

Richard Towns

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14:14:02:15 [Eric Darling]: Thank you. Let Mickey settle and we can go, Tom.

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14:14:10:01 [Mickey Youmans]: Back together. Okay.

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14:14:24:08 [Eric Darling]: Good. Mickey? Yep. Okay. Anytime.

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14:14:27:15 [Tom Kohler]: Richard, we're gonna start with a, an easy first question. If you would say your whole name and also spell it, please.

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14:14:33:13 [Richard Towns]: Richard. My name is Richard Cantwell, C-A-N-T-W-E-L-L, Towns. That's an old English name that I got from a man named my godfather, named Richard Iniver. Richard Cantwell Iniver.

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14:14:47:13 [Tom Kohler]: And how do you spell your towns?

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14:14:49:11 [Richard Towns]: Towns? T-O-W-N-S.

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14:14:52:21 [Tom Kohler]: And then would you identify, how, how do you identify yourself using a pronoun? What's your, what's your pronoun identity?

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14:14:59:14 [Richard Towns]: I've always been Richard Towns, you know, I was never a Dick and I would, my mother would tolerate close friends like Yankees that wouldn't wanna call me Dick, but I was always a Richard.

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14:15:10:22 [Tom Kohler]: Do you see yourself as a, as a they or a he?

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14:15:13:17 [Richard Towns]: As a he. I have a he.

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14:15:17:03 [Tom Kohler]: Thank you. I'd be really interested if you would be willing to just talk a bit about yourself, where you grew up, kind of how you grew up, and then we'll go from that. And, and I'm sure part of that story is gonna be how you, how your faith life has grown over time. And as we begin to hear about that, then we will begin to talk particularly about some of the role, the role you play at the Seamens House and other ways that you participated in civic life here in Savannah. But let's go all the

14:15:49:21 way back. If you would talk about your mom and dad a little bit and about kind of your roots and, and just how you become who you are.

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14:15:56:17 [Richard Towns]: Alright. To go way back, my, my father worked at White Hardware 41 years, and now that's where Paula Deen has her restaurant. And my mother was basically a housewife. She had actually grew, grew up on a plantation in Sardinia, South Carolina. And she said that when they came over from Scotland, they were Presbyterians and, and they started a Presbyterian church. So when I came here, we were Presbyterian. She, she said we would always be Presbyterian. So when I was two years old, I

14:16:27:00 started to go to Eastern Heights Presbyterian Church. That's on 37th and Cedar, that's the highest point in Savannah. That's 42 feet above sea level. And, and lot people don't realize that. But at two years old, I started going there. Never missed a Sunday for 12 years. And here's why. If I was sick, my mother would gimme castor oil. So if I was well, I would pretend if I was sick, I'd pretend I was well just, just to get away from that castor oil. My, my brother also went 14 years without missing a, a single Sunday at

14:17:02:13 this, at this church. So my brother went across the street to Savannah High School. I ended up, even though I, I grew up with the Savannah crowd from Wagner Heights is off of Wheaton Street. We moved when I was 11 out to Bonna Bella on the east side. And so a little saltwater river out there, Herb River, Country Club River. And that's where I grew up out there. So I did know all the Savannah High people, but I grew up with the Jenkins

14:17:27:13 people. So my brother went on to become the youngest college president in America, and now he's the co-founder of Liberty University, which is one of the largest Christian colleges in America. And he and Jerry Falwell were the co-founders there. So my mother was always very proud of him, and I always tell people that I was the good looking one.

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- 14:17:48:01 [Richard Towns]: He was the rich one. So I ended up going to Jenkins and I went to Clemson on a track scholarship for running distance. I was the only one that won the Washington Day race. It was a cross country race. I won it three years in a row. No one's ever won it after that. And now they just have regular cross country meets and events. So e even at Clemson, I was there when it changed from college to university and they also changed to the metric system. So, and that's the joke about Savannah.
- 14:18:19:10 In Savannah, I set the high school record of 4 38 at Groves on a dirt track. No one has ever broken that 60 years from now because they switched to the metric system and they quit running the mile. So I I I, I went off to college and there I assumed that I would go to a, a Presbyterian church when I was at college. And then I came home and started going to church with my mother again. And then when she, she got older, I had, I was actually taking her, so I met my
- 14:18:50:00 wife in the church, a little Presbyterian church on La Roche Avenue. And we are both from Savannah, we have four children and they still live in Savannah. I have a son that's a, a tugboat captain. I've got a daughter that's a nurse and another daughter who's in in the business world. And a son of my youngest son is in the music business. He makes saxophone mouthpieces in Savannah and ships 'em all over the world. And you wouldn't
- 14:19:20:12 imagine it this coming from a little small plant where he operates a CSC machine. And so it is kind of a neat, I've been on the board of directors of the Seamen's House for 35 years.

