

CONSULTANT: Will Holland
AGE: 35
RESIDENCE: Durham, NC
OCCUPATION: Unknown (he was a volunteer EMT in 1999)
INTERVIEW DATE: July 30, 2016, approx. 11:45 am
LOCATION: Durham Farmers Market @ Durham Central Park

Will Holland was next to me all morning at the Farmers Market, in a booth for Restoration Church; he was one of three people volunteering in community outreach for the congregation. Will became interested in the Millennium Memory Project as soon as he saw me setting up my table. He mentioned that he was working as an EMT on New Year's Eve 1999 and had some interesting memories. We planned his interview as the last one of the day, after the market closed. We started with the standard audio introduction.

Were you living in Durham at the time?

I was not. I was living in Gastonia, North Carolina. It's about 20 miles west of Charlotte.

So walk us through what you remember. Take us back there. Think back in your mind, let the images surface, and tell me what you remember December 31, 1999, when it became the year 2000.

December 31, 1999. Well, that was the year I graduated from high school. I had spent my first semester at Appalachian State University, so a little more independent than I was. I mean, I was learning to become independent. And I was working as a volunteer EMT at Gaston Emergency Medical Services. We would spend our nights – I did a lot of nights there, and weekends -- and so I remember being home for the YK buzz, because everybody was freaking out. I mean, it was the end of the world. Planes were gonna fall out of the sky, we had mass casualty vehicles ready to roll. It was a sense of ridiculousness to me, but also, there was the reality of, "Okay, well, if all the computers shut down, maybe there would be like a global collapse, and all our banking and stuff on there." But we weren't as dependent upon, you know, cell phones and everything else at that point. I didn't have a Facebook account. I think MySpace...I had just started a MySpace account in 1999. Was it maybe 2000? I'm not sure –

I'm not sure.

When I went to college, I had no social media, and I think MySpace was the coolest thing in the works at the time [laughs]. I got my first Hotmail account, you know, so I had finally gotten email. I didn't grow up with Internet in the house, so I went to college and my world opened up. But yeah, that night, we were volunteering. We had had this big prepping from the administration. They made

us crank every ambulance at 11:30, if you were sitting in your station or not. Every ambulance in the fleet had to be cranked. Every supervisor vehicle, every specialty vehicle, everything had to be cranked and running, because they were concerned that the computers in the truck would not allow the automatic ignition [laughs]. So it was like, we had to go, and I remember there was a big lot that had probably 15 ambulances in it that were backups, and all of them were running at 11:30. And we were just sitting there on the steps, waiting for the world to end, you know? And 12:00 came, and there were a couple of gunshots, and we were like, "Oh, great. The rioting has started. Everybody thinks it's the end of the world, so they're gonna go kill their neighbor," kind of thing. That was our biggest concern –

There were really some gunshots?

There were literally gunshots in the ---

Oh, probably celebrating.

-- Yeah, the public was like, "BOOM, BOOM, POW!" You could hear handguns and rifles going off. We were at our main station in the bad part of town, and so, it might have been just a celebration, literally, but we were thinking, "Okay great. If you really want to kill your neighbor, and the world's about to end, there's no electronic records of who you are anymore, so..." [laughs]. We thought it was going to be a crime spree.

So for a minute there -- just for a second there -- you heard gunshots, midnight had come, you thought maybe something really was happening.

Yeah. I was like, "This is kind of crazy. Here we go." I think that was the words we said, like, "Here we go." And no tones went off. No 911 calls. There was nobody screaming.

I take it the engines started in your --

-- Well, the engines were still running, so --

Oh, that's right.

So then the supervisors got on the radio and said, "Okay, EMS 1, shut down your truck." And then they'd shut it down, and you'd restart it and say, "It restarted. We're fine." And then they did that for like four or five trucks, and then they were like, "Okay, it's fine. It's no big deal." We went and shut off everything and got back to life. Dispatchers came on the radio, no computer problems, no dispatch problems. All clear, continue service is normal.

So did you get sent out at all that night?

