

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 100 – Richard Thurmond – A Story of Discovery

The End and a Beginning

And now a personal word,

My conversation with Rick Thurmond marks the 100th episode of this podcast and the end of a two-year run. I set out to interview fascinating people. I did so with a sense of mission: wanting to value truth and beauty, to pay attention, to honor thoughtful and meaningful connection. I don't know to what degree we succeeded in fulfilling that mission, but I do know that these conversations have deeply inspired me.

In my remarks in episode 1, I said that every person has a story. Of course, we all do. I asked Rick how he would write his story, and he said his life has been one of discovery. I entitled this episode “A Story of Discovery,” and of course, that might as well be the subtitle of this podcast. Just as Rick has learned about himself and the city of Charlotte, to which he has devoted much of his life exploring as editor and publisher of *Charlotte* magazine, and now as a senior executive at Charlotte Center City Partners, so I have learned that we all seek meaning in mystery. We don't have the answers to the deep existential questions of life, but we lean in anyway. We find satisfaction improving the lives of people in the places we are in. We say what we value. We do our best to live with integrity.

There are two traits that I have found in common among all the guests of this podcast. First, their imperfections are the source of their strength. They step into their insecurities. They step into their doubt. They face their fears and go on to wonder and create and do great things. I have a quote over my desk that says, “In the cave you fear to enter lies the treasure you seek.” Second, all the guests of this podcast experience love. Love protects them and validates them. A love of a parent, a spouse or a friend, or the love of God allows them to love themselves and to love others. Love gives them the great strength and resilience to overcome challenges and be real and honest human beings.

A few words about Rick: I don't remember when and how we first met. I think we met as part of the City Committee, a group of young city boosters led by Scott Syfert and Charles Jonas, two Charlotteans deeply rooted in the history of the city. The City Committee met sometime during 2000–2003 and included Amy Aussieker and Michael Smith, who have been guests of this podcast. The City Committee acted as a roundtable for emerging city leaders, and it was a heady time as everyone on the committee had big ideas.

Shortly after I launched *Charlotte Viewpoint*, I reached out to Rick because he was editor of a magazine with resources and staff and lots of stuff that I could only imagine having. Rick and I met to talk about editing and publishing and the city of Charlotte. We met at the Village Tavern sometime in 2004. For many years afterward we talked regularly over lunch or over drinks and in one form or another had the same conversation: What's going on the city? Who's doing good work? What's a good story to tell? In having those conversations, we began talking about ourselves: Are we doing what we want to do? Is there another choice we might be making? What's next for us? We chased the perfect hamburger. We had our haunts: The Comet Grille, The Liberty, Fran's Filing Station. We then turned to drinking old-fashionedes at The Cellar and at The Imperial. We became good friends.

Rick and I have been talking for fifteen years. Today we talk about family and travel and books. And always the city. My wife, Laura, and his wife, Ashley, are alike in many ways. My daughter, Shelby, and his daughter, Molly, are kindred spirits. If I were to create a Venn diagram of the six of us, what I would see in the center is a love for learning, a capacity for work, a goodness of spirit—at least on good days for me.

In November 2017, on my birthday, Rick, Ashley, Laura, and I were having drinks at Dot Dot Dot, a speakeasy where we had to knock on the door three times and say a password to get in. Not really, but it felt that way as we waited for a table. I asked Rick that night if he would be my 100th guest. Rick agreed, but 100 seemed a long way away. That's probably why he said yes. He wouldn't have to think about it for eighteen months if I stayed on schedule. Eighteen months later, here we are.

Rick embodies for me what is best in our community: he is smart, loyal, and kind, and takes his shot when he is open on the court. I know I can count on him, and he knows he can count on me.

There's a lot for me to think about as this podcast ends. The immediate emotions I have are a tremendous sense of gratitude for the 100 guests who said yes; for the people and organizations who generously supported this project; for my teammates, Andy and Chris, who are good and true; to the many listeners who tuned in; and to Laura and Shelby, who gave me purpose a thousand different ways.

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