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- 14:19:34:15 [Richard Towns]: My my high school preacher approached me one time when I get in the business world, Richard. And he said, Richard, he said, I'm the chaplain there and we have money that we've been saving for a hundred years and we've got old people who won't spend it. He said, I need to spend money to buy Bibles because we have Bibles in 51 languages and we give them away. So we have to have money to buy the Bibles. And then we give 'em away. And the, the various churches support this, this ministry,
- 14:20:07:12 the Seamens house. So I'm, I'm still there. The, the chaplain has moved on and I still kinda run the place. And during Covid, we, we just shut down, everything stopped. But now we've, we've cranked up again recently, and I have three part-time chaplains that are calling on the ships. They go to shipside, they'll pick up a crew and bring them back to the Semans house
- 14:20:32:17 and let them pick out a Bible in their own language. And then they, they of course, they wanted to go shopping either the grocery store or, or Walmart or Home Depot. And then they take 'em back to the ship. Now, when the Seamen's

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house started 180 years ago, the, the seamen owned the sailing ships didn't have a room. All they had was a hammock. There was no cabin for them. So when they would come to Savannah, the Seamen's house had a, a, a place with bunks in it. And they'd get to

14:21:04:22 spend the night in a, in a regular bed and not in a hammock. And, and they were safe too because initially the bars and all were praying on the sailors from around the world. So eight downtown churches gathered together and said, we're gonna try to take care of these men. So they started the Seamens House. And this started a hundred years after Savannah was founded.

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14:21:27:10 [Richard Towns]: Savannah was founded in 1733. So they started in 1833 and then 10 years later they got incorporated as to the Savannah Port Society governed the International Seamen's House. So they would always have a place for the sailors to stay. And Savannah rapidly became a, a big car carpet, car cotton exporter. Some of the best cotton in the world was grown down in Brunswick, Georgia. I think they call it a long staple cotton. So the Seamens house moved from place to place all over Savannah.

14:22:00:08 The last place we moved was on a square, which is now parking garage. The city bought that. So we saved the, the chapel windows and we came to Houston Street, which is Washington Square. We rebuilt a Seamen's House in 1965. These original windows are still in the chapel. They're well over a hundred years old. Beautiful little chapel that's, it'll seat 60 people. In fact, my wife and I were married there and I kept inviting my buddies

14:22:28:13 'cause I wanted them to realize I was getting married. I was, I was older. And I said, you know, I want everybody to know about it. She was getting worried that we're running out of seats, but I was so proud to be married to my wife. So the, the Seamens House is functioning again. We have three part-time chaplains, and they call on the ships and they pick up the sailors and bring them back to the Seamen's House. Or if they're on a tight schedule, they'll actually just take 'em straight to shopping and they carry a bag with them. In this bag they've got little tracks and they have

14:22:59:12 bibles that they give out. So, and as modern modernization came along, the sailors had rooms of their own with air conditioning. So they didn't need to come off. They could stay on board the ships. So we no longer had to supply starting 80 years ago. We didn't have to supply them rooms and bunks and everything. They'd come see us, we'd give 'em refreshments and things like that, and then they would turn around and go back to the ship. So...

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14:23:27:17 [Tom Kohler]: So let me see if I've got this straight. Just so, okay, so I mean there's a lot here and I want to slow it down just a little bit to make sure I've got it. So in 1833, so there were eight churches in Savannah...

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14:23:40:23 [Richard Towns]: That's right.

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14:23:41:08 [Tom Kohler]: That realized that seamen who were coming here as part of their work were being taken advantage of by the city, so to speak, by the bars and et cetera, et cetera. Yes. They saw that as a, a community problem. Yes, that's a problem in our community. So eight churches banded together to solve the problem. And the way that they solved that was with the International Seamen's House.

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14:24:02:07 [Richard Towns]: It's like being on the mission field, but the mission field comes to you. 'cause there are thousands of sailors that come in, in and out every week, every month to Savannah. And rather than have them wander around, let's give them something to do. And, and, and also these chaplains will, will witness the gospel to them. And they're, they're very receptive. Only one time did a captain say, we're all atheist. And, you know, so then you, you're supposed to say, well then what do you

14:24:32:11 believe in? If you don't believe in nothing, what do you believe in? But anyway, the most the crew members are, are the officers down on ship speak English. That seems to be the international language of shipping. So then you may have a crew that's Filipino or something like that. But we try to find out what, what is the language that they use and give them tracks and bibles in their own language.

