

Dural Miller

Where: Mary C. Snow Elementary School

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Location: Charleston, WV

Interviewer: Aaron Henkin

Transcription: Emily Hilliard

Length: 10:50

Dural Miller, a Charleston native, is a member of Keep Your Faith Corporation, working with students and families at Mary C. Snow Elementary with urban gardening and social services. Dural speaks about his work and the West Side of Charleston where he grew up.

Miller was interviewed by producer Aaron Henkin with Emily Hilliard as part of the *Out of the Blocks* podcast's two episodes on Charleston's West Side. Learn more: <https://wvfolklife.org/2020/01/17/out-of-the-blocks-podcast-highlights-charlestons-west-side-west-virginia-folklife-hosts-listening-party-february-12/>

DM: Dural Miller
AH: Aaron Henkin
EH: Emily Hilliard

0:00 My name is the Dural Miller, we're on the West Side of Charleston. I'm a member of Keep your Faith Corporation, which is a community outreach group as well as a literacy organization.

Aaron Henkin 0:08 Tell me specifically where we are this morning and what your involvement is with this institution.

Dural Miller 0:13 We're at Mary C Snow West Side Elementary school, and we do a gardening program of agricultural therapy.

Aaron Henkin 0:20 Tell me-- paint a picture of like, what that entails in terms of your interaction with the kids, sort of what what did I-- paint a picture with words about what you do?

Dural Miller 0:31 Well we do nutrition programs in the classrooms and gardening in the classrooms, window sill garden, which we take out to our outside community garden, well, school based garden, where the kids plant and grow vegetables. We started probably about four years ago, working with the special education classes. We wanted to create a space where parents and children within special education can have a place to come--who is going to football and basketball games and things like that, we wouldn't see the interaction, we won't see them at all. So we want to create a space where they want to come and enjoy themselves, they will have they would have one. So that's what we approach the school by putting the garden outside.

Aaron Henkin 1:10 Help me understand...a lot of people are going to be listening to this episode who aren't familiar with the West Side or with Charleston. Mary C Snow is a newer school, right? This is a-- it was kind of a big deal when the school opened up here in the neighborhood.

Dural Miller 1:26 Yes, two elementary schools combined Chaplin (sp?) and Glenwood. Glenwood Elementary School was really my elementary school. We worked out of there a lot, we did a lot of classroom behavior, different little things. So when they combined, we just came with it. And this school is, Mary C Snow, Mrs. Snow our principal at Glenwood, at the time. And she was making strides in the community. She always, would, she had something to say to you (laughs) if you did wrong. But she also praised you when you did good. So this school was--had a vote on the name. And some people wanted it, some didn't. Some didn't know her. So they couldn't understand the meaning and reason by it. But you know, ultimately, that's the name now. Mary C. Snow.

Aaron Henkin 2:09 Talk to me about the kids you meet, the families that you meet, the relationships that you build. Sort of what their lives are like.

Dural Miller 2:15 Well I'm from here, so a lot of these kids, I know they parents and things. So it is funny when I'll be like, Oh, are you showing off? I know your daddy! And they laugh like no, you don't, what's his name? Oh, I say they name, they'll be "Oh! No!" So that's fun and dealing with the kids and gardening because you know, it's amazing how, like the little girls love diving in the dirt just as much as the boys do. So to be able to point that really more because sometimes they find little bugs and roly-polies is probably the favorite little bug going on around here. So and then they go home, and they go home and be able to tell their parents what they've done. Like they had Brussels sprouts, or they, they picked some strawberries, you know, because we have, we do a lot of farmers--we work with local farmers as well. And we have 'em come to the school and we get the kids tokens, worth \$1. And they go to the line and

shop to be able to take vegetables home, fresh vegetables home. So when they get home with the vegetables, they have communication, you know like table talk--they have something to talk about, they be so excited. And then a parent, I see a parent in the store. And they will be like, well now we buyin' vegetables when we come to the store. Thank you! And it'd be like a laugh, but it's beautiful. Because now not just introducing fresh fruits and vegetables, also give them a topic to talk about at the table. Instead of being on them phones, you know? When then it goes on other things, as I say reading is one of our main focuses. I had reading problems going up. So for a parent to get comfortable enough with us to come to us and say hey, I have a reading problem with my my oldest son, he really can't read. Would you be able to help him out? You know. and that's what gardening has done for us. It's opened up the channels of communication to other services.

Aaron Henkin 3:51 Tell me about your own childhood, your own new school experience here on the West Side.

Dural Miller 3:55 I loved it. I loved, I loved being over here. I loved being here. You know, it's like growing up in school, I really couldn't read that good. I played sports and stuff. So I got by. But being able to, to read was something always on my mind. Like when I'd go to school, I'd pray about it, you know, because I wouldn't want to get called on to read. So I had a disciplinary problem. (laughs) You know? I was a bad kid because I didn't want to be-- I didn't want to be made fun of and I didn't want to be-- I was embarrassed of it, really. But as I got older in school, I started reaching out and I really couldn't find what I needed. Ms. Lawson's an old, she's our board member now but she's a teacher that took it seriously and she helped me. But I prayed about it and asked the Lord if he ever showed me how to read I would show other people. And the Lord blessed me, you know, and so that's where Keep your Faith Corporation came from.

