

## Dave Deal Transcription

### “Unclaimed Baggage”

We’re all a part of something. Identity in the US is often tied to national origin, but it is also deeply informed by our personal experiences and the influence of our family members, even when the family members are communal relatives, but not genetically related to us. I have a very mixed and complicated family history, so these concepts have always intrigued me.

When Barack Obama was elected President, the narrative was of a nation that had transcended race. Subsequently the President’s race and identity were relentlessly questioned.

Like the President, my own heritage is of mixed Caucasian and African input. Like him, I was also raised in a white family culture. So I always felt a part of white culture, yet at the same time apart from it as well.

Not completely different, but not completely the same.

My name is Dave Deal.

I’m a biracial person with a multicultural background in 21st century America, a country that proclaims a homogenous American cultural ideal while simultaneously embracing the multicultural histories and immigrant origins of its population.

I sometimes feel like a living genetic and cultural melting pot.

When people ask me about my family history and ethnic background, it can take hours to answer and explore without ever fully telling the story. Usually, I try to sum up the main points in a few seconds.

But when life is a growing transformation, can we ever truly finish defining a personal history that is still in progress?

And what defines the limits of a family history?

Where do we delineate the barriers between what we choose to include and what we choose to exclude?

So why have I decided to add my personal narrative to the Immigration History Research Center archive?

Because, like so many in America, much of my own journey has been one of self-discovery and probing my own sense of identity toward a more thorough self-understanding.

Because I am partially adopted, the history of how I have become who I am goes beyond the limits of my genetic code.

My mom, Helen Hunter, is a family biographer. She loves reading and narratives and in 2012 published a memoir of her childhood. It explores the evolving family history from her immigrant father's transition to America and her mother's courageous struggle for independence, access to education, and a career, to the challenges of depression, suicide, and raising a mixed family in the post-war years.

My mom was encouraged and inspired by her mother, Pauline Hunter, my grandmother. The eldest daughter of German farmers, her first language was German, which she spoke until it was banned in her community during the anti-immigrant sentiment of World War I. Intelligent and tall, my grandmother was a nurse manager in Minnesota's state mental hospitals.

My grandfather Robert Hunter emigrated from county Mayo in Ireland in 1922, during the aftermath of the Irish Civil War. He had been a Black and Tan during the conflict that led to the partition of Ireland. In America he trained greyhounds and worked in the mental hospital with my grandmother.

Like my maternal grandfather, my birth father, Rex Mhiripiri, an artist, was also a war refugee. He emigrated from Zimbabwe, a country torn by an oppressive apartheid-style government.

Years after he had left my mother, I ran into his son, my brother John, when we attended the Minneapolis South High School together. From this chance meeting, I learned that I had many siblings living in suburban Minneapolis.

But when we talk about our family histories and the individuals that have contributed to who we are, the ingredients aren't limited to biological connection.

My dad, Max Deal, married my mother Helen in 1969, and adopted me as his own when I was one year old. Having moved from North Carolina to work in the civil rights movement, he encouraged my pursuit of academic excellence and cheered me on in soccer and basketball games. He and my mother Helen had my sister, Lex, together. She and I share many memories and experiences from our parent's marriage.

Unfinished stories:

In the years following my parent's divorce, they both remarried. Mom married Brian McCaffrey, a Lutheran minister raised in Robbinsdale, Minnesota of Scottish and Irish descent, a real Boy Scout, literally, with a heart of gold and a good sense of humor.

Dad married Jackie Deal. She grew up in rural Eastern North Carolina and shares his love for travel. They raised two children together.

All of these interwoven relationship narratives have informed and influenced my own personal story to varying degrees.

It is a continuing conversation and an evolving personal narrative history.

How does one belong? And how do I fit in? These are the kinds of questions that I ask myself regularly.

Relationships weave in and out of influence and frequency in my life. I don't know that I have a feeling of it.

Being a part of something but also apart.