, so it's all he knew. He's a city kid. We're in South Dakota, and if you've been driving around Wyoming, you know what this is like. You leave a town, and you're in the country. And a few miles later, you get to another town, and then you leave, and you're in the country. So, we're driving up to Huron, and we're between Mitchell and Huron in the country, and we're driving past farms. And he goes, "So what town is this?" I'm like, "What?" He goes, "What town are we in?" I'm like, "We're not in a town. We're in the country." He goes, "No, no, no. What's this town called right now?" And it was a totally new concept to him that—

Q: That's interesting, yes.

Minder: —he was not in anything called a town. He’s, literally, in the country. Because in Kansas City, you go from suburb to suburb.

Q: And it’s all town. Yes, yes, yes.

Minder: [01:10:48] It’s all named something.

Q: Yes.

Minder: [01:10:50] And so I just remember laughing my head off at this city kid that that was a whole, mind-blowing concept to him that he was in the country.

Q: That’s really funny, yes.

Minder: [01:11:00] Anyhow, that’s an aside, huh?

Q: No. That’s a cool story, yes. So, your best friend in college was black or—?

Minder: Yes, yes.

Q: Now, tell me about that relationship.

Minder: [01:11:10] I was a freshman and he was an upper, like a sophomore I think. He's a very outgoing and friendly guy; loved everybody, everybody loved him. And there was something about—we just became good friends. There was like a chemistry there, and we just became best friends. We spent all our time together. We just clicked.

And it's sad, as we graduated from school—he was my best man, but as we graduated from school, and he went his way, and I went other way. It's before the internet and stuff. We kind of just—I don't—we didn't lose contact, but we didn't stay in touch like I wish we could have. But we could pick up the phone. Like he just commented on one of my daughter's post. We could pick up the phone and pick up like we've been together the whole time. It's one of those kind of friendships.

Q: Oh, cool.

Minder: [01:11:57] But he's in Tennessee, and I'm in Colorado.

Q: And was he your first black friend or—?

Minder: Yes.

Q: Yes. What was that like?

Minder: [01:12:08] I thought it was cool. I had a black friend. [Laughs] I thought it was cool. And he grew up in very, very conservative Baptist black churches where they didn't hoop and holler. You think of a typical black church where there's a lot of the choirs dancing around singing. They were very straitlaced and—which I thought was really funny because I had this stereotype of black churches, and his little church wasn't like that.

Q: Oh, interesting, yes.

Minder: So, just [unclear].

Q: Yes. Do you remember, like what do you guys like to do together, you know?

Minder: [01:12:39] Sing, we sang. Matter of fact, he and I formed a quartet. There's four of us, and we toured one summer for a couple of weeks. Got like a couple of guys, and a piano player, and hang out, talk, just do stuff friends do.

Q: Yes. What do you guys talk about?

Minder: [01:12:59] Life, our relationship with God, classes we're doing together, girls, dating. He tried to talk to me about masturbation once. I didn't want to go there. That's how open he was talking about anything. And it was just like, "Yes, I don't know."

Q: Just like the ethics of it, or just generally like—yes.

Minder: Yes, the ethics. Yes.

Q: Interesting.

Minder: [01:13:23] Yes. I don't know why I threw that out there, but it's like—

Q: No, it's interesting. Yes, yes, yes. And Kansas City, I mean, you said it was a big place too.

It's also a place with a totally different makeup of people.

Minder: [01:13:45] It's very racially—

Q: —it sounds like.

Minder: —mixed. For me, it was very racially mixed. I don't know. I've never bothered looking up the demographics. I don't know if it's fifty percent white, fifty percent African American. I don't know. There's a large African American population there. And so, I've never been around it like that before. I'm trying to remember. The first time I even saw a black person face to face, I was probably a sixth or seventh grader, I don't know. I don't know.

Q: At school or just—?

Minder: [01:14:12] Just in life. It wasn't at school. It wasn't at school. We were probably in Sioux Falls or something, I don't even know, or maybe in Minneapolis. So, I'm in this racially mixed thing. We didn't have a lot of black people in our school. I don't know why, but wherever you went to the store, or shopping, or wherever you went, there were lots of black people. And I just remember the transition of really noticing it...to after a while, I didn't notice it. Tell you the story I told you—

Q: You want to again on the record?

Minder: [01:14:50] Sure. I mean, I don't know how much you want me to repeat or what I said and stuff?

Q: I mean, I don't want you to try to repeat it, but I think what comes up naturally, and you want to tell it, and you think it's relevant to what we're talking about now, go for it.

Minder: [01:15:03] Well, like because I hadn't been around black people, I notice them. My friend Ray took me to his church, and we went to the college class. It's an all-black church, and we just went down to the basement. And there's a college group, and there's probably like twelve of thirteen sitting in a circle around chairs having some [unclear] class. I was the only white person, and I was a freshman, and I just remember feeling awkward. I wasn't scared. It wasn't like as a kid when the car with the natives would break down. I wasn't scared. It was just I felt awkward. I was the only white person. I remember thinking, "This must be what it's like

for Ray when he's the only black person in a group of white people." It just felt weird because I've never experienced it, and I didn't know what to expect.

But anyhow, as time went on, I remember, we had this gym ministry where Tuesday nights, kids from the neighborhood would come and play basketball. And some of us guys in the college, we'd play ball with them, and then we'd sit them down, and we'd tell them a story from the Bible or do something. We'd preach out, you know, trying to get them to believe in Jesus or whatever. And it was all black kids.

And one night, it was just me and another guy. It was just the two of us from—two students, and there are all these kids playing there. And it was five on five. I'm sitting on the sideline in the bleacher watching, taking a break. And so, here's my partner and I. He's playing with all these kids, and they've been playing for a few minutes. And another guy from our dorm popped in, sits down next to me, and he's white. He laughs. He goes, "Hey, Jay is the only white guy out there," and until he said that, I hadn't even noticed it. It didn't even occur to me that my fellow student was the only white guy with all these other kids. And these kids were junior high and high school ed, so they weren't that much younger.

I remember that made me feel good that I hadn't noticed it until he said it because it made me realize how far I'd come where the skin color wasn't something I noticed and thought about. It was just—you know? I don't know if that makes sense?

Q: Yes, yes. It makes sense.

Minder: [01:17:16] But I remember that feeling. It's like, Oh, that makes me feel good. I don't know why but—

Q: Do you think that you've continued to see race in that way, or not see it, or—?

Minder: [01:17:27] I guess I noticed people when they're a different race, so they're white, or Hispanic, or Asian, or black, or whatever. But. I kind of think of it as, if they're a redhead, or a blond, or got brown eyes. I kind of think of it. I just go, "Oh, that's a black guy." I don't—

Q: But do you think there's like a different culture with it, too, and stuff like that or—?

Minder: [01:17:51] Oh, I think so.

Q: Versus like, you know, redheads have a culture?

Minder: [01:17:55] Oh, well, yes. Yes. I know we like to pick on gingers and make fun of them. But, oh, yes, I think there's definitely a different culture.

Q: Yes. So, coming out of bible college, too, what did you—I know that, originally, your mom said, "Go to bible college for a year and then—"

Minder: [01:18:22] And then I decided to stay, and I graduated.

Q: Yes, you decided to stay.

Minder: [01:18:24] I got an education degree.

Q: Yes. And you wanted to stay because?

Minder: [01:18:29] I just loved it so much. I think I just love the—I love the family, the community of that one.

Q: Yes. And then when you did graduate, did you know what you wanted to do then or—?

Minder: [01:18:39] Not really but when I'd come home for vacations, my folks changed churches, and we're going to this other church. And I loved how the pastor preached and stuff, and so I asked him if I could do like an internship with him. So, between my two senior years, my fourth and fifth years, I interned, and they asked me to become their social pastor. So, I moved back to Huron and was the associate pastor for seven years.

Q: And by then you had already met your wife, right?

Minder: [01:19:04] At bible college.

Q: Oh, at bible college, yes.

Minder: [01:19:06] And then three or four years into that, we got married, and she moved from Wyoming out to Huron, South Dakota, with me. We're there for three more years, and then I resigned, and moved up to Cheyenne where she's, kind of, from in northern [phonetic] Cheyenne Ranch.

Q: Yes. So wait, so three, four years into you living in Huron, you guys married?

Minder: [01:19:23] Yes.

Q: Oh, okay. So, she was how much younger than you—

Minder: [01:19:26] She's three years older than me.

Q: Three years older than you?

Minder: Yes.

Q: Oh, okay, okay. So, tell me about your relationship with her and how you guys came to know each other?

Minder: [01:19:32] She transferred in as a junior. We transferred in the same year, so she was older than me, but we're both juniors, so there are a couple of years together. She played on the

women’s basketball team, so we traveled together on the road trips, and very outgoing, very flirty. And I was flirty with the girls, too, and so we always teased each other and joked around. I liked her, but I never dated her. And then we graduated, and she moved back to Wyoming, I moved to South Dakota. And then a couple of years into it, one night she called me, and that started some phone calls. And then she took a trip, a big loop of a trip, and stopped, and saw me, and then I thought I was falling in love with her, so I—that was like in September. I moved really quickly. New Year’s Eve, I proposed to her, and Saint Patrick’s Day, we got married. Long distance relationship.

Q: Wow. Something. Oh, yes, so she called you that one time to kind of—what was it about?

Minder: [01:20:29] Just call a friend. She forgot about the time difference, so she called me eleven o’clock Central time, and I was in bed. It was before answering machines, so I had to answer. I was Associate Pastor; it could have been somebody died, so I have to answer the phone. She just said, “Hey, how are you doing?” And she’s just calling a couple of friends and probably got my—in those days, you could get somebody’s phone number by calling direct the operator and asking for it, so.

Q: And then so, she came and visited you on that trip? What was that trip like the first time?

Minder: When she came and visited me?

Q: Yes. Well, the first one when she came and, kind of, hit up where you were on a loop or something she was doing.

Minder: [01:21:05] She had been dumped by the guy she was dating out here, and I said, “Yes, take a trip. Come and see me.” So, she went and saw a couple of other college friends, and I was one of them on the circle that she went. And I had her stay with some friends of mine. She didn’t stay with me because that would have looked inappropriate. And we weren’t dating, we were just friends, but still she couldn’t stay at my house because of, you know, a very conservative culture.

Q: Yes. You were living alone at that point?

Minder: [01:21:30] Yes.

Q: Or were with you with your family?

Minder: [01:21:30] I had my own house. And I remember one of my high school classmates, I had him come in and meet her because I thought maybe he could meet her. I remember thinking during that weekend when she was there, and like I got jealous. I’m like, “Gosh, I’m not gonna let Cliff have her. I think she’s pretty neat,” so I started telling her my feelings for her.

Q: That weekend?

Minder: [01:21:51] Not that weekend but a couple of weeks later I called her.

Q: Oh, interesting. During that time, did you guys talk between that weekend?

Minder: [01:21:56] Oh, yes, on the phone.

Q: Oh, you called her back? Oh, okay.

Minder: Yes, probably.

Q: But then you told her on the phone and stuff?

Minder: [01:22:02] Yes. And then we started writing letters and having phone calls.

Q: Interesting. Yes, talk to me about that whole process because I know we were talking last time about moving fast, and stuff like that, and you're reflecting on that a lot now.

Minder: Yes.

Q: Tell me about it, you know?

Minder: [01:22:18] For this book I picked up, *The Tactical Guide to Women*, I realize now that I had this pattern in dating where I would see a girl I liked, I would ask her out or whatever, start to flirt with her to get her—get—see if she's interested. We'd start dating, and I would move

quickly. I would do these big romantic gestures. I would sweep her off her feet. I would just come on really strong. And she would fall for me or whatever and fairly shortly into that, I'd be like, no, I don't think she's the one. I'd see stuff. I'd change my mind. You know, I just would see stuff or whatever, and it's like break it off. And that was my pattern with—I didn't date a lot but a few girls, but that was definitely my pattern.