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14:24:57:19 [Tom Kohler]: What happens, I mean, do you get involved if a particular seamen has a particularly urgent need, for example, medical or is worried about a family member back home? I mean, is there a role that you would play in that situation or

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14:25:12:13 [Richard Towns]: Y yes. When something happens to a crew member, we are available to take 'em to a hospital or to urgent care and get them treated. And sometimes the ship sails and we, and after they are treated two weeks later, we have to take them to an airport and fly ahead to the next port of loading or, or discharging. But, and that, that's if something happens to them.

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14:25:39:01 [Tom Kohler]: Have you ever had a seamen who took it? And I wanna be careful on wording here. Took advantage of the situation and jumped ship?

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14:25:49:06 [Richard Towns]: They're really careful about them jumping ship, you know, and, and we don't really have to get involved with that. At one time the Russians were coming to Savannah and when they first came, no one was off the ship. A guard was at the gangway with AK 47. Finally they decided, you know, we've got to let them come with these preachers. You know, they, they, they trusted the preachers. So they would come to the Seamen's house and they would roam around drinking coffee and tea and they

14:26:22:03 would whisper to the chaplain, can I have another Bible? And he'd say, I'll go get it. He said, don't just leave it laying somewhere. He said, during the evening, it'll slip in my pocket because we have a political officer that watches us. So even when the Iron Curtain was up, we were sending Bibles to Russia in their own language. And, and we felt like we, with Ronald Reagan, we had a good part of bringing down the Iron curtain.

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14:26:47:17 [Tom Kohler]: And you've been doing this for 34 years?

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14:26:49:22 [Richard Towns]: Yes, I have.

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14:26:52:00 [Tom Kohler]: I mean, on a given month these days, how many other people are involved as volunteers? I mean, how, how, how big a web of people do you have locally that contribute and make sure this happens the way it needs to happen?

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14:27:06:02 [Richard Towns]: Usually a small group of, of six to 12 people is about it. Sometimes the chaplains can bring the sailors to the Seamen's House and then we have somebody that will take them shopping or bring 'em back to the Seamen's House. You, because sometimes chaplains have another ship to go call on and they can leave them here and go get another crew. So it's, it is just a small group of of volunteers that, that are there. At one time we had a, a chaplain that lived upstairs in the Seamen's House and his wife was a hostess, so she always served them coffee and tea and they

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14:27:40:14 grew to love her and they would bring her gifts because they would make the same trip over and over like every six to nine months. And every time they came, they'd bring her a present or a toy and there was a glass case in the hallway. They would put money from their country in this glass case. So it had money from all over the world there at the Seamen's House,

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14:28:00:13 [Tom Kohler]: So this is a little old provincial Savannah, and we do tend to be provincial have been that way. But at the international Seamen's House you have these mementos and this memorabilia from literally all over the world.

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14:28:15:06 [Richard Towns]: Yes. All over the world.

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14:28:16:08 [Tom Kohler]: Under, under the roof. There it is. Right? Yes. This is how we fit into the whole rest of the world?

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14:28:21:05 [Richard Towns]: Yeah, that's right. Wow. So we were well known because they would go home and talk about us. So we were like a goodwill ambassador for Savannah, Georgia. 'cause they all talked about, they loved to go to Savannah. They to go to the Seamen's House to to relax, watch tv, play the guitar, play pool, had a pool table. And at one time we had computers before there were cell phones so they could get on a computer and, and call home. And then we had the regular phones that you'd call long

14:28:55:10 distance and with an operator. And the operator would call us back and tell us how much it cost. And then by now everybody has a cell phone as a ship's coming up the river, the seamen are, are calling chaplains say, we're coming and we're docking it at East Coast Terminal, can you come get us? So we know in advance by these cell phones that the seamen are coming. And now we're able to give them an app where they can read the Bible on their cell

14:29:21:16 phone and it's a free app.

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14:29:23:20 [Tom Kohler]: Oh, that's real. Right, right. Oh, that's really interesting. That's kind of the evolution, if you will, of right.

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14:29:31:01 [Richard Towns]: Evolution. Yeah. You know, you, you no longer need to carry the Bible. And it used to bother me at church. I'd see somebody, I said, what are they doing on their cell phone? Read, playing the game. But they're reading the Bible at church, you know, and I still like to carry the old fashioned Bible and turn the pages.