We did. But we ran the standard, you know, respiratory distress calls, or “somebody had a car accident” calls. It was nothing related to Y2K that happened that night, EMS wise.

Well, still, some people had some emergencies that just happened to occur...

Well, there you go. But they weren't like Y2K...their CPAP machines stopped working, or their oxygen tanks didn't go off [laughs]. It wasn't that the world fell apart because of the computers and the actual transitioning to zero-zero again. And so, it was just normal stuff. It was a normal EMS night. And it was a big laugh. We were waiting for the planes to fall out of the sky, because, I mean, Charlotte International Airport is right there. We were just waiting for the big call for all of us to respond for people just falling out. But you had backup controls; it's not completely computer-controlled. Obviously it was a joke, but yeah, that was EMS the night of December 31, 1999. It was...we were prepared for the worst. Laughing about it in some ways, but at one point, it was like, “Oh great, is this really happening?” And then, back to normal.

Wow.

Within a couple of hours, back to normal. Nothing changed. Everybody was living life. Bank accounts still worked. You could still get on the Internet and check your Hotmail. [laughs] Life was good.

Hotmail...

[laughs] That's the first one I got, Hotmail account, so yeah.

You still have it?

AOL still was like [*makes the sound of a dial-up modem*]: “EEER-WAANK”. It was still dial-up and all, but I hated the AOL thing. Hotmail was awesome. I do not have it anymore. I don't even remember the password. I think I still have an account, but I couldn't even log in if I wanted to. I think they canceled it.

So EMS, did you all have cell phones back then?

Um, we had radios, and I guess some people had...let's see, 1999, I think I had the Motorola Razor, the like, flip phone. The first original Motorola flip phone. I think that's what I had on my hip. And so it worked fine. Called my mom in the morning, “Everything's fine, nobody died.” “Okay, great. See you when you get home.” You know? Yeah, I think that's when I had the Motorola flip phone.

How would you compare 1999 to today?

Um, it just seems like it was simpler. It wasn't as complicated as today. It wasn't so much tension, or...I don't know. Today, it just seems like everybody wants to be connected, but you can't connect, so you create Facebook accounts, and you try to do it through social media. And having a conversation with somebody is so foreign now. And it seems like it causes more problems because people are fake on their accounts. They create false personas of themselves, and you meet them, and they don't add up. So you're starving for a relationship, but you're not getting actual relationships.

You think the church fills that void?

I think the church has failed in a lot of ways to fill an authentic relationship void, but I think --

Why do you say that?

I think there's a change of it. To me, the church has been caught in the traditional Christianity. Especially in the Bible Belt in the South, you do it because you do it. You go to Sunday because you go to Sunday. But there's a Gospel resurgence. There's people living the Gospel. The Gospel is becoming alive more in the church today and it's kind of flipping around. That social Christianity or cultural Christianity, you can tell the people who are stuck in cultural Christianity, and those who want to build authentic relationships for the Gospel. And so I think there's a shift happening. It's probably in the last five years. Five, six years, there's been a shift happening towards more relational disciple making versus program-driven disciple making, and loving your community. Because the social media, the Facebooks, the accounts, the AshleyMadison.coms, all these ways to be somebody you're not, are taking over culture. I think the church is realizing this is not how you have relationships. It's not the way that God designed us, to love one another. So let's switch it up, and just be real in front of each other. "Yeah, my Facebook account says my business is going great, but you know what, I'm struggling. And we're barely paying the bills, and my wife and I fight all the time because of it." The opportunity to be authentic, it's coming back. And so, what better place to do it than in the community of the church?

That's interesting.

I think it's shifting, it's shifting back.

The booth for Will's church, Restoration Church, features a sign that invites people to ask two questions: 1) Do you go to church? and 2) Why or why not? We discuss this at length. I argue that many people go to church for the sense of community, much like Will describes in his earlier conversation. He agrees, and says that in today's world, the church is one of the last remaining places were

one can get a sense of authentic, offline community. I thank Will for his time and end the interview.