Aaron Henkin 4:50 Talk to me about... Did you all...So that sounds like it was a pretty transformational moment. Yeah? Did you, I mean, talk about how your self-confidence, self-esteem, sort of self-identity kind of started to materialize once you got organized, learned to read. And I mean, did you always know then that you wanted to be like giving back to the community?

Dural Miller 5:15 No, I planned on being a bad kid forever (laughs)! Because that's what I thought my life was, because I didn't have-- I couldn't see past of not-- my struggle at the time, you know, because I was young, but dealing with the Lord, he, he told me, I was somebody. So when I really believed that, it was pretty much over, you know? And that, the confidence came with it and the walk came with it. So then I start talking to others, you know, I don't really get into it, like, hey, hey, but if you talk to me, I'm gonna tell you about the Lord, you know, because that's what gave me this, everything I am right now and this confidence that I have and this organization come from that, coming from believing. And then doing, you know? Not just sitting, you know, one of the things that we preach is we have to be out there, we got to let them see us. Because a lot of kids, a lot of us, we know, we, you know, we look a certain way. So when kids see us, they automatically come to us, and they're drawn towards like Michael and, you know, we, we got a look that I think we was blessed with so we can reach some people that others can't, you know? And reading has been...learning how to read is still a process for me, you know? And so I really think it's special because you can read, pick up a book, and be anywhere, you know. You can get away and then you can use your education to get away if you really want to get out your neighborhood. So it's been a blessing to be able to allow, to come in to this school and to be able to share my story with kids, and them talk to me about some of they issues. And then get with they parents, you know. We got a basic needs program where we help with identification. So security cards, all that, filling out job applications, housing papers, and this year, we just started a workforce development program, where we got guys learning how to do fiber optic wiring with Bridge Valley and Teal Tech and a couple other groups. Coalfield Development, Enact and Greater Kanawha Valley helped us with that project. And that's going to move on forward to where we're going to be able to get into some of these shelters, and be able to keep

have 'em going into manufacturing, so we're not just going to house them, we're going to teach them how to work to stay housed. And that's a project that's, we're ongoing, we're gonna work with the city on.

Aaron Henkin 7:19 You've got, you've got to get ready to go soon. But let me just let me just finish by asking you to maybe talk about, I mean, you mentioned, you know, education and reading as a way to, to sort of find other horizons, maybe get out of town, do other things. You're here though, you see, what's what, what keeps you plugged in, connected, routed here on the West Side?

Dural Miller 7:45 Well, like I was saying, leaving out of town is really not, I haven't thought about it too much. But reading can free your mind. You know, so you don't have to really, you know, you can go experience things. But for me being here is--I think it's where I'm supposed to be right now. You know, like, my work is really just started, you know what I'm saying? I'm really just starting to feel that I have a niche. You know, I've been doing it for a little bit now. But right now, at this moment, it feels like I'm opening up more, I'm learning more, I'm getting more people behind this, this movement that we got. So I'm thinking just in the last year, how much done change and how much we've grown. So we got a farm in the neighborhood, we bought a piece of land over there and was able to put an office over there, we're gonna do workshops and stuff and we didn't, you know, we wouldn't have thought of that, that we would own something like that. So I think we just getting started and, and I can see what this workforce development program can do for the city. You know, just our community. So I'm excited about staying and pushing that.

Aaron Henkin 8:47 Last thing-- can do you have, can you think of an example of like an interaction or relationship you've built with a kid that and or an opportunity you've had to witness a kid sort of having a revelation, turning a corner? I obviously don't use names, but...

Dural Miller 9:04 Well we had a kid we started off messing with him at Glenwood Elementary School. He was running the streets, you know, we just, we just created a basketball team (laughs). We had a smaller gym where we would play, you know? Play with each other in the neighborhood. And we just had to go pick him up, chase him down, find him all over the place. Long story short, right now and he's playing for West Virginia State. You know, he's playing in college, he's going to college, you know, and there's numerous of kids we can talk about that, that was bad, and we just would be around them, pick them up make sure they get to practice. We used to go to shelters and make sure kids would get to school. And those kids are going on in college you know? Our first group of kids we dealt with graduated last year, well year before last, and we got another group graduating again cuz we've been dealing with them since they were little babies, you know. So seeing a kid that says he's not--he don't like school at all. Don't want to participate in any kind of community activities, to be now playing in college is a beautiful thing because he has support that I don't even think he know he needed at the time, and then supporting his family, making sure they was okay so he could, didn't have to worry about some of the things that grown folk had, you know. Around here in this neighborhood kids see a lot of grown folk stuff. You know. They got to deal with a lot of things that they shouldn't deal with as kids, but it's the reality, it's what it is, you know. So being able to help him and his family is beautiful every time I see him. He just had a game last week and he showed out. I mean, he showed out! (laughs) And it is good to see him doing, and he smiles and he hugged me and we got another kid. He goes to WVU, he's playing ball, you know. And he hit me the other day just was talking about man, you know? Y'all I was offered my first coach. If y'all really didn't keep me going, I probably wouldn't play it anymore. You know? So this hearing of things is good, you know? That makes me like, Okay, well, this next kid, I'm gonna go give him some of this too.

10:50

END OF TAPE

END OF INTERVIEW