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14:29:46:16 [Tom Kohler]: I hear you. So how does all this get paid for? I mean, how, how's that work?

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14:29:50:21 [Richard Towns]: It gets paid for by donations from the church. There are some individuals, but normally it's the churches that, that give donations. And we depend a lot in Savannah on the Presbyterian churches because there's about six or eight of them. And, and at one time we had our presbytery was paying the salary for one of the chaplains. And so that doesn't happen now, but we are, we're building back up again toward that.

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14:30:22:18 [Tom Kohler]: The, the people that you see, these, these, these seamen people that work on the, on the ships, I'm asking, I mean, what, what is, what tends to be their faith stories? I mean, are these primarily people who are coming from South America who might be Catholic? Or are they people who are Muslim or, I mean, who's who, who shows up at the door?

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14:30:44:05 [Richard Towns]: People of all faiths show up at our, at our door. At one time we had a Catholic priest that worked with us. He, he just kind of hung out with us. The Catholics took care of him. And at one time I felt so sorry for him because he needed gas money. So I started buying his gas money 'cause he was using his private vehicle because there are some sailors, the Philippines and all, they're Catholic and they want somebody to come and do mass on board. And we were not able to do that. So, but if

14:31:15:01 we can just give them the word from the English, new English Bible, we, we do that.

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14:31:22:15 [Tom Kohler]: Would there ever be someone who, who you interact with who would be Muslim?

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14:31:26:23 [Richard Towns]: Oh yes. Yeah. And they're very receptive. You know, no one's ever said, no, I don't, I don't want this or that. You know, they will actually take the Bible and read it. And Isaiah 55:11 says, "God's word will never return void." And we believe that, you know, give it to, give it to a Muslim or a Hindu or anybody and let, just let 'em read, read God's word. And we, we show 'em love and compassion. So they're their, their willingness say, well these nice people will give you a Bible. I'll

14:32:00:18 at least read it. And plus I, I'm out at sea for 30 days at a time. What else am I gonna do?

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14:32:07:16 [Tom Kohler]: Well I get that part for sure. I mean, plus you're out at sea, I mean, yeah, yeah. Let's, yeah. I wanna go back a little bit to your youngest brother. Yep. Saxophone.

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14:32:18:08 [Richard Towns]: Oh, that's my youngest son. Son, yeah.

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14:32:20:15 [Tom Kohler]: Makes saxophone

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14:32:22:09 [Richard Towns]: Mouthpiece. Mouthpiece. He, he operates a CNC machine. He graduated with, with an engineering degree. And he did that for a while down at Fort Stewart building stuff. But he loved music in his younger life. He was on the Olympic development program and I thought (cell phone rings) it'll shut off in a minute. Oh, there it go. I thought

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14:32:48:17 [Tom Kohler]: Let, let's jump back. So I'm gonna just, yeah, so we'll start over. Okay. So I want to jump back a little bit just 'cause I didn't get a, a chance to dig in on this a little bit. Okay. So your youngest son who makes saxophone mouthpiece. Yes. Let's hear about that.

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14:33:03:12 [Richard Towns]: Yeah. My youngest son is Richard Zachary Towns and he was on the Olympic Development program. And I thought he would do that in college. And he had scholarships, but his love was music. And in fact, he shocked me one time he took his student loan and bought a thousand dollars guitar. I said, you can't do that. And so I said, I said, they're not gonna forgive that, are you? He said, no, they don't forgive it if you made a li a high salary, which now he makes a

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big salary. So instead of engineering, like he graduated with, he started working with this company

14:33:36:02 called Jody Jazz. And they make saxophone mouthpieces. And he started operating the CNC machine that makes these, and when the machine broke down, they'd have to bring in someone and it'll be down a week, pay a high salary. So they send him off to a school. He learned how to repair it. He became so valuable to this company. And now he, he operates the machines and they started out with classical mouthpieces. And then they play, now they have jazz mouthpiece pieces for saxophones. The great saxophone

14:34:05:19 players in America come to Savannah. They'll get a handful of these mouthpieces and go in the little, little little studio and they'll play till they like one. Then they'll carry it back to Zach and he'll gold plate it for \$850.

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14:34:21:02 [Tom Kohler]: Gosh, who knew?

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14:34:23:15 [Richard Towns]: Who knew?

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14:34:24:01 [Tom Kohler]: That's all I'll say is who knew?

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14:34:25:17 [Richard Towns]: He's the only one that's single. And now he's got a a \$70,000 boat. And my youngest daughter has a house, a second house on the Daufuskie Island. So all my children have boats and they go spend the weekends on Daufuskie Island, which is a like being in another world.