And I did that with her. But the difference this time was we were five hundred miles apart. There was no internet. It was a phone call occasionally because back then, you paid by the phone call, and it got expensive to have a phone call. You didn't call every day, and we'd write letters, and then letters would take a couple of days to get there, and then a couple more days to get back. And I don't know how we survived dating back in the olden day.

Q: It may have been easier.

Minder: [01:23:25] It's a lot different than it is today.

Q: I don't know. I wonder if long distance was actually easier?

Minder: [01:23:30] I don't know. Well, the negative side was I moved quickly. We got married, and we didn't really know each other. And then we started living together, and I realized—I just saw stuff, and at the first month into our marriage, I'm like, what have I done? What have I done? And then it just started years of trying to work things out. But as time got on, I realized I'm not going to—I can't stay married to this person the rest of my life. And some of the stuff I

told you off the record at the Starbucks, I don't want to say stuff about her on record that would get published. That were just stuff I saw or stuff I—does that make sense?

Q: Yes. It makes sense.

Minder: [01:24:12] I don't to want hurt her or our kids.

Q: Yes, that makes sense. Of course, of course, yes, yes, yes. You don't have to talk about anything you don't want to.

Minder: [01:24:17] Yes. But I mean, basically, our relationship was toxic. I was not the victim. I did and said things that hurt her, vice versa. But I did stuff in our marriage and said stuff that she couldn't forgive me for and get past, and so she beat me over the head with it for twenty-seven years. And anyhow, I got to the point where like, I'm done.

So, I realize now that if we would have dated in the traditional sense, I think I would have done the same thing. I would have seen stuff, and I would have moved on, but I wanted to get married.

Q: Yes. Why'd you want to get married?

Minder: [01:24:48] I don't know. It was something—growing up as a kid in my teenage and young adult years, being married, and finding the woman of my dreams, and living happily ever after was just something I always wanted. And I knew that we'd have arguments and fights. I'm

not saying it was going to be perfect. I'm just saying I want to be married to somebody I was deeply in love with. And I was at the beginning, but then things just got toxic and stuff, and so last year, I felt some stuff happen. I'm like, this is it, I'm done. I'm out of here.

Q: And what were some of that stuff that happened if you can tell me?

Minder: [01:25:24] Well, I just feel like she's—how do I word this?

Q: And it's okay. Just to give you a sense of security, if you do say something that you are nervous about or you're not sure about, you do get a chance to go through this all, and you can just delete it.

Minder: [01:25:45] Just say, "Please don't include that"?

Q: Or you can figure out a better way—

Minder: To phrase it.

Q: —to phrase it or something.

Minder: [01:25:50] I just felt like I was married to a very angry person, and I don't know where all the anger came from. I think it had to do with the relationship with her folks, her mom and her dad. Her dad passed away. I never met him. I felt like I'm just married to a person who's easily

offended, did not forgive, and held that grudge forever. And so, stuff I might have said or did early on, she could never let go of it. And so as the years went by, if we ever had an argument, or a fight, or whatever, she would inevitably say, “For twenty-seven years, you,” blah, blah, blah, and however long we were married. If it was fifteen years, “For fifteen years.” And I just felt like I could never overcome stuff even though I felt I had changed. I was different and that she couldn’t forgive me, and she just—in her mind, that hurts were too deep or whatever. Any little thing I did, if I forgot to pick up something she asked from the grocery store—that’s just the example of it—”For twenty-seven years.”

And I just felt like if I said, “Hey, sweetie, your shoelace is untied,” she would explode in rage, just that’s how I felt I was living. And then I became angry over time living with an angry person, and then pretty soon, she’d flip it on me. “You’re so angry, “ and I’m like, “Yes, because I’ve lived with an angry person for so long I’ve become like you.” There’s, actually, a proverb in the Bible that says that about don’t live—

Q: [Unclear] in the bible.

Minder: Don’t go with an angry person or you’ll learn their ways and become like them. And I felt it’s exactly what happened to me because I was always on the defensive. And so, I started to shut down and stopped arguing with her, and I just stewed inside, and I started having health problems. And then I just got to the point where [I was] like, “I can’t do this the rest of my life.” But I was scared to do it because I knew I’d lose my job as a pastor. I didn’t want to hurt my

kids. I didn't want the shame and embarrassment. I had this Biblical conviction that it wasn't a Biblical reason to divorce, so I stuck it out.

A year ago in February, we had another argument, and she said something. In the middle of it, I'm just like, this is it. I'm done, and I started making plans how to move on. [clears throat] And then in August, I told her I want a divorce.

And I knew stuff. It's embarrassing to admit this. She journaled, and she'd leave her journal laying on the nightstand with her Bible or whatever. And sometimes, I couldn't stand it. I'd read it, and read all the stuff she wrote about me. It was always negative. And so, for twenty-seven years, I would—might—maybe not pick up her journal for months or a couple of years at a time. But then stuff would happen or whatever, and I'd see, and I'd look at, and I'd see her just venting and ranting about me—never anything positive literally.

Q: And you read that for the entirety of the marriage, though, from like the first year, so you started?

Minder: [01:28:545 Yes. And last summer, she wrote some stuff and I photo—I took pictures of it in my phone because I thought, "I might need this at some point." And so, as the summer went on, she started to freak out because she could tell I had changed. And she asked if I was having an affair. She asked me a couple of times, "Are you having an affair," because of the way I was treating—just kind of distancing, being cold towards her.

And then in August, I sat her down, and I said, “We need to talk,” and I sat her down. And I didn’t get the sentence out, she goes, “You want a divorce, don’t you?” I said, “Yes.” And I would have bet money in that moment because of what she wrote in her journal all those years, and how our relationship was toxic all those years, and the anger towards me. I would have bet money she would have said, “Yes, let’s—you’re right, let’s go our separate ways.” And her response was, “Oh, no, I don’t want this. God doesn’t want this. What’s this going to do to our kids? I saw us growing old together.” I’m just, kind of, thinking, “What marriage were you in?” And then she said some more stuff, and I said, “I know what you think about me.” And she said, “You’ve read my journal, haven’t you?” And I said, “Yes,” and she got really angry, “I didn’t mean that stuff. I didn’t mean that stuff.”

“For twenty-seven years you wrote that stuff, and the stuff you wrote these last few months tops it all. And you talk about this divorce hurting our children, someday you’re going to be gone and our children are going to read through twenty-seven years of what you thought about their dad. How do you think that’s going to hurt them?”

I feel she said all that, so she could play the victim, take the high road, be the innocent party, be the one that held on to her convictions, you know?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [01:30:47] She doesn’t have cognitive dissonance. [Laughs]

Q: Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Minder: [01:30:50] I'm the one that has it because I actually did it. I think she played that all up in this divorce process when I know, for a fact, she was miserable too. And she even used the D-word in her journal a couple of times, so. I don't know how it's going to play into your report on whiteness in Cheyenne, Wyoming. [Laughs]

Q: Oh, we're really interested in people's lives, you know?

Minder: [01:31:13] She's part Hispanic, how is that?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [01:31:15] She's a fourth Hispanic.

Q: Great. [Laughter] I mean, I don't know. Does that have anything to do with your relationship at all or—?

Minder: No.

Q: Yes. But you guys stuck it out for twenty-seven years, you had three kids together.

Minder: Yes.

Q: You moved to Cheyenne, too, and stuff. And why'd you hold on to it for that long if you always kind of—

Minder: [01:31:45] Because of my beliefs, and I took them very, very, very seriously. Because I knew I'd lose my job as a pastor, I'd lose my income, didn't know what to do next. And I've always read that a bad marriage is better than a good divorce, and I don't want to do that to my kids. I was scared. I didn't know how to go about it. I didn't know what—there's all those facts—the shame of it, letting people down. And a phrase a friend told me, they said, “You were comfortably uncomfortable. You're comfortably uncomfortable. You were comfortably uncomfortable. You had learned to function in that dysfunction because there was security there.” And that was one of the scary things was I threw all my security in the toilet when I did this. But—

Q: But you must have felt really strongly about this to throw all that security away, in a sense, the job, things like that?

Minder: [01:32:44] Not in February where we're standing in the better marketing. I remember talking what it was about and stuff. And I had tried over the last few years not to argue, and I'd just stuff, and I'd walk away, or bite my tongue, or whatever when she'd get mad at me. I couldn't do it. Sometimes, I still shot back, and we'd have arguments, but they were fewer. But that night, I was arguing back with her. I was mad and then she said something, “For twenty-seven—” She said something, and inside it was like a switch flipped. I was like, “I'm done.” And

I quit—that moment I stopped arguing. I just let her go on and on. I just looked at her and, kind of, walked off. And then in April, we had another argument, and it was over money and then another argument. I said, “I’m done,” and I walked away and then that’s when I read her journal. She goes, “Billy said he’s done. I assume he meant the marriage. I’ve been done a long time.” Our kids were gone. I just wasn’t doing it anymore.

Q: So, did you have to quit your job though and stuff like that?

Minder: [01:33:49] Yes because of our church’s beliefs. Some of the people in church were upset, “Why can’t he stay,” there were some arguing, and other people said that. And the best way I can liken it to is, I was a leader. Leaders are held to a higher standard. Like if somebody in our church divorced, we wouldn’t ask them to leave our church. I could have stayed at that church and attended it, but I couldn’t be the pastor anymore. I had broken one of the rules, and I disqualified myself from being a pastor of that church. It would be like an athlete breaking a team rule and getting kicked off the team. It’s that simple, and I knew that going into it, and I accepted it.

Q: Yes. But you also said that there—you’ve talked to people where they have different beliefs than yours on this, on divorce and stuff like that, and [crosstalk]—

Minder: [01:34:46] Some people say, “You’re reading it too literally. God wants you to be happy. God will forgive you.” And I appreciate those comments, but I just—the way I approach

God's word, I—you know. I don't know. I still chose to do it. I didn't change my theology to fit what I wanted to do, and that's what some people do.

Q: Or not necessarily change your theology just to fit what you want to do, but change your theology from your own experiences, you know? Because I think that—and I'm not trying to push you on this kind of thing—

Minder: [01:35:43] No. There's nothing you could say to offend me. I'm not a person who gets offended.

Q: You know, you're telling me that for twenty-seven years, it was an unhappy marriage a lot of it. It wasn't just that you wanted to make a decision that you would be changing theology for it. It's a twenty-seven-yearlong experience that backs up that decision too.

Minder: Yes. Yes.

Q: You still maintained this, the idea that this is not—these are not Biblical reasons for divorce.

Minder: [01:36:21] Right. That's what that cognitive dissonance comes in, I guess. Is that still cognitive dissonance?

Q: I don't know. Talk to me about what you think this cognitive dissonance is, yes.

Minder: [01:36:30] Well, you have this belief, but then you act differently from what you believe. Maybe that's not what it is, but—

Q: Let me think about that. I think we're, kind of, in the area of cognitive dissonance. I think cognitive dissonance is when you have an idea of yourself and an idea of the way to do things, and you don't act that way, and how you reconcile that.

Minder: [01:37:00] That's what I did.

Q: Yes, I think that's it. Yes, so, I think we got it.

Minder: [01:37:02] People were shocked. People were shocked at—because people have known me. Like the Johnsons have known me for twenty-some years. People have known me in Cheyenne really well, and respected me, and looked at me as their pastor, and done their weddings, and funerals, and blah, blah, blah, all that stuff, and listened to me teach and preach. I think there was a lot of shocked people because they didn't see it coming.

Q: Did you tell people that you are divorced or—?

Minder: [01:37:35] Yes. Thursday morning, I told my wife. I called my head elder, and he goes, “Well, you know, you can't preach this weekend, and we'd like you to say something.” So, I drew up a little statement of what I wanted to say. So, we had three services. At the end of the— each service, I came on the stage, and I read my statement, and I walked off the stage, and I was

done with that church. That was on Sunday. So, Thursday I told her. Sunday, I was done. So, everybody in our church knew, and of course, word spread like crazy.

Q: You said that Saturday though, there was another incidence where you kind of walked it back.

