

CONSULTANT: Mark Walker
AGE: 55
RESIDENCE: Knoxville, TN
OCCUPATION: Postal clerk
INTERVIEW DATE: July 20, 2016, approx. 9:45 am
LOCATION: Garden City Pier, Garden City, SC

Mr. Walker was visiting the pier with his wife and two kids, ages 8 and 7. He talked to me while his family fished, about five feet away from us. We began with the standard audio introduction.

I am Mark Walker. I am 55. I'll be 56 in 11 days, and we reside in Knoxville, TN.

Happy Birthday.

Thank you.

I've told you a little about what this story is going to be about: people's memories from when it changed from 1999 into 2000. Let's start with that specific night, New Year's Eve. Do you remember where you were and what you were doing?

I was still single at the time. I was dating somebody that is not my wife now. [laughs] A lot of people were freaked – I wasn't worried that much because I figured it was just gonna all work out – the only thing that I did different, I did go ahead and get a full tank of gas just in case something wasn't working right at the gas pump. But we were at a singles, kind of a single's retreat, with some friends at somebody's house. And as a joke, somebody right as it hit midnight turned off all the lights, like we had lost the power [laughs]. And everybody was just like, [shocked] "What happened?"

Yeah, right? Y2K, right?

So it was kind of funny back then.

Wow. So you clearly remember?

Oh, yeah.

And you were with – and I don't want to have to open any wounds here unnecessarily – but you were with somebody that did *not* end up becoming your wife?

Yes, I was with a girl named April. And we were at, like I said, a church thing. We played games at night, and when we got to the countdown, for about five

minutes, everybody just kind of sat and we had somebody -- I didn't know they had someone rig the...flick off all the power and the lights -- but it was kind of funny then.

So it was a church event?

Yes.

If you don't mind me asking, what denomination, what church?

It's Baptist.

Is that a regular thing? Like they had the Watch Night or something like that?

It was just one of the many socials they used to have. Just a way to get friends together. We'd eat somewhere, have a game night, something like that.

Did they usually do something for NYE?

Yes, and this particular one was going to be special, because everybody was going into the 2000s and all that. *[looks at his son]* My son just caught something. Anything Daniel? *[back to the interview]* But it was just something we would periodically do to get together with friends and stuff like that.

How would you say that things have changed? You think back on 1999, going to the new century, how do you think things have changed from then to now?

My goodness. Well, it's been double-edged. Some of the technology has been incredible. I didn't have a cell phone back then, and they were just coming up. Some of the things you can find on the computer and all this stuff now is unbelievable. But then there's also some really bad stuff that is on there too. With all the just, immorality and stuff like that. So it's been double-edged, but there's been a lot of good things that have come out of it, too. Where you can just look up something and *[snaps]* find it like that. I'm showing my age here, but when we were kids in school, we bought encyclopedias, which to your 20 somethings, they have no idea what that is. And that is how we looked up things.

[with a shocked face] **We read newspapers!**

Yes. And I still do.

What were you doing for a living back then?

What I'm doing now. I've been with the post office almost 34 years. I started when I was about 22 there, and back then in 1999, I was on a day shift by then because I started on the night shift. I was running what they call a flat sorter machine, where it would process flats. You'd key in a key code, and a bundle would go where it was supposed to go.

So you've probably noticed things changed at the post office since then?

Automation has...unbelievable, how it can read a bar code. We used to, when I was first hired in, we would, a letter would go by a little belt and would keep three numbers per second. Now, you just put a machine on there, and it just rips right through them and just reads a bar code and sends it to where it's supposed to go. And I'm just...I'm amazed that something like that could possibly exist.

Do you remember preparations and people's thoughts about the Y2K bug at the time? Especially since you were in the post office.

