

CONSULTANT: Michael Graham
AGE: 32
RESIDENCE: Jacksonville, NC
OCCUPATION:
INTERVIEW DATE: July 30, 2016, approx. 11:00 am
LOCATION: Durham Farmers Market @ Durham Central Park

Where were you living at the time?

At the time of December 31, 1999, I was living at my parents' house in Denver, Colorado.

So take me back to that day. Put us there. What do you remember about it?

I don't remember a whole lot, specifically. I think during the day, I was working on a volunteer project with my church, via Habitat for Humanity. And I was in high school at the time, so I was on Christmas vacation. So during the day, I think I was doing the Habitat for Humanity project, and that evening, I was babysitting for some neighbors. They were leaving me with their kids, and they were going out to party somewhere. And I don't remember too many specifics beyond that.

Were you up at midnight?

Probably, yes. Probably just doing some homework. The kids were probably asleep. Probably watching TV, ball drop. And I guess, like, watching the ball drop in New York City, and that was the time where everyone was anxious about the computer integrity, or like, kind of, the continuity of computer operations. And I think I remember that with the different time zones, we saw that other countries in other time zones were having continuous...

And nothing happened.

Continuous utilities, continuous services. Yeah, short version of the story is nothing happened. So at the exact moment of New Year's Eve, 11:59 in Denver, it was a moot point, at that moment, because we knew that nothing was going to happen.

Did you think something was going to happen? You can be honest.

Well, maybe. I guess, short answer is maybe. I don't remember being particularly personally scared or nervous, but I do remember the media made a big deal out of it. And you know, I think maybe my mom bought an extra one or two gallon jug of water and put it in their laundry room. And my dad gave her a hard time. And

my dad was saying nothing was going to happen. But my mom bought one or two gallons of water.

Did they take any extra money out of the bank or anything?

Um, that was my parents finances, so I don't know what my parents did with their finances. I don't remember making any changes to my finances.

Do you remember talking about it at school? So you were in high school...

Yeah, I was in high school. In particular, I remember our gym teacher talking about it in a very disparaging way. Like, he didn't think anything was going to happen. And he was mocking the media for blowing it up and making a big deal out of that.

If somebody who was too young to remember back then, or they weren't born, let's say, and they asked you, "What was life like in 1999?" What would you say?

Not much different than it is now.

Really? You don't think it's much different.

No. That's the short...

Why do you say that?

Why do I say that? Um, the economy was good then, the economy is good now. In the 90s, we had the Clinton economic boom, and we didn't really have the dot com crash, maybe until 2000 or 2001, so the dot com crash hadn't hit, so the economy was doing well in 1999. We had the crash in 2008, but then ever since 2008, the economy has kind of slowly been improving. So its – what is it now, 2016 – and the economy is going up. 1999, the economy is going up. People talk about the economy being bad now, and it's six of one, half-dozen of the other. I think unemployment is below five percent, so I think unemployment is kind of a record low, so a lot of people are working, and the question is, "Are people working in jobs that are paying them enough?" I don't know. But at least people are working. You know, life is different for me just being in a different geographic area. And life is different in terms of...I guess there are a lot of similarities, now that I think of it. Because we had a two-term, in 1999, we had a two-term president who was leaving office. Now we have a two-term...We had a two-term Democratic president who was leaving office. Now we have a two-term Democratic president who's leaving office.

Hopefully we won't have an electoral mess like we did then.

Oh, yeah, I forgot about that. But there is, yeah, still another similarity there. Where we have a two-term Democratic president leaving office in a close election, so close that it came down to, like...

Florida.

Florida. And the entire election hinged on like, one county. And we don't know the election results for the upcoming election, but we do know that it's a close election. I think the polls are saying that Trump and Clinton are like, at a statistical tie. So I think a lot of parallels between 1999 and today.

That's interesting. In talking about this, you've mentioned politics; you've mentioned economics. You haven't mentioned technology or daily life.

Oh, man. So technology is like, much better now [laughs]. That's the short version of the story. And the cool thing about technology is it's enabling us to use our resources more efficiently.

What do you mean?

In terms of Uber and Lyft, you know, you have people who are taking Uber and Lyft and using those types of services efficiently, as opposed to wasting a lot of gas and creating a lot of traffic, circling around the block for 10 minutes looking for a parking spot. And I can't think of great examples at the moment, but you have a lot of apps that are just enabling us to get more information, which enables us to be more efficient in our day-to-day lives. So there are pros and cons with the technology, in terms of maybe critics would say that we're alienating ourselves with our mobile technology, but on the other hand, we're able to conduct our day-to-day lives more efficiently. So you're asking about technology and day-to-day life, and I feel like there is the big overlap. You can't talk about day-to-day life today without technology, and you can't talk about technology without talking about how it affects our day-to-day life. And I think about my morning: I just went on to my iPhone and opened Google Maps, and put in this address of this farmers market, and Google Maps told me what bus to take.

Yeah, let's say it's 1999, and you want to go to the Durham Farmer's Market.

I'd get lost. [laughs] I can't find it.

What would you have done?

I honestly might have gotten lost. That's somewhat joking, but also somewhat serious. I do remember getting lost more. When you're looking at these paper maps, yeah, you can look at a paper map to get from point A to point B, and you

can use a paper to successfully navigate, but it's just more difficult. So you're more prone to...

You're back to the efficiency, yeah.

You're more prone to...It's funny that you mention that. I do have some pretty salient memories of being lost and having somewhere that I needed to be, and like, calling my parents. [laughs]

Things that only could have happened back then, that wouldn't happen now, right?

Yeah. Whereas now, the minute I'm lost, I just pull up my Google Maps app, and you don't really have to know where you are, you just say "Go from my current location to my destination." Whereas with the paper map, you need to know where you are, figure out where you are at the moment, when you're lost.

Do you remember what it was like using the Internet back then?

It was really slow. We had -- and this was exacerbated by the fact that my parents were pretty cheap -- so when there were maybe better options, like DSL or things of that nature, we still had the dial-up. So I remember the sound that the computer would make.

What was that sound?

It was like, "ERRRR. ERRRRR." And then, I just remember it was slow Internet speed. We always had older computers, so when my dad's office would upgrade their computers, sometimes the employees would be able to take the old computers home for free. So a combination of older computer, slow Internet connection, made the Internet kind of a big frustration for me. And this was just at the moment where the educational community was starting to get on board with technology. So I had a couple of high school teachers in particular who were putting a lot of assignments online, and I was just extraordinarily frustrated because I was just not able to access these assignments due to the slowness of the Internet.

I mention an anecdote from an earlier interview in South Carolina (see Kelly Jayrowe). I thank Michael for his time and end the interview.