Minder: [01:38:09] Well, when I told my wife Thursday, Saturday morning, I drove down to Denver, told my daughters. My son was in the air force in California. I called him on the phone. My wife, obviously, devastated, left the house and went to her sister's. So, Saturday that weekend, I'm alone in the house. Saturday night, I'm lying in bed thinking, "Can I really do this? Can I really blow up my church like this?" And I was sitting there thinking, and talking, and praying like, "God if you're going to change my mind, if you're going to convict me, if you're going to give me a lightning—a light-bulb moment or a lightning moment, now is the time."

And then I had this thought, "I'm going to go up and look in her journals again." She had a nightstand full of her journals. I'm going to look in her journals, and I can find—if I can find something positive in there about me, I'll—if I can find something in there, that I'll—I won't do this tomorrow. I'll walk it back.

Q: Would you have been able to walk it back?

Minder: [01:39:09] Oh, yes.

Q: Even though you're [crosstalk]—

Minder: [01:39:10] My leadership wanted me to really bad. They were like, “If you don’t do this, if you don’t ask her for a divorce, we’ll give you a six-month sabbatical paid, and you can go get counseling. You guys can go to retreats. If you don’t do this, we’ll do your salary for six months.” And I was like, it’s done. I know her. I know our relationship. In six months, it won’t be different. Because you go back to how she’s—carries a lot of anger. She is easily offended. She doesn’t forgive, and she didn’t trust me because of stuff because of the past.

So, I went up and I—she’d taken the new journal with the—the current one, she took with her where I read the stuff. So, I took the second-most current journal. I open it up, and I started reading it. And I’m looking through it, and a lot of it was just, “We went to Denver, we went to Hidden Falls.” And then maybe she’d write some prayers out, or something she had learned, or whatever. But then she’d write and then all of a sudden, there’s a story about something I did in 2011, really negative, and called me a narcissist just like my mom. She couldn’t stand my mom. And I when I read that story, I just like, there’s my answer, [claps] closed the book, put it back, closed the lights down. I went back down to the guest bedroom, fell asleep, and the next morning, I got up and read my statement three times at the end of the three services.

Q: How did that go?

Minder: [01:40:42] It was brutal. It was brutal. They wanted me to come late to church, so I didn’t run into anybody; to the first service. They had me sit in my music pastor’s office. Someone came and got me at the end of the service. Somebody else preached that morning. I

walked up on stage. It's really quiet, and everyone's like, what is going on here? The first service, I read my statement. I can hardly make it through. I was choked up, and then I did it, and then I walked out, and there's gasping.

And I walked off the stage and some people came and found me. They didn't want me mingling out in the lobby, and I understand. They didn't want, "Oh, poor, Billy, poor Billy." They didn't want this big sympathy show because I was doing something that was not good. And the second service, I got up and did it again. That's our big service. Most people attend that one. Then I did it in the third service and it was—and because people were coming to me between the services and were sitting there, I'm—we're all bawling and hugging each other. And I'm expending so much emotional energy, you know, just draining my emotional energy.

Q: So that you were around between the services and people would—

Minder: [01:41:45] No. I was in this office, but people would come to the office, and they'd see me in there, and they'd come in, and they would cry, and we'd hug, and they'd talk to me for a little bit. Then somebody else would come, we'd hug, and we'd cry. So between the emotion of the whole thing, of reading the statement and people coming to see me, and all this stuff, at the end of the third service—you know, it's been a long morning. When I got up the third time to read the statement, there was no emotion. I felt like I a robot. I could have been reading a recipe for chocolate chip cookies. And so, it was over.

Q: Did your wife attend any of those services?

Minder: [01:42:22] Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no. She's on her sister's, gone, hurting, and I get it. I hurt her deeply. She was comfortably uncomfortable. No, she's—what did I say—comfortably uncomfortable too.

Q: Comfortably uncomfortable, yes.

Minder: She was living on it too. She's ready to go the rest of her life that way.

Q: How did your children react?

Minder: [01:42:49] I called my son Saturday morning, and he was surprised, and he wanted to know details. He wanted examples, and those are the words he's using. He's twenty-six.

Q: Examples of what? Like the fighting?

Minder: [01:43:05] The fighting, why we're splitting up, why it was so bad that I had to do this. He wanted to know, [snaps] he wanted to know. He wanted to hear stories. And I was like, "Son, I cannot—I can't do that do to you. I can't do that to your mom. I'm not going to tell you stuff and try to get you on my side. I just—I can't do that. Maybe someday, we'll be able to talk more. But you saw us fighting. You grew up with it." We would argue and fight in front of them which—what an idiot I was to do that in front of our kids. We had these knockdown, dragging-out, screaming matches in front of our children. It was horrible. And he goes, "Yes, but you

weren't fighting as much the last few years." I said, "Yes, because I shut down. I started stewing inside. That's why I have some of these health—I thinks it's why I have some of the health issues." So, he was hurt, he was okay.

And then I'm driving on to Denver to tell my daughters. Well, he calls them and tells them, my two girls. So when I got there, they opened the door.

Q: They live together or—?

Minder: [01:44:04] Yes, they share an apartment, and of course, they're texting me all the way down. "What is this, what do you want to talk about, what's going on?" And I walk in there, and my youngest daughter is crying. My older—my middle child, daughter is pacing the apartment, and so I sit in the couch. My baby girl is sitting where you are, and my other daughter is like a caged animal. She just couldn't stand still.

And I told them, and my baby girl, you know, she's crying. She five-eleven. She comes and sits on my lap, and she's just sobbing, and we're hugging, and "I'm so sorry." I tried to say all the right things like, "We're not divorcing you, we both love you, I love you, I'm still your dad, I'll always be your dad, I'll always be there for you." The other daughter is just [makes sound]. And so, I walked over to her, and she stopped, and I said, "Can I give you a hug," and she let me hug her, but we didn't talk much. And then I left because their mom showed up with her sister.

Q: Right then?

Minder: [01:45:07] My wife wanted to be there. She goes, “I want to be there when you—you tell the girls and I want to be there and watch you tell the girls.” Well, her sister worked it out, so they were two hours late, so I was like, “Fine.” I was like, “I’m just going to tell them. You’re supposed to be here two hours ago.” And so, I told them and then as I left in the parking lot, she showed up, they walked in.

And I’m driving back to Cheyenne, and the middle child that was pacing. I don’t know what my wife said to them, but I got—my middle child just blasted me in a text. “I’m so angry at you. You’re such a hypocrite. I don’t want to talk to you right now. I still love you, but I’m not going to talk to you for a while. And you, well, you need to get help with your depression.” And my wife tried to turn it into that I was depressed. And so, it took my daughter and I a while.

And then that following Saturday, the girls came up to the house, and individually with two girls, I had a long, two-hour conversation with each girl, and talked about the divorce, why I was doing it. And then they talked about hurts or frustrations they had with me or me and their mom, and it was a really good talk. And a lot of the talk wasn’t about the divorce. It was just about they felt free to talk about hurts they had growing up that we didn’t know we had done to them, so. That’s how they responded. And my middle child is getting better, but it’s still hard on her.

Q: And did they have the same kind of views of divorce that’s like only for biblical reasons?

Minder: [01:46:45] I think the middle does, and the younger child is a lot more liberal in her views and everything. You need something?

[INTERRUPTION]

Minder: [01:47:27] Brutal. Wouldn't wish it on anybody.

Q: What?

Minder: [01:47:32] I wouldn't wish it on anybody to go through divorce. It's horrible.

Q: You want to tell me about it?

Minder: [01:47:40] There's a lot of pain. There's a lot of guilt. Friends, you, kind of, lose friends. They just stop communicating with you, and they've got to choose what side they're on, if they're going to talk to your wife or talk to you. Scared about the future, "What does this mean for my finances? What am I going to do? Will I ever find somebody?" All that stuff.

Q: Yes. We talked a little bit about you last time post-divorce, and I do want to talk about that still.

Minder: Okay.

Q: But I also wanted to ask you because it was, kind of, in between the last time we're talking here. I was just wondering like, what's your wife done since then?

Minder: [01:48:23] She stayed in Cheyenne. We sold the house. She moved into an apartment. She had to get a job because she wasn't working. She got a job at a credit unit. She's like a trainer of the—she trains at the credit union and does—this is just hearsay because she does not communicate with me.

Q: You guys haven't communicated since then?

Minder: [01:48:43] Just to handle financial details of the divorce, you know, the bills and stuff. She doesn't want to talk to me, which is fine. I understand that. And so, the last time I really saw her was in September. February eight, we met in Cheyenne to do mediation and we saw each other just walking past the hall, but there's no conversation. This past Thursday—

Q: Is this divorce mediation or something?

Minder: [01:49:04] Yes, yes. Yes.

Q: In the mediation, are you supposed to see each other or no?

Minder: [01:49:11] Not necessarily. It's just we got to the courthouse in the same time. We sat in separate rooms, and the lawyer ran between us. And at the end of the mediation, we both had to

go to the courtroom, and the court reporter recorded the settlement, and our verbal assent to it.

There was almost no eye contact or anything. We're sitting on the other sides of our lawyer. It's like you've seen on a TV show. Yes. So, I really had no communication with her other than a quick text or whatever, and she always—it was always through our lawyers.

But then this past Thursday night, two nights ago, my daughter, my baby going to film school in Colorado, they had their awards night. It's like their Oscars [Academy Awards].

Q: Yes, and you told me about that.

Minder: [01:49:51] And so, my wife and I both went to that. So, we're sitting with our children a couple—and we said hi to each other, and we said bye to each other, and that was about it. I'm willing to have a relationship with her, but she doesn't want to with me because I'm the one that divorced her, and she—you know, I get it. It's fine. But we're going to have to work together in the future with our kids when they get married and stuff, you know, so.

Q: Yes. And how have you been since the divorce?

Minder: [01:50:20] It was really painful, and a lot of sleepless nights, and a lot of tossing and turning, and guilt, and wondering what's going to happen, and pain, and devastation, and tears, and crying out to God, and walking this lake in the middle of the night. But a couple, three weeks after, I got into a divorce recovery class at this big church. I go to a satellite branch of it here in Windsor. It's in Fort Collins. And so that was a thirteen-week thing on Thursday nights. And

every week, they cover a different topic, grieving, anger, reconciliation, finances, children, sex. I mean we covered thirteen topics.

And then you get to meet other divorce people, and that was huge in my life. To use a Trumpism, it was huge, huge, and I went through it twice. I went through it in the fall and then I went through it again. I just finished here a couple of weeks ago. The Cinco de Mayo party tonight is that group of people. And what's really interesting is the second time I went through it in January, February, and March, I'd think back to the same topic from the first time in the fall, you know?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [01:51:33] I'd remember how devastated and hurt I was then and how far I've come, and it was really cool. So, a lot of healing has taken place.

Q: Yes. And how was your relationship with faith?

Minder: With God?

Q: Yes. Evolved since then?

Minder: [01:51:57] So to me, God is a personal being just like you and I are, so I don't look at it as my faith. I look at my relationship to God.

Q: Okay. Yes.

Minder: [01:52:03] Semantics maybe, I don't know.

Q: And your relationship to God then? Yes.

Minder: [01:52:07] I've seen a whole another side of God. I've seen his grace and his mercy towards me in a way I never would have dreamed. Because I was doing something that I felt is wrong, that I felt God feels is wrong, that he wouldn't want me to do, but I was going to do it. And that's basically what I would say to him. I said, "God, I know I shouldn't, I know this is wrong, but I can't go on. I'm going to do this. I'm so sorry."

And I just felt—I've always been big on circumstances in my life as a sign of God working or leading. Like in high school when I wanted to go check out that Kansas City College and then the next week, my superintendent says, "We're going to Kansas City," I've always looked at that stuff as God involved in that, not just coincidence. But you've got to be careful because sometimes a coincidence is a coincidence. What did [Sigmund] Freud say? Sometimes a cigar is a cigar?

Q: How do you tell the difference between them?