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14:34:42:09 [Tom Kohler]: Very nice.

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14:34:43:05 [Richard Towns]: Now my oldest son is the only one that didn't go to college. He was a black sheep, but now he's the tugboat captain and he makes more than all the rest of 'em. They're college graduates, you know?

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14:34:54:03 [Tom Kohler]: Yeah. Well and that's a nice tie into the Seamen's House as well, right? Yes. I mean, I mean it gives just kind of, the whole story kind of comes

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together in that way. Yes. Which is lovely. You, I'm, again, I wanna go back into you just a little bit if I may. So you got a scholarship to Clemson?

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14:35:09:23 [Richard Towns]: Yeah, I ran track at Clemson. I came out and I started working in the import export business. And I, I actually took the government exam to get a custom house broker's license. And during that period of time while I was at Clemson, the summers I spent on a steeple jack company climbing in high things. So the engineer at WSAV on Victory Drive, and they have a tower across from Grayson Stadium, 750 foot. He

14:35:39:23 said, could you climb a tower? I said nothing to it. He said, can you just go up, change the bulb and come down? I said, you know, I worked all day long with a steeple jack company, eight hours a day on, on towers, and now I could climb up, come down and charge you a bunch of money. He said yes. So I climbed towers for 10 years in Savannah for, for WSAV, the Corps of Engineers. And also they called me one time to Roberts Dairy. There's a cable TV tower. Someone had hung a confederate flag on that tower and they

14:36:10:08 said, Mr. Towns, do you think it'll mess up our inter our interference, our reception? I said, well, absolutely. You gotta get it down. Well will you do it? I said, yes, I'll do it. And I up and down 35 minutes and I get my standard fee.

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14:36:27:11 [Tom Kohler]: I hear you. And then you also were in the military?

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14:36:30:22 [Richard Towns]: After that? I was always the older, I took care of my mother till I, I was 23 and I got in a reserve unit, a medical unit at 23. Did not like it. I was bored to death because these military doctors were not very military and I wanted to be gung-ho military. So after eight years, I transferred to a Green Beret unit. And so I go to jump school at 33 and I'm the youngest one there with 18 year olds. And because I could run, I outran all of them. Every day I run, we'd have to run th three miles

14:37:04:12 out train all day, three miles back. And I outran everybody at jump school. So I, I became a Green Beret at 33. At 38, I went back to be a jump master. And this unit was so elite because we were older and smart. We, we trained all over the world and we had people with different skills that made us so valuable. We, we did a, a, a mission for the government outta Quantico. Secret

14:37:32:23 mission of how to go into infiltrate Russia. We were so good that they say, we want your team to go to Europe and represent us in the NATO war games. So we did. And they gave, and we flew over from Sculthorpe, England over the English

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channel and jumped into Germany and they were chasing us and they never could find us. We are always a day ahead. We were so careful. So they, they never found us. And, and we just put 'em all to shame. They

14:38:02:19 started adding more and more people onto chasing us. And the very last target, they compromised us, they actually told everybody, this is where they're gonna hit this, this power plant way up in the mountains, in, in, in this where it's got a dam. So we went in there a different way. One of our guys dressed up like an old man with two grocery bags and he shuffled into town. He had a hat and a raincoat. He just shuffled into town. He'd stop and rest and stop and rest. And then he went and sat on the dam and

14:38:31:09 then just sat there and they just pretty soon ignored him. When he left, he had two shopping bags, but there was one bag left on the dam with the explosives. So, you know, we, we fooled them and, and that turned out to be good for us. So...

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14:38:45:13 [Tom Kohler]: Now, were you married at this time?

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14:38:46:18 [Richard Towns]: I was married, yes. At this time I got married. My wife never knew what we were doing or where we were going. I wrote a book and she had to type it for me. I had somebody had to type it 'cause everything was in printed. My longhand was so bad, I printed. So she had to type my book and she said she didn't realize twice I wrote in the book, I almost got killed. She didn't, she had no idea. The kids wanted to know where I went. But she was just so busy with children, she just didn't have any time to, to talk about it. And she didn't care about the military until

14:39:20:11 one day they gave her a military ID card. She loves it. She goes to places that gets that military discount. She goes out to the base of the commissary. Her, her medicine is free, totally free. I've had two operations on my both hips, each one over a hundred thousand dollars. I didn't pay a penny. So now I've got to go back. One, one of 'em starting to wear out. I've got to go back and they're gonna go in again and, and fix

14:39:48:15 it. Which he said, you're 80, you're in good health. We're gonna fix your hip and let you carry on.