Yeah, they were curious how things were gonna come over because we punched a clock. Is this gonna like flip back to 1900 instead going to 2000? Is this going to work out right? People were worried, like, "What if things just stop and we don't get paid?" [laughs] So they were wondering, like, how is this really gonna work? I just figured...I never really got worried. We had some people that I knew, they had like, built stuff out in the middle of nowhere and had some canned goods in case...They wanted to be somewhere they could go and have food in case everybody went kind of nuts about everything. But I wasn't really that worried that we couldn't figure it all out. Because we all had manual can openers where we could open up a can of food and eat it.

So you weren't tanking up the car, and taking cash out of the bank?

No, not really. Not really. I just pulled up that day and thought, "Eh, let's do this, but I think everything will work out just fine."

I ask where he was living at the time, and Mark talks about how he has lived in Knoxville his entire life. He met his wife there.

So do you remember people in the area actually thinking the world was going to end?

Oh, absolutely. Yeah. They had signed [?]. ...there are some outlying towns that are very rural, and like I said, they had some, they were going to...they had built a cabin in the middle of nowhere. They'd stocked some food and some lanterns, and bought all kinds of stuff, like some type of survival mode or something like that.

You remember to talking to any of those people after it came and went, and nothing had happened?

I wanted to give them a hard time, but I didn't [laughs]. Because it was just kind of funny, you know, you're just kind of in this for yourself, then. I guess they started to think, "Well nobody is listening to us, so we're going to be some of the survivors." And I was like, "Well, have at it."

What about the next day? Do you remember anything, like, after midnight?

[pause] Well, being a college football fan, the next day was New Year's Day, so we were watching bowl games all day. And it wasn't that far along that we played the University of North Carolina because we were the Tennessee Volunteers.

I remember that, I think.

Yeah, I hated that game.

Mark recalls the controversial ending to the game, in which the referees overturned a call and UNC won. We talk about the UT football championship in 1998 and UT's slow rise back to respectability.

So last question. When you think back on 1999, do you remember some of your first experiences with like, the internet, trying to send an email, or getting a cell phone?

I did. I was one of these latter day people to adopt anything. I got my first iPhone two weeks ago [we both laugh].

I shouldn't laugh at that.

I bought a computer that had an email capacity...I could have [*incredulously*] six different email addresses [laughs]. And that was it. It was an old...oh goodness, I forgot what it was. It was like a Macintosh 320 or something like that. I bought it from a friend for like 75 bucks because they were getting a much more modern computer, and at least I had where I could send an email to my brother, so -- he's a foreign missionary -- so I could email him in the Philippines. So that was kind of cool.

That must have been crazy, the first couple of times --

He was one of the six addresses I got to keep [laughs]. That I chose to keep. It would only hold six email addresses.

Wow. What about cell phone? Do you remember when you first started using a cell phone?

That was good. My dad was starting to be in declining health, and they had called me at work one day, and nobody answered the phone, and I thought he had fallen down a flight up steps. So I was like, "I gotta have this all the time." And that was just amazing, that you could push a couple of buttons and you could talk to somebody across the world. I still don't understand that.

While you're standing on the pier, if you want to...

Yeah, really. It's just like, good grief. I mean, he's in Malaysia right now, and I'm going like, "I can push one or two buttons, and I'm calling him." I don't know how this works, but I use it.

I share a story with Mark about telling my kids about the days before cell phones; having to walk and knock on a stranger's door if you got flat tire in the middle of the nowhere, how my kids were aghast at the thought of this. I mention that my daughter is seven years old and will probably want a cell phone soon. Mark tells me his daughter is also seven and his son is eight.

That's actually a good question. What is the age that you think kids should be able to get a cell phone?

Oh goodness. Um... 10 or 12, but I'm not going to tell my kids that. [laughs]

I don't think they heard you.

I don't know, 10 or 12 years old, I guess, because there's just too much stuff that they could accidentally get into. Like they might find some porn or something. I don't want to be exposed to that, because... sooner or later they're going to see something in school or something, but I want to keep them as pure as long as I can.

I thank him for his time and end the interview.