Minder: [01:53:07] I don't know. I don't know. I think it takes some thought, it takes some prayer, it takes some thinking, and maybe time if you've got some time. But [snaps] I don't just kneejerk jump into every—"Oh, that's God, oh, that's God, oh that," I think, sometimes, as you get older and more life experience, you kind of know. And then this might not make any sense at all, but—I don't know if you heard of John [C.] Maxwell. He was a pastor and was a leadership guru. He says, you know what, "In your spiritual knower," he called it your spiritual knower sometimes something will happen, "and just in your gut, you know God just did that." And it doesn't happen all the time, but—

Like I was going to figure out how I was going to rent a place with no job. And a week after I asked for the divorce, I get a letter in the mail, a card in the mail from a couple in my church. And it was a really nice thing, "Billy, we're so sorry, we love you, and you've made an impact on our—" you know, saying all this stuff. And then they said, "We want to give you this gift, and this is just for you, not to be shared with anybody else," and they underlined that. It was a check for \$5,000 that they want to give to me to help me in this hurting time. So, I was just blown away, and I looked at it as, "God, thank you God."

My relationship with God, I see him as I am his son, he's my father. And so I compare it to my relationship with my father and my son. And I think if my son was doing something I didn't want him to do and I felt it was wrong, I didn't want to do it, but he did it, I'd still love him. I wouldn't disown him. He's still my son. And I might not like what he did, but I still love him, and I want to be there for him as best I can. It might not be in the way he wants me to be there

for him. I'm not going to be co-dependent with him or whatever. But anyhow, that's what I felt like was going on.

So, I had this check for 5,000 bucks. I mean that's a lot of money to me.

Q: Yes. I mean, yes, it's a lot of money, yes.

Minder: [01:55:23] And I wanted to tithe ten percent of it, so that, okay, I'm going to take 500 bucks. I decided to give it to my sister who's a single mom, really struggling; a single grandma actually. So, I sent it to her in Sioux Falls, and then I'm looking for an apartment. I'm having a horrible time finding an apartment. I find this place, and this is a place owned by Christians. And I'm meeting with the office manager who's a Christian, and she said—I said, "I don't have a job." I told her my story, obviously not the detail, but I told her what's going on. She goes, "All right, we've got a lot of divorced men in this complex in your situation." And I said, "I had no job, so how do you rent to me with no job, no income verification?" She said, "You're going to pay six months upfront" and then she said—as we talked, she goes, "You know what, let's just do three months," and we're talking some more and then—by the end of the conversation she goes, "Let's just do two and a half months" because it was the middle of the month. She goes, "Let's do two and a half months with the deposit and stuff." So, I had this check for \$5,000. I gave away 500.. I had 4500 bucks left. Guess what two and a half months of the deposit was.

Q: I don't know.

Minder: [01:56:30] Forty-five hundred dollars. It was exactly what—I stepped out of faith and didn't keep that whole 5,000, and I just felt that was from God. So, here I am. And then the college I used to work at in Cheyenne, they reached out to me, and they offered me a job, and it pays the bills, and it's a good place to land.

Q: Yes. They reached out to you actually?

Minder: [01:56:53] Well, I met with the CEO last summer because I was—I know I was going to be leaving ministry. And wanted to know—he was a pastor. We have really similar stories.

Q: This was before your divorce, you met him?

Minder: [01:57:04] Yes, before my wife and that whole thing.

Q: Oh, so this is—

Minder: Yes.

Q: You're like preparing already—

Minder: [01:57:07] I was getting ready. And I didn't mean to tell him the whole story, but I ended up telling the story but—so he—and then I told him, “Hey, I asked for it, we're divorced, we're getting divorced.” He says, “What would you think about coming back to work for us as a

campus president?” And so, they reached out to me. I’m not a campus president right now. I’m doing work in admissions but anyhow—

Q: They want you to be campus president or—

Minder: [01:57:33] Yes. Obviously, there’s a situation at the college where they’re not ready to do certain positions with finances and stuff. They had to close the Cheyenne campus, but that’s the—

Q: What college is this again?

Minder: [01:57:47] It’s called IBMC, Institute of Business & Medical Careers. It’s a technical school, a career college, a private college. The owners live in Windsor. The CEO lives just down the street. A bunch of employees live here. I think it’s a good school, but it’s been a safe place to land. And there you go. Need more coffee?

Q: No, I’m just thinking. Why did you move down here?

Minder: [01:58:34] My wife and I talked for years about moving down to [Phil Cove?], Fort [Raine?]. We call it NoCO, Northern Colorado, because we love the vibrancy of the area. We love that the climate’s nicer than Cheyenne. It’s warmer, and way less windy, and greener, and there’s so much to do. So, she and I had talked for years about moving down here. And when I lost my job, I didn’t want to stay in Cheyenne because it’s a small town, and just all the

yuckiness of the divorce. I lost my health insurance, obviously, when I lost my job, and I had to get something going. And I didn't know where else I would move to.

I have connections here with the school that hired me. It just seemed like a natural—it just seemed like—I don't know. That make sense?

Q: Yes, yes. Do you miss Cheyenne at all or—?

Minder: [01:59:31] I miss the people.

Q: What about the people?

Minder: [01:59:36] Just a lot of good friends, a lot of close friends. Like Steve and Christine, the couple you're staying with, I wasn't close friends with them, but we were good friends. I was there for twenty-four years, so you develop a lot of close relationships.

Q: Yes. I wanted to ask you a little bit more about your time in Cheyenne.

Minder: Yes.

Q: So, you moved there partially because your wife is from Wyoming, and she was sick of Huron and stuff?

Minder: [02:00:04] Yes. She didn't like maybe that culture there and stuff.

Q: Yes. And you moved to Cheyenne. What was your first thoughts about it?

Minder: [02:00:12] Well, we also moved there because they were planting a new church in Cheyenne. We wanted to be part of what they're doing, so we got on the ground floor of this new church.

Q: And what church was that?

Minder: [02:00:19] Cheyenne Hills Church. And my first thoughts about Cheyenne, it was fun because it was bigger than Huron. Huron is 13,000. Cheyenne is 5060, and it's close to Denver and close to the mountains. So, I was excited to be in a bigger place and being close to the mountains. And I didn't know about the climate. I didn't know it was so freaking windy, you know, obscenely windy. And I thought it was a nice town. Although, a bit of sticker shock from the—you know, the cost of living is higher. The rent was probably double. I remember in Huron, I had a little apartment at 250 a month, and in Cheyenne, it was 450 a month for a smaller place, which sounds funny now that we're talking 1993 dollars, you know?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [02:00:19] And I paid 1285 for this, which is a lot for Cheyenne. I don't know, probably eight or 900 in Cheyenne I would guess. But one of the things that surprised me was how many

black people live in Cheyenne because I think—I didn't know much about Wyoming. South Dakota and Wyoming bordered each other, but I lived over on the Minnesota side of the state. So, I just thought it was cowboys. It's not why I moved here. I moved here because my wife was here and this church was starting. That's why we moved here. It had nothing to do with ethnicity or nothing like that. I don't know. It's just not on our radar.

But I get here, and I notice there's quite a few black people around. And I find—come to find out that there's an air force base in Cheyenne, F.E. [Francis E.] Warren Air Force Base. It used to be a cavalry unit in the 1800s. And the Buffalo Soldiers were stationed, the black cavalry soldiers were stationed in Cheyenne. They called them Buffalo Soldiers, which I didn't know any of that history.

So, that's why there's a decent amount of black people in this very white state because they've been there generationally now. And then there's also a fair amount of Japanese people because of the World War II. When they interned them during World War II, they brought them to Wyoming or Scottsbluff, Nebraska, and so they've stayed. And then, of course, you have the Hispanic population coming up from Mexico, New Mexico, Colorado into Wyoming. There was none where I grew up in South Dakota, no Hispanics. So, the town was way more racially diverse than I expected.

The air force base is one of the largest employers—probably the largest employer with 3,000 people or something. And then, of course, the air force is very diverse, so you've got all kinds of ethnic groups that are air force people. And then there's a railroad that has some diversity. So, I

thought it was neat because I like the diversity. I think it's fun to meet people from other cultures and groups, and so I loved it [unclear].

Q: And how did you know about that church, Cheyenne Hills, before you even got there?

Minder: [02:03:10] Because Renee was attending the church. She was working at the church in Wyoming where that pastor was working at. She was his youth pastor, and he did our wedding, and then they asked him to start a new church in Cheyenne. So we had a relationship with him.

Q: What was that like—

Minder: It was fun.

Q: —being on the ground floor of that church?

Minder: [02:03:27] Well, and the church is really different because we wanted to—our goal was to reach unchurched people. We didn't want to just attract other Christians from other churches. We wanted to attract people that have never been to church. So, we threw out the book on how to do church, and we changed our language, and we would do skits. We would use movie clips from a current movie. We would use songs, pop songs off the radio and put them to multimedia. And we made it like an experience and not just sit there, sing some hymns, and listen to a guy drone one for half-hour, and it was a blast. Loved it.

Q: And how did you square that with your, kind of, more conservative Christians?

Minder: [02:04:09] Oh, it was perfect. You know, I want to reach lost people. The message never changes. Faith in Jesus Christ, that—back to the core four things, that never changes. But the method to reach people has to change. So the method is not sacred. Wearing a tie the church and a suit is not sacred, so. And it grew like crazy. We grew from nothing to over a thousand and—

Q: Yes. And were you like an associate pastor there?

Minder: [02:04:40] Yes. I eventually became the teaching pastor, so I preached a lot, about forty percent of the time towards the end, so.

Q: And why did you leave?

Minder: [02:04:40] He retired. You know, part of the conversation was me being the next lead pastor, but this church community and myself just didn't feel that that's where God was leading us. There's that kind of nebulous, what does it mean—

Q: You didn't feel like that where God was leading you?

Minder: [02:05:02] I just didn't feel comfortable with it. It's really weird. I felt like I should apply for the position, but when they told me they didn't want me to do it, I felt that's the right answer, so I agreed with it. So, they brought in a new pastor, and it was a disaster. He was

plagiarizing. He was—couldn't get along with the staff. And so, my wife was on staff. She resigned, the youth pastor resigned, I resigned. And that's how I ended up working at that college I'm at now for before I went to Meadowbrooke.

Q: Oh, it was in that period there that you [crosstalk]—

Minder: [02:05:27] In that little period between churches.

Q: And the plagiarism thing; was that public too?

Minder: [02:05:33] It became public.

Q: How did people know about it?

Minder: [02:05:36] I found out about it.

Q: How did you find out about it? Tell me that story.

Minder: [02:05:42] He was coming to candidate, and he emailed me his sermon and his sermon handout. And when I looked at it, I thought, “Wow, this is a lot how Rick Warren, a pastor in—I don't know, have you heard of him?”

Q: I've heard of Rick Warren—

Minder: [02:05:56] Saddleback Church in Orange County. I think he's in Orange County. You know, he's got a big church movement, and a website, and stuff. I go, "Wow, this is a lot how Rick Warren does his sermons," but I didn't think too much of it. And then they called him. I didn't like him. My wife didn't like him, but they—

Q: You already didn't like him?

Minder: [02:06:12] Roundabout, this guy is too—he was Southern Baptist. In the whole interview process, I got the willies about him, and it felt like when we'd ask him questions, all he had done was memorize our website and regurgitate what our website said. It didn't feel like it was him.

Q: Why did they hire him then?

Minder: [02:06:30] Because he just enthralled enough people. He was very stately and commanding, and that's a whole other story. But they brought him in and then the second—the first sermon he preached to them is like they—I went to Rick Warren's website, and you could download the transcripts. He was downloading Rick Warren transcripts and reading them to us. It's like it was his stuff. And he wasn't saying, "I got this from Rick," or "Rick Warren says." He was, literally, reading Rick Warren's sermons, even when Rick Warren would do a story from his life like "I ran into a lady at the grocery store, and she asked me this, and I did that." He would read right through those things like that was his story. And so I confronted him. I took it

to leadership. The leadership was—they circled their wagons around. They were so enthralled, and so other stuff was going on, so we—the three of us quit.

Q: Wow. Did other people leave too?

Minder: [02:07:27] Yes. It threw the church into a tailspin for a couple of years.

Q: Oh, okay. And is he still there?

Minder: [02:07:33] Oh, no, he lasted about a year, and a bunch of other stuff happened, and then they asked him to leave or be fired.