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14:39:55:07 [Tom Kohler]: And y'all met in church?

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14:39:56:19 [Richard Towns]: We met in church, yes.

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14:39:58:08 [Tom Kohler]: Tell me about, be, tell me about that church and about meeting in church and about if you would, your, your personal faith life a little bit?

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14:40:07:02 [Richard Towns]: Okay. We met at Faith Presbyterian Church on La Roche Avenue. Her parents had left Cokesbury Methodist and moved and started going to Faith. And she was 16 and I was 20 and I was dating her and her mother didn't like that because I was too old. But her mother and my mother were good friends at the church. And her daddy was an ex-Marine. He loved me. So because of that age difference, we were allowed to start

14:40:40:22 dating. So I'm, I'm now 80, she's 75 and she's just still the, the love of my life. But there, we had a chaplain, a pastor Reverend A. Dale Umbright. He, he was also had been in, in the Navy. And we, the Presbyterians are deep in the Bible. They, everything's gotta be by the Bible, you know, and they, and so we, we learned so much from the Bible being in the

14:41:12:10 Presbyterian church. So that's, that's where my foundation was. And especially going all those years and never missing. So even, even in the military, you know, the guys that knew me, you go in a bunch of wild, I had some wild guys, some of 'em were bad. But at meal, you'd see me bow my head and pray. Suddenly they got quiet. And pretty soon they were doing that. You were, they they were

14:41:38:07 copying me. And on one mission they sent me out to get 12 identical books. And I said, how am I going to go to a bookstore and get 12 books? No, a bookstore might have two or three. So I went by the chapel, I said, lemme go into the chapel and pray. And I went in and prayed, and they're the Gideon New Testaments. And I said, man, that's perfect. It'll go in your top pocket or it'll go in the outside pocket of your ruck sack.

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14:42:02:13 [Richard Towns]: And so I got 12 books and we did the Old World War, civil War spy thing. You know, you, you got chapter one verse one, book one, you know, so all you gotta to send out a message 1, 1, 1. So if the people at the end have the same book, they can go chapter one verse one and they can put a, a message together. And we, we were doing that. So later on I saw around the campfires at night, I'd see the guys reading their New Testaments. And I said, that's good because, you know, because I,

14:42:35:11 I was with some guys who, who had been in combat had killed people, you know, and, and they were, they were, but they were good guys. We, we were, we were like a band of brothers 'cause we did everything. And everybody did everything. And, and on a mission. I not only knew what I was doing, I knew what the radio

Richard Towns

man was doing, the Commo Man. 'cause we lost a commo man one time. So we had to all get his stuff together. And so we were cross-trained and we were smart and, and we

14:43:02:20 learned every phase of warfare. But, but I always felt, even on my jumps at night, I felt like God was with me. And I had that calm assurance that nothing's gonna happen. You know, God's gonna take care of me. And, and to this day, I, I always thank God for always being with me, always giving me that calm assurance that God is with me.

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14:43:25:07 [Tom Kohler]: And then so obviously the, I mean the International Seamen's House takes up for you. This is a big expression of your personal faith. I mean, it's growing up out of the con growing up outta the church, Presbyterian-supported. You are lifelong Presbyterian, et cetera. And from that, from that window so to speak, you get to see a part of the community that very few people do. Are there other people that, you know, maybe through your Presbyterian faith that you feel like do a good job of showing

14:44:01:01 up in the larger community and making a good difference in the larger community? And, and it comes from their own sense of their faith and how they believe we are to be in the world?

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14:44:13:02 [Richard Towns]: I, I have these, these chaplains that we interviewed and hired them, and these, these are strong Christian men with, with the, the faith and, and the love to go out and, and call the people that they don't know. And and that's tough to call 'em somebody that even has maybe has a different language and, and, and to show them love. But you know, like I said, we, we are our missionaries and the mission field comes to us.

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14:44:43:01 [Tom Kohler]: That's a, that's a great, it's a great way to think about that. Yeah. Right. That has come, right? Yeah. Oh my gosh. Tell me, tell me if you would, as you look back, just through your life, is there a moment that you personally feel like would be for you, your most profound spiritual moment?