Q: Oh, wow. What other stuff happened?

Minder: [02:07:41] He couldn't get along with the staff. I've always tried to live by the—not my whole life, but as part of my life. I tried to live by the model that what I—I won't say something about someone unless if I would say it to their face. And like the stuff I've been saying with my wife, oh, yes, I'd say that to her, you know? So, when I say this about this pastor guy, I've come to terms. I would say this to him if you were sitting in your seat. I've come to believe he's a pathological liar because of stories he would tell and stuff from his life. But anyhow, he was there and then that stuff started to come out, so the leadership asked him to leave.

And then the head guy who didn't support me and all that a year earlier, he and his wife came to my house, and they sat in my living room. They said, "Billy, we are so sorry. You were right. We should have fired him right away. We're so sorry we didn't believe you." But by then, I had moved on, you know?

Q: Yes. You were already at Meadowbrooke by then?

Minder: [02:08:41] No, I was at this college.

Q: How did you end up in Meadowbrooke?

Minder: [02:08:45] The first two years after that experience when I left that Cheyenne Hills Church, I was very angry at God. I was in a ditch and felt like, God, we're doing all this stuff, we're hitting our stride in ministry and really being effective and then this happens. And so for the first couple of years, I was just angry. And people in town would see me as their pastor. I would guess if you ask Steve and Christine, "Who do you see as your pastor," I wouldn't be surprised if they used my name because you develop that relationship with people over a long period of time.

Q: Yes. I mean I don't think they go to church—

Minder: Probably not.

Q: —I would say.

Minder: [02:09:27] Through them and the ditch too, the divorce thing, which is part of my guilt, people like them that aren't going to church anywhere now. And I got a—it's horrible but anyhow—

Q: I don't think Christine knows about your divorce either.

Minder: [02:09:39] Oh, yes.

Q: She does?

Minder: She'd have to.

Q: She doesn't. She doesn't know why you left.

Minder: [02:09:45] She doesn't know I divorced my wife?

Q: She doesn't know why you left. That's what she said to me.

Minder: [02:09:49] Well, she probably knows I'm divorced, but she probably doesn't understand—

Q: Why you had to leave—

Minder: —that I had to leave because—

Q: That may be it. Because I remember I told her, and she’s like, “Yes, I still don’t understand why he left.”

Minder: [02:09:59] She wouldn’t understand why the divorce meant I had to step down.

Q: Oh, okay, okay. Yes.

Minder: [02:10:03] Because they wouldn’t be a couple that’s into all the theology intricacies, like the leadership did. So, the first years, I’m wrestling with that. I’ve come to terms with it, and during that first year, I still have people saying, “Will, you do our wedding? Will you do this funeral or you do this?” So I kept saying, “No, no, no, no, no.” But then I’ve got to the point where like, “God, okay. If you want me back in ministry, I’m going to start saying yes to stuff.” And shortly after that, Meadowbrooke Church came to ask me to candidate, and they hired me.

Q: Wow. What was it? And we already talked a little bit about what it was like being at Meadowbrooke. Do you still think of yourself as a pastor?

Minder: [02:10:46] Wow. When I left Cheyenne Hills Church and spent four years at that college, one thing that was weird to me was when I was working at that college in admissions,

people at the school would introduce me to a student or somebody, and they go, “Hey, this is Billy.” I’d be the admissions representative of the school or the admissions counselor. They go, “This is Billy. He’s a pastor.” In my mind, I think, “No, I’m not. I quit that church. I’m working here.” But I kept being referred to all the time, “He’s a pastor. He’s a pastor.” That’s how people perceived me I guess. So now, I’ve stepped down, and of course, I moved out of Cheyenne. I’m down here where I’m making new friends.

Do I still see myself as a pastor? Wow. I don’t know. You’re the first person that’s asked me that.

Q: Do you think you need to know?

Minder: I’ll start thinking about it now, but no, I don’t think I need to know.

Q: Is it important for your identity to be a pastor? Is that—?

Minder: [02:11:57] I avoided the title for years, and years, and years, and years. And now when I meet people, and they start asking about—you know you start getting to know someone and they hear the story.. I’ve always not told people I was a pastor until they flat asked me because once someone hears I’m a pastor, they change how they treat me. They try to stop swearing, [laughs] which I don’t care. Just the dynamics change. And I’ve always hated that because I don’t want it to be like that. I don’t see myself as a pastor in that sense. I don’t see myself as a reverend, or a holy person, or a—I’ve always detested that when pastors have that attitude, so. [Laughs] What?

Q: No, nothing. I'm just thinking. Because I would say in somebody's eye, I probably see you as a pastor.

Minder: [02:13:08] Just from our talks?

Q: Yes. Well, I don't know. Maybe this is, you know, my own bias with living in New York and stuff, but it's such an important part—for me at least, it's such an important part of my identity, what I do that, and what I've done, and what I was trained to do. And I feel like so much of what you've done and you were trained to do was to be a pastor. So, I almost wonder, you know? Like, yes, yes, that's just naturally where my mind goes but—

Minder: [02:13:41] I don't know what the future holds. I don't know. I don't know.

Q: Do you think you could be one again or—?

Minder: [02:13:45] Oh, sure. Here goes the circumstances again, in the right set of circumstances. When I left Cheyenne Hills in 2006, I didn't think I'd ever be a pastor again. And here I am now, I am divorced and I like being out of from under the pressure of having to prepare a message every Sunday. It's like having a fifteen-page term paper due every Sunday from scratch. But I do miss preaching. I do miss some aspects of it. God's going to have to—I don't know what it's going to look like for God to move me in back that direction. I don't have

any idea what that's going to look like. Does it feel weird to have somebody say phrases like that?

Q: What?

Minder: [02:14:36] God's going to have to move me that way, God uses the circumstances of life, God—you know, talking about this?

Q: No. Do you think it's [crosstalk]—

Minder: [02:14:43] No, I'm just wondering how it sounds—

Q: Do you think I perceive it as weird?

Minder: [02:14:46] I don't know. I'm just wondering how it sounds to someone outside of my culture.

Q: No. I mean I think it makes sense for you to say the—

Minder: [02:15:02] [Laughs] Political answer.

Q: Yes, yes, yes. I don't think it sounds—if I said something like that right now, I would be like, where did that come from? But hearing you say it and knowing your story, I think it sounds like it definitely makes a lot of sense for you—

Minder: [02:15:17] It's who I am.

Q: —to say things like hat.

Minder: [02:15:18] It's who I am, and it's how I perceive reality, you know, to make it a very neutral thing. I just have no doubt that there's a personal—not just this universal force, but there's a personal God that exists. I just have no doubt in that. It's from my experience. I know it's my experience. I've seen too much, and the Bible is alive to me, so that's how I perceive the world. And I know other people don't. They don't agree with it, and that's fine.

Q: Since this is a project about race and ethnicity, in addition to communities and stuff like that in your own life, does the Bible inform, at all, how you see race and ethnicity?

Minder: [02:16:02] Very much.

Q: Yes. And how is that? How does it inform that?

Minder: [02:16:04] Well, right off the bat, when God wanted—in Genesis when God says he's going to make man, he says, "Let us make man in our image." Male and female, he created them,

and so right out of the gate, I believe every human being is made in God's image and has value and significance because of that. There is no human being that is worthless or less than another human being in that sense. We're all equal before God that way—that we're made in his image and we're valued and loved by God. So right off, that's my foundation for how I see human beings.

And then you get further in the scripture and stuff and then you get in the Book of Revelations. At the end, in heaven he talks about there's going to be people from every tribe, and race, and tongue. Heaven is going to be incredibly diverse with all these different—apparently in Heaven, there's still going to be a racial, ethnic diversity. We're not all going to be—

Q: One—

Minder: [02:17:05]—a generic angel thing. We're going to be humans. We're spiritual beings as humans. We talked about every race, and tribe, and tongue bowing before, serving, and worshiping him. So, the person that hates another race and thinks they're Christian if they're in heaven, they're going to have a rude awakening. You know what I mean?

Q: Yes. Yes.

Minder: [02:17:25] It definitely does form how I feel. The Bible, my faith, and God forms how I see race and ethnicity. But then there's other people that had used the Bible to create racial diversity and justify slavery of black people because of the story of Abraham—or Noah and his

three sons being the three major race. It's horrible. I look at that and say, How in the world did you get that out of the Bible? It does form my beliefs in ethnicity.

I think it's cool, but at the same time, there's different racial things. And maybe there are cultural, ethnic things. Like I have no desire to go to Asia. That culture just doesn't interest me.

Q: Interesting. Why?

Minder: [02:18:19] The Asian, like when they wear their robes, and their gowns, all that—whatever it's called—the decorations and stuff,—

Q: You just don't find it interesting?

Minder: [02:18:28] —I don't find it—I don't like it. I don't hate it. I just don't like it. And when it comes to women, I don't find—typically, I don't find Asian women attractive. I find Hispanic women very attractive because of their facial features, and their cheekbones, and all that kind of stuff. A lot of times, Asian women and Native American women very, very, very beautiful.

Some black women, I feel—I see attractive and some I don't, but the same with white women.

Does that make sense?

Q: Yes.

Minder: I mean—

Q: That makes sense. Yes, everyone has their own tastes [crosstalk]—

Minder: It's a taste, I guess.

Q: Yes.

Minder: [02:19:03] But it's not an animosity towards anything. It's just—

Q: No. No, no, I don't think it is. Yes.

Minder: [02:19:06] I just have no desire. People are, “Oh, my whole life, I want to go to Japan.” It's like, Why? And so, I'd rather go to Australia, I'd rather go to—I don't know—Ecuador, you know, so—

Q: Well, that's fair. I don't think I have a very strong desire to go to Ecuador, so. But I would love to go to Japan, so.

Minder: Yes. Yes, yes, yes, there you go.

Q: That's my own little taste there if we're going to whatever I've come to think is cool or something. But I have nothing against Ecuadorians. I'm sure it's a cool culture and place for those who are into it, you know?

Minder: [02:19:40] But I tell you, I love all kinds of foods. I'd go to Asia for the food.

Q: Oh, yes. Well, I'm sure, man.

Minder: Exactly.

Q: Yes, yes, yes. Yes, I don't know. Hands down, I think the best food in the world, but again, I'm totally biased in that.

Minder: [02:19:56] And you know, one thing I've always thought would be cool about—we doing okay?

[INTERRUPTION]

Minder: [02:20:47] One thing I've always thought would be cool would be to have an ethnically diverse church where it wasn't just predominantly white people and a few Hispanics, which our church was. We had a few black people in our church, but part of it was there's not a lot of racial diversity in Cheyenne like that, even though there's some. And I never knew how to make that happen.

Q: Yes. What would you see that church, kind of, looking like? What kind of service would they have you know?

Minder: [02:21:15] I don't know. Well, for one thing, the staff would have to be probably racially diverse.

Q: Yes. That would make sense.

Minder: [02:21:21] And racially diverse in the different leadership with different teams, and volunteer leaders, and stuff have be racially diverse. You know, the worship services might incorporate different kinds of music from a different ethnic group, maybe a different language as well for the fun. But I don't know how different that would be because when it comes to worship styles, it's like clothes. Some people don't like wearing a certain style of clothes. I think I mentioned before, really before like the Second Baptist Church in Cheyenne because they had struggled a lot. It'd be fun to merge the two churches. Probably both sides, we'd lose some people that just it didn't feel like church to them because the worship styles would be so different. It would be hard to merge those two styles, not impossible but—

Because I just feel strongly that there shouldn't be racial divisions. There shouldn't be animosity. There shouldn't be that—there shouldn't be that. But then at the same time, I do feel from the general, from the politically correct culture, as a white person, sometimes when I read stories, or watch stuff, or whatever, I do feel like I get beat over the head with my whiteness.

Q: Yes, what's that feel like? And what things do you feel like that's beating you over the head in a way?

Minder: [02:22:54] Well, the reason you are where you are is because you're white. You know you can appreciate that. A black person can't be where you are because they don't have the advantages you have. And I don't know what to do with that because I'm trying to live my life. I'm not trying to keep black people down. I'm trying to live my life. I'm trying to pay my bills. I'm trying to find somebody to fall in love with. I'm trying to decide what to do to replace an old pickup I've got. I'm not thinking how I can step on some other racial group to get where I'm going. So, I don't know what to do with all that, but—

Q: Do you think some of it is true or—?

Minder: [02:23:33] I suppose some of it is.

Q: And do you think that people are actually saying that all of this is just because you're white?

Minder: [02:23:48] It feels that way from some people, but I don't know who those people are. It just feels that way.

Q: It feels that way in a way? Yes. Interesting. And where do you interact with those? Like when you come face to face with your whiteness in that way where you feel someone is like—you know?

Minder: [02:24:13] Probably the biggest place would be Facebook.

Q: Facebook?

Minder: [02:24:16] There's a black girl that was one of my students in Cheyenne, and she's very Black Panther, African queen. She uses a word to describe black people. It starts with an *m*. She has very radical black views, very radical. And she'll post stories. Oh, what did she call it? It's an African word. Oh, I can't remember the word. I have to get on her page and look around a bit. But she'll post articles, or stories, or rants from somebody, and sometimes these posts will lump all the white people in with that slave owner that tortured his slaves to death in 1850 and were—you know? I'm like, Girl, I—

Q: She was your student at church or at—

Minder: [02:25:19] At the college. I enrolled her in college.

Q: So, what would she call it?

Minder: [02:25:35] Oh, I have to scroll down and look for it. I'll try to find it. Oh, I almost had it. Sometimes, when she refers to herself and her race, she uses this word that starts with *m*. I just can't pull the word up. [pause] Hmm, I'm just drawing a blank.

Q: Oh, wow.

Minder: [02:26:46] If I find it, I'll text it to you. Are you seeing stuff as you're scrolling down?

Q: Yes, I'm just kind of looking. I'm just, kind of, interested in what she's positing and stuff.

Minder: [02:27:16] Anyways.

Q: So, do you interact with any of that when she posts stuff or—?

Minder: [02:27:20] Sometimes, I do, but sometimes, I know there's no sense getting into an argument with her about it because it's not going to change her mind.

Q: Have you guys argued about it at all or—?

Minder: [02:27:30] A little bit on Facebook.

Q: What are other instances when you feel like that's coming up?

Minder: [02:27:54] Oh, gosh, this—it feels dumb to say this sometimes, but I, kind of, roll my eyes sometimes when they talk about how there should be more black people in movies, or more black people in this occupation, or whatever. And my understanding is African American is like thirteen percent of the US population, so—

Q: I think it's around there maybe nineteen I think

Minder: [02:28:27] Is it that high?

Q: I think maybe a little higher.

Minder: [02:28:29] I thought it was thirteen.

Q: Maybe it is. Maybe I'm wrong. Yes.

Minder: [02:28:32] So that means on a TV show or in the newscast, one person should be black or maybe two people should be black. How come, you know, there's not more? I don't know. You look at professional sports where you know a huge percentage of the football players are black or basketball players are black, how is that okay? How is that not reverse racism or whatever? I wonder that sometimes.

Q: Do you think reverse racism is a thing or—?

Minder: [02:29:19] Yes, I think it can be. I think it can go too far the other way where somebody gets preferential treatment because they're black or because they're another race. And it's not based on somebody's merit, or their ability, or their skill. Gosh, the word she would use is almost like Mormon, but it's not Mormon. It's—I'll find it sometime.

Q: I mean you can literally add it in your transcript after.

Minder: Okay.

Q: Do you feel like you've ever been—experienced reverse racism or—?

Minder: [02:30:09] I don't feel like I have.

Q: Have you ever, like, seen its errors? Like you know, have you ever seen racism in action or anything like that?

Minder: [02:30:29] I guess to go back to my childhood days in South Dakota where I grew up in a farm. I don't know if I saw acts of racism, but there was obviously an extremely racist attitude towards Native Americans. It's just the way people thought and talked. But seeing one, I can't say I've ever seen a racist act. I don't think I have. I don't know what that would be like.

Oh, well—maybe okay. Well, you know, my best friend Ray. This is a conservative college, predominantly white. So, Ray starts hanging out with Heidi [phonetic] in our college. And here's my friend Ray. He's got—

Q: A big family.

Minder: [02:31:26] When he and Robyn [phonetic] got engaged, he goes, “Billy, we're not going to use birth control. We're going to leave it in God's hands,” and this is what happened. [Laughs]

Q: How many kids they have?

Minder: [02:31:36] Eight I think, and they have adopted one, but there is Ray.

Q: Wow.

Minder: [02:31:40] So, we're in this little bible college.

Q: Is he a pastor too?

Minder: [02:31:44] He is. Yes, he's planning a couple of churches, and one of them in Kansas City was with a white guy, and it was racial. It just sort of [unclear].

Q: Oh, cool.

Minder: [02:31:49] So, there's Ray and Robyn. They speak at marriage conferences. Sometimes, they're here in [unclear]. So, he starts hanging out with Heidi and it, kind of, feels like they're starting to date. So, the dean of the college—

Q: And Heidi was white?

Minder: [02:32:02] Yes. Here's Heidi. Here's Heidi. I went to college with her and Ray. You know, we all went to college, this little bible college together. So, the dean of the students picks up the phone and calls her parents, and says, "I just want you to know that your daughter is starting to see a black guy. I just wanted to let you know that, okay?" [Laughs] So I guess, yes, I have yes examples of racism.

Q: I don't think he just wanted to let them know that, but—

Minder: [02:32:36] Well, obviously, obviously.

Q: [Laughs] You don't just let them know the race when they're dating a white guy though, do you? No.

Minder: [02:32:44] And they were not told they couldn't date. The school wasn't going to tell them, "Hey, you two can't date." He just wanted to make sure her folks knew in case her folks wanted to say to "Heidi, Heidi, come on." So, that's all he did was call her parents and let her parents know. I thought it was awful.

Q: What happened after that?

Minder: [02:33:07] They never really started dating, but Ray told me about it because Heidi told him. She and I have been messaging the other day. She has become an atheist. That's kind of funny, so we've been talking about that.

Q: Oh, really? Interesting.

Minder: [02:33:19] She and I have been messaging on Facebook.

Q: How did she become an atheist?

Minder: [02:33:23] She just felt like she never felt God in her life. The stuff I tell you that I feel, she's never felt any of that, and so she just decided she's going to dump the whole God thing. So, we just recently were messaging for a long time. We have good talks about it, and I think she'll come around again someday.

Q: Or—

Minder: [02:33:42] [Laughs] But I asked her about that. I mentioned it the other day when we were messaging. I can't remember all she said, but she said that was a weird time but—so yes. I guess, yes. That's probably the most blatant racist act I've ever witnessed or heard of firsthand.

Q: Yes.

Minder: [02:33:57] Isn't that funny?

Q: Yes, it's interesting.

Minder: [02:33:59] Interesting.

Q: Do you think though that, like, institutions, and organizations, and stuff like that are racist?

Minder: [02:34:08] I think in this case, that institution was racist doing that. You know, I went to college in the early—from ‘82 to ‘87, so I’m in college in the early ‘80s. We had a speaker from Dallas Theological Seminary. It’s like the flagship conservative seminary. Some of our professors were from there. A lot of our students—Ray went there actually. My friend Ray went there, attended, or got a degree from there. We had a chapel speaker from Dallas Seminary speaking to us once at Calvary. They said, “Did you know that until 1955”—and this is like 1983, so less than 30 years earlier—”black people were not admitted to Dallas Seminary?” And I just remember thinking—just it blew my mind.

Q: So, as white people then, do we have any, sort of, responsibility to make up for that in some way?

Minder: [02:35:03] I think in that way, sure. We need to take down those stupid barriers.

Q: Where, in your mind, does it start to go too far?

Minder: [02:35:12] To do—go too far to?

Q: Like for things we need to do to dismantle racism. Does it go too far? You're saying before that sometimes you feel like—

Minder: [02:35:28] I just feel like I get beat over the head with it. I don't know. Well, one of my daughter's best friends in high school—they're still best friends—is black. They lived like four houses down from us on our street in Cheyenne. And she got a full-ride scholarship to, I think, the university of—one of the two Michigan colleges, University of Michigan or Michigan State [University]. I can't remember which one it is. And she said, "It's because I'm black." She knew that, like that's why she got that scholarship. So, my daughter is going to [unclear] film school, racking up thousands of dollars of students loans. She doesn't get that privilege because she's white. So that's kind of irritating.

Q: But to push you a little bit on that, isn't there like a history there, though, where over time by having, in a lot of ways, founded and set the rules of the country, and who could own land here and there, there's like accrued benefits to being white? Are there?

Minder: [02:36:37] Yes. I can understand that viewpoint. I can understand how that could be true. I just don't see how it's happened in my life growing up in South Dakota and then living in Wyoming. My ancestors emigrated from Switzerland and England in the 1800s or whatever, so. I agree that that could have happened definitely in the south where there was a lot of slavery and stuff, totally. But for me personally—

Q: You personally didn't feel that? Yes.

Minder: [02:37:17] I don't think my whiteness helped me in South Dakota, or Cheyenne, or—and maybe it did, and I was just so blind to it, I don't realize it. I'll give space for that.

Q: Yes. And you giving space for that, what does that look like? Like are you going to continue to engaging in these conversations, or is it just, kind of, leaving an open mind generally, or—?

Minder: [02:37:38] I think it's leave an open mind generally, and it's maybe not understanding it, but accepting it.

Q: Accepting what?

Minder: [02:37:49] Accepting that whiteness—what's it called, the advantages of being white, or the—white privilege. There you go. That white privilege is a real thing, and it has benefited whites, some whites, and it has held back others, some of the other races. I can definitely agree that that has happened.

I don't know what it was like for black slaves to suddenly be freed, and they have nothing. How are they supposed to get jobs and buy land? I don't know how that all happened. I don't know.

Q: So, you can, kind of, just accept it, in a way, that this is a thing?

Minder: [02:38:35] Yes.

Q: Do you think it's a thing?

Minder: [02:38:37] Yes. I think it's a thing. Yes. But I don't see how it's impacted my life.

Q: Do you think any type of privilege has impacted your life or—?

Minder: [02:38:51] Well, I guess, it depends on how you define privilege. I mean I had a stable home I grew up in. My parents stayed together. I would say we were lower and middle income, so we always had food, clothes. I never just feared for my safety, and my parents didn't abuse me. I wasn't sexually abused, or physically abused, or verbally abused. [Clears throat] I felt loved by my parents and my family. I lived in a safe community where I didn't worry about crime or—so, I think I've benefitted from all that.

Q: Do you think those are forms of privilege, though?

Minder: [02:39:31] Forms of privilege just because I'm white—?

Q: No. I'm just asking—

Minder: —or forms of privilege?

Q: —generally. Is this what privilege is, you know? Because I, sometimes, just wonder myself where do we draw the line between privileged and underprivileged? Is there some sort of baseline thing where we're just like, you know, that person is—that experience is neither privilege nor underprivilege. My question is, you know, we have all these different experiences and people have different access to resources and stuff. And I feel like sometimes with privilege, we have somewhat arbitrarily drawn a line and then we talk about privilege. But some things, like I wonder, you know? Like having a family that loves you, is that a form of privilege, or is that just something that everyone should have? I don't know. Is having an income of a certain level...you know, when do you start to stay you have class privilege and when does it—?

Minder: Yes.

Q: —say that you're—

Minder: [02:40:43] Which is [crosstalk]—

Q: —underprivileged?

Minder: Yes.

Q: I'm not criticizing the concept, but I just think it's an interesting conversation to have that you know, where—these terms, it's a continuum in some way, but like where do we draw lines on it? And when do we call something privilege, and when do we not, and why?

Minder: [02:41:03] I don't know if I have the answer to that.