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14:45:07:00 [Richard Towns]: I think the, the first thing that I was honored to be a husband and to find it, it's not, I'm not no longer taking care of myself. I've got a, a wife to take care of. And, and, and then that's compounded when a child comes around and suddenly you, you feel guilty because you're loving that child more than you're loving your wife. And, and how do you get around that? But, but, but, but

Richard Towns

God solves that problem. 'cause 'cause you, you love both of them and as long as they know you that,

14:45:40:09 that you love them, you know, I, I think that's so important. And that they, that they, you raised them in the church and, and they they did our our children were all raised in the church.

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14:45:53:00 [Tom Kohler]: And do you, why do you, how do you think all four of your kids decided to stay in Savannah? Very unusual.

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14:45:57:18 [Richard Towns]: That is unusual. I, I don't know. My, my tugboat son got a job in Savannah, started out on shrimp boat in Savannah, worked on a, a a a, a towing service where they would tow a boat all the way to Houston at eight knots all day long. You're going in eight knots slow. And he thought that was boring. So he came back and got to work on the tugs. And, and now they're right up inside these giant ships and he's easing 'em

14:46:28:07 right into the dock. So he lived here. My, my youngest daughter married a Brit and they live in Savannah, but they also bought a home on Daufuskie. And everybody goes there. My oldest daughter became a nurse, a nurse here in Savannah. And she's worked in the hospitals and all. And now she's an executive and she'll go to all the outlying clinics within two or 300 miles

14:46:55:03 and do quantitative analysis to make sure they have everything they need.

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14:46:59:14 [Richard Towns]: And then my youngest son, Zach, he just stayed here. He, he had no desire to go anywhere else. And all, all of his friends were here. He went to BC and these BC boys have a common bond that they, it is, it is a lifelong bond that they get at BC there, there's no distractions like girls at BC because he was the class clown. And, and I had him in a little Christian school. So when I sent him there in the ninth

14:47:30:00 grade, he was so quiet because back in those days, they had a big sticker, honey, a big sticker bush. And if you misbehave, they'd pick you up and throw you in the middle of it. And he was always fearful of that. So he always behaved. He never drew attention to himself, but he was, he was big in soccer. And so BC had him on a part scholarship for soccer because, because he was really that good.

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14:47:57:14 [Tom Kohler]: And then are, are your children religious?

Richard Towns

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14:48:03:19 [Richard Towns]: I would, I would say that one is very strong, very, very conservative, very strong. My two sons, one doesn't go now and one is irregular because of working on the tugboats. And, and then I've got a, another daughter who makes sure that her kids are in a Christian school and she makes sure they're in church and Sunday school. So, but I've got one daughter who, who's the oldest, the nurse is outspoken about her faith and everything. And now she, she's always telling me how, how grateful she

14:48:38:01 is that I was her dad. Can't beat that. Yeah. Yeah.

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14:48:43:12 [Tom Kohler]: Can't beat that. Wow. Yeah. Hmm. I'm gonna stop just for a second and ask these guys, are there pieces that you guys want to make sure we grab hold of or et cetera?

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14:48:57:11 [Mickey Youmans]: I do. I'd like maybe a memory of one at one time the story of one of the people that came off of one of the boats that went through a special, a special thing based on all the services that you provide. You know, like was it something that was, you know, that would they, were you just like, something like that? Like there was a person that really needed, really needed something?

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14:49:26:02 [Richard Towns]: You know, I was, I was more or less in charge of the whole thing.

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14:49:30:04 [Mickey Youmans]: Yeah, yeah.

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14:49:30:19 [Richard Towns]: Yeah, I was more or less in charge of everything. The chaplains were inter interfacing with the individual seamen. So they, they had more interface with them than I did. I made sure that everything worked, that the bills were paid and they were able to go to the ships and there was money there to pay them to buy gasoline. So the chaplains were the one getting the real stories from the Seamen.

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14:49:58:06 [Tom Kohler]: So at the chaplain level, that's where literally the rubber meets the road.

Richard Towns

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14:50:02:06 [Richard Towns]: That's right.

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14:50:02:20 [Tom Kohler]: And that's where the interpersonal relationships are happening. And the chaplains are hearing the stories. And then the role that you've played for all these years is to keep all that glued together financially and in every other way. And I would be curious, I mean, 34 years is a long time. Do you have a board of directors?