Q: I mean yes, neither do I. I guess it's you just kind of wonder—

Minder: [02:41:06] Have you seen that video on Facebook where there's a bunch of young people, you know, teens or twenty-somethings, lined up on a start line in a grass park?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [02:41:18] And they're going to run a race, and they go, "Wait!" And there's black, and white, and there's different ethnic groups. And they go, "Wait, before we start, if you grew up with both your parents in the home, take two steps forward. " And then they started asking these series of questions. Have you seen that video?

Q: Yes. I've seen it, yes.

Minder: [02:41:39] So, a lot of the white kids keep getting a step forward, and step forward, and step forward. So, they're hardly anywhere away from the finish line, and a lot of it, like the inner-city black kid that never knew his dad, and grew up on welfare, and had seen somebody stabbed, you know, all those questions, they're still on the starting line. And that video is trying to make the point of white privilege, I think.

Q: Yes, I would say it is. Like go for it, yes.

Minder: [02:42:14] But then, okay. So, I didn't grow up in a high-crime neighborhood. I've never seen somebody shot, stabbed. I've never had to worry about being—gang violence. I've never had to worry about getting into gang or getting beat up. I've never had to, you know, my folks—I have all this stuff. Where was I going to go with that? What am I supposed to do with that? Am I supposed to get rid of my stuff, and live out of my pickup because I'm white to make it more fair for a black person? I don't know what to do with all that. Except I know I'm supposed to feel bad that I'm white because I get beat over the head with it by a politically correct culture.

Q: Are you though? Are you supposed to feel bad that you're white?

Minder: [02:43:06] That's what I feel like I'm supposed to feel. And I read my student's posts and these stories about what slave owners did, and about black kids getting shot by cops, and all that kind of stuff, and it's white people doing this. "You white people, you white people," and it's—I feel like I'm supposed to feel—I'm supposed to beat myself up. So I—

Q: Do you think that's productive though? What do you think the productive thing to do is?

Minder: [02:43:38] For our culture you mean? For our society?

Q: When these instances come up, and you react by—you know? I'm just talking about your reaction to it. Because I think that privilege—I think when people—I mean how do you feel? If I were to say you have white privilege, how does that make you feel?

Minder: [02:44:01] It makes me wonder what that really is honestly.

Q: Makes you wonder what it is?

Minder: [02:44:04] What it really is. And how am I privileged because I'm white? What do I have just because I'm white?

Q: Do you feel defensive at all?

Minder: [02:44:12] Yes, a little bit.

Q: I mean—

Minder: [02:44:14] That's what I mean by beaten over the head. I feel defensive about it, yes.

Q: Why do you think you feel defensive about it?

Minder: [02:44:22] Because I feel like I'm being told, "You're where you're at just because you're white. You've got what you've got just because you're white." I'm like, Really? Really?

Q: Interesting. Yes, I don't know because when I hear, but then again I'm also—

Minder: [02:44:43] You're from such a different culture than I am, I think, in a lot of ways, right?

Q: Yes I guess so. I mean when I hear it, I think, at first, I felt a little defensive. But then after a while, having done more research and stuff, I came to—okay. So maybe if someone said I'm a hundred percent where I am because I'm white, I would say, "That's not the case because I could have also gone a lot of other ways in my life, and I'm still white and like, literally, just from the choices I've made."

That said, I think that if—I think of it like in the whole possibility of choices for we're saying, and the chances and probabilities that I can end up in different places. I'm much less likely to end up in prison. I'm much more likely to go to college, all these things that are related to whiteness. You know, I'm not saying it's because of whiteness. I'm just saying that it increases my chance. If I'm white, it increases my chance of doing these things, of making more money, of getting a loan on a home in an area. And it's not like there's something intrinsic in myself about me being white, you know, the pigment of my skin. It's more that it's how I'm interacting in the world, and how the world perceives and receives me, and how institutions are set up, and also the history too, like how it's accrued, you know? That like my family own property, you know?

I mean we're Jews, so that I'm sure there was probably discrimination at some point, but we're fully able to exist in white neighborhoods. No one talks about us. No one asks about that. I mean maybe someone says we're Jewish, but it's never—it would never be something that would be—I couldn't see it being something that someone would ever say something to me. And so all of those things built up give me some sort of privilege or a little bit of like a head start at someone in a way, like a boost in a way.

And it's not to say that everything I do with that boost after that is because I'm white. But it's like I've already had the boost, and it's not just a boost at the beginning of life. It's a boost that accrues over time, too, you know? In the end, that makes a difference. And I think that a lot of the stuff—I don't know, you know?

Minder: Right. [beeping] That was the coffee maker. It's probably shutting off.

Q: Yes. I mean that in the end, that makes some kind of difference and then that for me, I don't think I need—I don't know. I don't know if guilt is—I mean do you—? I feel guilt at times, but I also feel like comfort with who I am and I feel like—I feel discomfort with the way things are in society, but I feel comfort with who I am. And if I do feel discomfort with how I act towards others or what I'm doing with my life in a way, I would seek to fix that. And so, there's always some discomfort, and I'm always seeking to fix things.

But like I feel like as a whole—and I'm not saying I'm satisfied with myself as a person. I think anybody who knows me would know that I'm completely not. But that I view it as like a process,

and hearing the word white privilege, it doesn't come with all this emotional baggage where I feel just guilt when I hear it. I hear it, and I'm like, that's a reality of life. You know?

Minder: Yes.

Q: And that's something that the black people deal with too. And I think that, like, maybe it's a blaséness over hearing it over time, but I also feel it's just like having conversations about it, and moving beyond, having really intense like guilt-ridden reactions to it in a way. So, I don't know—really know where I'm going with that. I guess, I'm, like, sharing part of my own experience with it.

Minder: [02:48:55] Well, I appreciate it.

Q: Yes. Because I feel like in some ways, I can relate to that sense of guilt, and not really knowing what to do with it, and things like that. I think part of it is just maybe acknowledging that. Again, I would never say it's the full story. I don't think it's the full story. I think people who read into things, anything is the full story, it becomes problematic. But it's definitely part of the story. I think in the history of America, it's a pretty big part of the story. So, I'm not going to put a percentage on that. But like it's a pretty big part of the story that like this country was built with slavery, and that we're still dealing with the ramifications of that. Anyone who comes into the society is—you're living in that history. You can't divorce yourself from that history. So, what are you going to do, you know?

Minder: [02:49:46] Yes.

Q: And I don't really know if I have an answer for you. I mean—you know?

Minder: [02:49:50] You know, part of me where I grew up, I grew up in the northern state where there was no slavery. There's no history of it. There's not many black people. There's none essentially. So, I've never seen it or experienced it, and black people didn't build any of the buildings where I grew up. You know what I mean?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [02:50:09] So when I hear that, I understand and believe what you're saying, but it's all—it happened over there.

Q: It happened over there. Interesting.

Minder: [02:50:16] I didn't live in it. I didn't live and see race riots. I didn't live in drugs, by ghettos, and segregated bus seating, and all that stuff. So, it's just anecdotal to me because of where I grew up, I think. I mean, I think, I'm thinking that that's why I think that way. But at the same time, I fully accept the fact of what you're saying is a reality.

Q: Yes. Which is good to accept that other people's experiences without having experienced something that's similar because—

Minder: [02:50:51] I might not be able to identify with it, but I can accept it. Okay.

Q: Yes. You know, I think that this conversation about race is often something that's seen in black-and-white terms in America. What about Native Americans, though, in your area, you know their history and stuff? And I know they may not—

Minder: [02:51:10] It's awful. It's awful.

Q: I mean they may not have built the towns, but, like, that land was a land that they, at some point, were probably on.

Minder: [02:51:17] Oh, sure. And this is stuff, I guess, I was taught or whatever, but it was a clash of cultures. It was a war of cultures. The hard, sad realities of that is white people won. I think a lot of natives where I grew up, Native Americans, they were nomadic cultures. They didn't have a concept of owning the land, land ownership, and so that's a very European concept. So, the Europeans are coming in there, and they're buying land from the Indian. They think they're buying land from the Indians, and they Indians don't understand. "No, we're going to be on this, and you can't come anymore because we own this now," that was—you know, that was a clash of the cultures and concepts. That was very real.

But the white people had the numbers and the technology to take what they wanted, as wrong as that was. And then their solution, as brutal as it was, was to cordon off Native Americans on

these littler reservations that usually is the worst land in the area. Land not good for anything, could not support their nomadic lifestyle. It's a sad chapter in American history.

Like I said, a couple of hours ago, to take a group of people and not just section them off in this little piece of land. But then destroy their incentive to do anything by providing housing and everything for them, you know?

Q: Yes.

Minder: [02:53:08] So, it's too bad, I guess, that the government didn't do with Native Americans how they did with black people. How come they didn't black people and put them on reservations, and do the same thing they did with Native Americans? I think it's accurate to say African Americans are more mainstream than to society than the Native Americans are in South Dakota [unclear]. So, the government took two different approaches, and I think the average black person is probably better off than the average Native American in South Dakota is. I don't know if that's accurate or not, but that would be my guess based on all the black people that I know in Cheyenne, and here, and Kansas City versus what I saw at the reservations in South Dakota.

Q: I mean, do you think what happened to the Native Americans in the area that you've inherited as your history in South Dakota, is that racism, too?

Minder: [02:54:25] Explain the question.

Q: Before you were saying, you know, “race, that whole stuff, it’s like that’s over there. That’s like the South.”

Minder: [02:54:33] What you were describing is over there.

Q: Yes, the South, and even the east coast, and stuff. But like, “South Dakota, we didn’t have many black people, if any, at that time so that wasn’t a part of my history. Like I’ve inherited that white privilege or whatever from that.”

Minder: [02:54:46] But I’ve got this with the Native Americans, yes. I hadn’t thought of it that way. It looks different in South Dakota than it does in—

Q: Yes, of course, it looks different.

Minder: [02:54:55] It looks different because things develop differently, and the government handled things differently.

Q: Are there similarities, though?

Minder: [02:55:03] Yes, I suppose there are. Yes, I suppose there are. Yes. I guess there are similarities in the sense that the white people were the ones in control, and they made the rules,

and called the shots. And the other ethnic groups like the Native Americans and the black people didn't have any say in it as our history developed and you know?

Q: Yes. So do you think like a special scholarship for Native Americans would make sense?

Minder: [02:55:57] Oh, there are. There are all kinds of stuff like that.

Q: Did they—

Minder: [02:55:59] And there's colleges on the reservation.

Q: Do they bother you or—?

Minder: [02:56:03] No. I guess they don't. I never thought about it. The reservations do have colleges and stuff, and I don't know how academically strenuous they are or—interesting.

Q: Yes, it's interesting for me, too, because I am someone who—I grew up in the northeast and California. And I think something I often heard in schools and stuff was like this demonizing of the South and the white southerner. It's like this is where the racial problems came from. And I think upon further research and stuff, I realize that, yes, like New York City—well New York City did have slavery at one point, but it may not have had slavery for as long as the South. Or California may not have been a part of the Confederacy and stuff. But it had its own forms of it

in a different ways, and its own forms of racism. And going way beyond slavery, too, you know, to like red lining and things like that.

And even these days, I would say with policing. Some people would disagree with me on that. It's fine, but I would seriously think having seen how policing is done in New York City that it's definitely raced in some way. So, I don't know. I really relate to you on that, though, because I feel like when you don't grow up with—when you grow up in the narrative of America and stuff, it's like often that we—just like we treat racists as black, white phenomenon, we treat the history of race as this oversimplified kind of phenomenon where it's like there was slavery, the north was against it, the south was for it. We fought. You know, the South lost. The South is racist. After that, you still had it with Jim Crow, civil rights movement took care of that. Now, we're all children who stand together just like Martin Luther King [Jr.] said.

Minder: [02:58:09] It's not quite that. It's not that at all, is it?

Q: Yes. I mean there's been some progress, but—

Minder: [02:58:16] Yes. *Moors*, M-O-O-R-S, *Moors*.

Q: *Moors*, oh, okay.

Minder: [02:58:20] That's the word she uses. Sorry.

Q: Interesting. But yes. No. I guess that's my roundabout way, and this evolved into more of a conversation now by this point.

Minder: Which is fine.

Q: You know, about like me relating to you, and how I think that—as people from the North or whatever, how we often try to wash our hands a little bit of the race thing I feel. You know, if we look a little closer, it's still there.

Minder: [02:58:58] But like you said, to wash your hands off the race thing, I understand what you're saying. I think my Uncle Morris [phonetic] up on Wilmot, a little town I'm from, he spent his whole life there, born and raised there, got a farm. He's getting ready to retire. What's he supposed to do with that? This whole concept of white privilege and he's got—what's he supposed to do with it? I realize we, sort of, jumped—

Q: What do you think he should do with it?

Minder: I don't know.

Q: I mean, if we brainstorm here, maybe—I don't know. Like let's approach this in a kind of whiteboard ideation thing. What are three things he could do? I don't know. If he felt—I mean I think the first thing is maybe he has to recognize that it's something. And engage in the conversation you know—

Minder: [02:59:46] And so, he does.

Q: —like what we're doing right here. So I think you're doing something right here by talking to me, or we're doing something together. But yes, what else what do we do? I don't know.

Minder: [02:59:57] And that's kind of how I feel living here in Windsor coming down from Huron, South Dakota, and Cheyenne to here.

Q: I mean, yes. I don't know if there's a set answer to that, too, you know?

Minder: [03:00:09] Well—

Q: I think there's a lot of different things you can do.

Minder: [03:00:12] Yes. You know, living in Cheyenne all those years—when we first moved there, I wasn't employed by the church yet. And I was working at Blue Cross [Blue Shield] Wyoming, and there's a friend of mine, [unclear], a black guy. And I remember I just asked him was I said, "There's no racism in Cheyenne, is there? I mean you don't feel that? He goes, "On, yes," and then he named a couple of things. But I never saw or felt it as a white person. It's like everybody got along. I don't know.

And one thing that was really cool is my daughter Savannah, a basketball player, she went to the East—Cheyenne East, and there were three or four white kids, three or four black kids, three or four Asian—Hispanic kids, and there was even an Asian kid. That’s what her team looked like, and so that’s what she grew up with.

And there’s a town, there’s a big oil town in northern Wyoming, Gillette Wyoming, well known for its racist attitudes. And when our kids would go up there, the parents in the stands would yell racial slurs to our kids. My son and my daughter would come back from the games and tell us about it, stuff that was yelled out, and screamed out, and stuff, and this would be parents.

And then there’s another town up northern Wyoming on the way to Montana called. It’s very white. Sheridan has polo grounds that the royal family has used for decades. Sheridan, Wyoming, has a big polo ground. The royal family in England keeps horses there, and they’ll come out and use it. It’s kind of crazy. Well, this has nothing to do with the conversation.

Q: Yes, it’s interesting. I didn’t know that.

Minder: [03:02:01] But when my daughter—we went out to Sheridan for a tournament, and we’re playing Sheridan. My daughter was probably a junior, so it’s like the first time we went up there. And I remember looking at the two benches. I’m on the opposite of the gym, and here’s the Sheridan bench and the Cheyenne East bench. And there’s my daughter sitting there with all her teammates. And her best friend is this black girl, and there’s a couple more white girls, and then there’s that little—or little Asian girl we had. And what countries were folks from? I can’t

remember. And then some Hispanic kids. And then you look over at the Sheridan bench, every—twelve girls were sitting there. Every one of them was a blonde-haired, white girl. Every—there was not a brown-haired girl. They're all blondes. And you just sit there and look at that, it's like, Wow. And I like the fact that my daughter grew up in that environment instead of that one. I don't know why I told you that story, but it's just a funny story.

Q: No. It's a good story.

Minder: [03:03:01] I remember from [crosstalk]—

Q: Yes, it's a good story. Some of your experiences about race or about—you know, like some of them—a lot of them intersect with basketball.

Minder: [03:03:10] Because it's a big part of my life.

Q: Yes. It's cool. I don't want to take up too much time today because I also have to get going eventually, but do you have anything else that you want to say here? Any of your stories or—

Minder: [03:03:22] No, it's been fun to do this. I don't know if it's —

Q: —questions, you know?

Minder: [03:03:25] No, it's been fun. I don't know if it's been helpful. It's been very interesting. I'm glad I got to do this. It's been fun.

Q: Great. Well, we're happy to have you, you know—

Minder: Who's we?

Q: —do whatever this is.

Q: Yes, yes, yes. We is, you know, that's me speaking on behalf of—

Minder: [03:03:42] Columbia University.

Q: —Columbia University, or whatever—

Minder: [crosstalk]—

Q: —you know, I'm here doing so, yes.

Minder: [03:03:46] Well, I tell one of my friends about it. It's been hard to describe to a couple—I mean to a lot of people, but it's been hard to describe exactly what this is all about. But one of my friends, he's a divorced-group friend, he's very conservative like, dude, come on.

He's like, "Well, you be careful because that could be a setup, and it could be—" he's like this paranoid thing.

Q: Yes, we've gotten that before.

Minder: [03:04:13] And he goes, "I know it sounds paranoid, but—" and then he makes a joke of that expression just because I'm paranoid doesn't mean it's not true. You know? You ever heard that?

Q: Yes. I mean, it may just mean that you have to evaluate whatever he says knowing how paranoid—

Minder: [03:04:28] Just I don't care. I just blew it off. I said, "No, it's not like that."

Q: Yes. Well no, I think it's fair that people have—you know, people are—media has done a lot of stuff where I feel like people are fairly skeptical in a lot of ways.

Minder: I know.

Q: So, I think it's fine. But we have a process here that, we think, is fair and that, we think, allows people to put a story forward that they want the public to know, and hear, and—

Minder: [03:04:51] Well, and you're studying Cheyenne and all the stuff we talked about, we went all over the place in my life, how does that tie to Cheyenne? Just a little—

Q: Well, we—

Minder: —part of it ties with Cheyenne?

Q: Oh, you got twenty-six years there or something like that, right, or however long? Yes.

Minder: [03:05:03] Yes, twenty-four.

Q: Twenty-four? Yes. Because you guys were a few years in Huron too. I mean it ties into that, you know? You just told me a story about the basketball team, and it had to do with Cheyenne, and we talked about the church in Cheyenne, the Second Baptist Church, the Buffalo Soldiers. We talked about stuff that had—

Minder: [03:05:23] Our surprise—Cheyenne was as racially diverse as it is. That surprised me because I didn't know.

Q: I mean, I think, that's what makes this interview style, like, cool for me, too, is that yes, I'm in Cheyenne, but I think people so often box things off in a way. Cheyenne's cowboys, you know?

Minder: [03:05:42] That’s what I thought.

Q: Black people are this way, white people are that way, you know? I think part of our—the whole interview is that it’s holistic, and that it shows how things are connected, and it shows that how—you know like we can say, “Okay, these people in Cheyenne right now, but where did they come from? What are their stories, and like what’s their future? And what other identities?” Obviously, being a Christian is a huge part of your life.

Minder: Sure. Right.

Q: How can I talk to Billy about his life, and meaning, and race, and seeing people without understanding something about his views as a Christian? I have to understand something about them. I can’t just ask you a question. Yes. Do you have white privileges, that will tell me one thing, but I—that’s just one little data point.

Minder: [03:06:28] That makes sense. You hearing my whole story helps put context to what I feel about Cheyenne or whatever. You know, one thing I mentioned—and I’ll try to make it quick, but my dad, I’d say, he was racist not in a violent way. But I remember as a kid, he would say stuff about black people, maybe because we’re watching *Sanford and Son* or whatever, and he’d say his opinions about black people. I remember as a little kid thinking, “How do you know that?”

You know, the whole thing about watermelon, black people like watermelon, black people like fried chicken? And that's a racial slur and I was like, "But I like watermelon and fried chicken. Why is that? I don't understand. I don't understand the context or the history behind it." But then he would say stuff like, "Well, they smell funny." And then I remember I had to play against a black kid in basketball. It had to have been in college. I don't know if we ever played with any black kids in high school. It would have been in my bible college. No, I was in high school because there was a college in Huron that had some black kids, guys on the basketball team, and we're scrimmaging against them. And my dad was watching afterwards. He's kind of giggling. He goes, "Don't they just smell funny?" I'm like, "I don't know. Like where do you get this stuff from?" I don't know.

Q: Where do you think he got it from?

Minder: [03:08:03] I don't know. But sometimes, I wonder why I didn't—some of his racial attitudes I didn't pick up and own them. I'm a Chevy [Chevrolet] guy because my dad was a Chevy guy. I probably started off being Republican because my dad was Republican. But some of this stuff he said about racial stuff, I didn't—I was like, "Why are you saying that?" And maybe it's because of my church and my mom about saying, "We're all made in God's image, and God loves all of us and—" I don't know.

Q: Interesting. No, it's a really interesting question.

Minder: So, there you go.

Q: Great. Well, thank you so much for [phonetic] today.

Minder: Thanks, Sam.

Q: [Unclear]. Billy, that was awesome.

Minder: [03:08:44] Thanks for coming to my apartment.

Q: Yes. No, absolutely. I had a good time. It's a comfortable apartment.

Minder: [03:08:49] You know, we got to talk a little bit about our dating lives, and you told me you're kind of like me how you approach women?

Q: Yes. [Laughs] Yes. I think a little bit. I think I'm less like that now, but I think I was—

Minder: Good.

Q: —like that.

Minder: [03:09:00] Because you're growing up, or you're maturing, or whatever.

Q: Yes, yes, yes.

Minder: [03:09:02] You know, it's not a good pattern to have.

Q: Yes. Yes.

Minder: [03:09:04] If I gave you this, would you read it?

Q: Not right now.

Minder: Just be honest.

Q: Not right now. I'm too busy. [Laughs] I'm totally honest. I have no time to read—

Minder: Yes, I appreciate that.

Q: —any books, yes, yes, yes. But I did look it up, actually, after you—

Minder: Well for me the best part—

Q: —sent it to me.

Minder: —was the first part where you look at yourself. The part about finding a good woman, yes, okay but—

Q: If I'm in a moment of stress in my life regarding women, I may pick it up and—but I actually feel like—just from what I've read of the summary and stuff like that, these are all really good things to think about. I think I'm already thinking about a lot of them, and I think that I—I'm not beyond it in any way. But I think that like the specific things I'm thinking about are more specific now. and I would want to read like—oh, of I did have time to read anything, I would want to read something that's like really geared towards how do I expect—something like how do I express my masculinity around women or something like that. Something that's like—

Minder: Just—

Q: —less about—oh, I guess it's related. I don't know.

Minder: [03:10:08] Yes, because it talks about that stuff, and those website, and stuff. But just like all the—you know, when you look at the back, all the study he references when he says stuff, I mean look at that. These are just pages.

Q: No. I mean, yes, he's a real public—

Minder: [unclear].

Q: —psychologist or whatever. Yes. Cool.

Minder: [03:10:23] This is my personal book. I didn't buy you one, but I was going to give you my personal one.

Q: I know. That's really cool. Honestly, like I'm super honest with people, I'm not going to have time to read it right now.

Minder: [03:10:32] Well, I'm glad you said that though.

Q: And—

Minder: [03:10:33] Because at some point, you get Kindle on it, or something, or whatever.

Q: Yes, yes, yes. I mean I don't know. As I've said, I kind of deal with things in my life as they come up and as they become problems. I think there are things that I want to like nip in the bud or like—

Minder: [03:10:46] That's fine. You know—

Q: Or like looking in the future and say, "Okay, could this probably do it—"

Minder: You learn by experience.

Q: "— or should I learn about it, but—"

Minder: But what about vicariously learning from the scripts that I've done or other people have done? You know that's another way to learn too.

Q: Yes.

Minder: [03:10:56] It's not just—

Q: No, no, true. Yes. Well, I think hearing your story and stuff like that is, in some ways, a way to learn.

Minder: [03:11:02] Definitely.

Q: Yes.

Minder: [03:11:06] All right.

Q: In multiple ways.

Minder: [03:11:07] So, what are you doing tonight then back up in [crosstalk]—

Q: I'm going to stop this recorder.

Minder: —in Fort Collins.

[END OF INTERVIEW]