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14:50:24:14 [Richard Towns]: I have a board of directors. And recently we started increasing them because it fell off a lot. Fell off during COVID. So now I've got a new president because I was in the role of president for years and years. I have a new president, president who is a retired businessman and lives at the Landings. He, he's doing very well. So I'm letting him do other things. I still do a lot of the money things. I've got one corporation that I deal with in Coatesville, Pennsylvania. This man had

14:50:55:11 owned a steel mill. He came to Savannah and he saw his wife playing the organ at a Seaman's House function. He fell in love and married her. He went back to his steel mill and he, he left word from now on, you take care of that little place in Savannah if they need anything. So now his grandson comes to see me once a year. He says, is there anything that you need? And last year I said, I need a new air conditioner, 8,500. He write your, here's your check. Or the termite people need to, we have airborne

14:51:26:20 termites. They need to cover the whole place for the tent. Here's a check. \$10,000. So we are still, and he says, my grandmother and my granddaddy met here at the Seamen's House. So this is a, a part of me that I still handle because he comes to see me in in Savannah.

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14:51:45:09 [Tom Kohler]: That's, that's a a that's a wonderful story.

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14:51:48:00 [Richard Towns]: A good story. Yeah. Yeah.

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14:51:51:15 [Tom Kohler]: It gives you hope.

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Richard Towns

14:51:53:05 [Mickey Youmans]: That was good.

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14:51:54:07 [Tom Kohler]: Yeah, it really does. Well I, it, it feels to me like what we've been able to do here is I think we've, you, you guys tell me, I feel like we've got a pretty good feel for how the Seamen's House works. Which is quite frankly elegant. 'cause it's straightforward, it's simple in the best sense of the word, and it works. And we have met someone who, for his entire life has been on a journey. And that journey has been

14:52:25:15 driven in the best sense of the word by his faith. And, and moving forward, I mean, put these four great kids into our community, they're gonna stay and do great things as well. I mean, seems like that that's a that's a pretty good day's work.

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14:52:44:03 [Richard Towns]: Yes. Yes. It, it is been quite a journey. And I've, I've, I've certainly enjoyed it.

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14:52:51:11 [Tom Kohler]: And, and and your physical strength, everybody in your family is, is just athletic? Is that what I'm to believe?

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14:52:57:00 [Richard Towns]: Yes. Every, everybody, everybody's strong. Well, you have, I think, good genes from my mother who was a MacFadden. And I actually recently went to Scotland and I went to the battlefield where they fought on at Culloden. And I went to Isle of Skye to see where they were from. And these were rugged people. And my mother teases everybody about, she said, I, I've been Presbyterian for 200 years. And so this Sunday I get to go back to her old church, which is Sardinia Presbyterian Church. And I,

14:53:27:13 I always write them a check by doing that, I'm on their mailing list and they'll keep me apprised of what's going on. So then they'll have a meal there with a special MacFadden barbecue sauce, which is a vinegar based vinegar and pepper. From there after the meal. And on this table, all the pictures, some of 'em are a hundred years old and they're covered with plastic.

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14:53:49:21 [Richard Towns]: So you're eating a meal and you see all these pictures of the old, I've got two grandfathers after the Civil War, they were named after Robert E. Lee. So I've got Robert E. Lee McFadden and Robert Eli McFadden. And so after the, the church service, we're going to the family cemetery that's been there for

Richard Towns

250 years. And we'll, we'll see all the, and the the funny thing at Cemetery is there is a monument for the black mammies that raised all the MacFadden children. I said that that is

14:54:20:13 something else that they honor these, these women who, who raised all the children.

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14:54:25:13 [Tom Kohler]: This is at the church?

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14:54:26:17 [Richard Towns]: Yes, at the church. Wow. Yeah. That's cool. That that's pretty cool.

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14:54:32:15 [Tom Kohler]: Unreal.

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14:54:33:06 [Richard Towns]: So all my, all my people up there were farmers. And so it was just no question, I was always gonna go to Clemson. You know, I had a scholarship to Citadel and to Georgia and, and everywhere else I had one to Annapolis, but my math wasn't good enough for Annapolis. So I ended up going to Clemson. And, and I said, 'cause at one time it was Clemson A&M and when I was there, it was Clemson College. And then it changed to Clemson University. So... And I always teased people, I said,

14:55:01:02 you know, I, I was in driver's ed until the mule died.

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14:55:07:17 [Tom Kohler]: I wanna walk outside. I think our three o'clock may have just taken in the door.

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14:55:11:00 [Richard Towns]: No, it's five till we

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14:55:12:07 [Tom Kohler]: Are there. Let me double check real quick. I don't mean to, but

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14:55:14:12 [Richard Towns]: I That's okay.

Richard Towns

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14:55:16:04 [Tom Kohler]: The views. Yes, sir. I, yeah,

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14:55:19:02 [Eric Darling]: We're all right. I think, I think we're there. Mickey, we can cut. Thank you. Okay. Very, very much. All right. Appreciate it. It was very interesting.