

≈ 1 ≈

Chapter 1 - Growing Up

Hello, my name is Charles Edward Casteel, Sr. I was born on November 5, 1947 at 3:55 A.M. in the Tampa Negro Hospital, Tampa, FL. For, I was the fifth and last child of Roosevelt and Gladys Casteel.

The Projects

We moved into the projects in 1952. It was the year that my mother was hospitalized. Due to her illness, we were raised by our father who managed to do a magnificent job. None of us ever got in trouble with the criminal justice system. All of us finished high school, and I was the lucky one and first to attend college and graduate.



North Boulevard Homes (Projects) - 2003

Dad worked long days six days a week for about \$60 a week. He had no choice but for us to stay in the projects. The projects, North Boulevard Homes of the Tampa Housing Authority, were a great place to live. We had solar powered hot water and lived in an all brick row house. We had no grass nor flowers in the yard, just dirt. If it were a cloudy day, forget about hot water. We could get by during the summer, but in the winter, we had to boil water on the stove in order to take a bath. We only had one bathroom, three bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen. We also had a washing machine and a natural clothes dryer, i.e. the sun and a clothes line.

During the winter, we had gas heat to keep us warm or kill us. Yes, those gas heaters would leak gas and kill many of our neighbors, friends, and others. It was very frightening to go to bed at night because you might not wake up. Therefore, to stay alive, we always left the bathroom window open no matter how cold it was. Can you imagine having to take a bath and the bathroom is *'Ice Cold'*?

The neighbors helped raised us too. They would discipline us if we got out of line or became disrespectful. They would literally 'beat' the hell out of us with a switch (a small tree branch with the leave removed) and would tell dad that they had to beat us. Well you gusted it, we got another beaten from dad. The same was true if we got in trouble in school. We did not have the nerve to do something bad at school which would have required dad to make an unplanned visit to school. We had to be home (in the house) every night before the street lights came on. Street lights came on at 6:00 PM. If you weren't home by 6:00 PM, you can imagine what happen. Dad would cook dinner sometimes. As we got older, my brother, Franklin would also cook. Most of the times, dad's girlfriend would cook extra food to feed us. We would bring our plates down the street to her house to get something to eat and bring it back home to eat. I remember one day, I was very so hungry I ran home as fast I could with my plate and was "clothed-lined". I did a 360. The plate went one way, and I went another. I never did get anything to eat that day.

We didn't have nice furniture. Some of the furniture in our living room was made for outdoors. We took pride in our place though. Not ashamed of anything. We always had friends over simply

because, we were the first on the block to have a TV. We even had a grand piano that my dad got from somewhere. It was too big to get in the house, so we left it on the front porch. I tried to learn to play the piano. It didn't work but I did manage and learned to play the boogie-woogie though. At night, I could swear I could hear the piano playing by itself. That thing was spooky!

I had a lot of friends while growing up. I was always the boss until I got my behind whooped by Nathaniel one day. We played tackle football, stickball, cork ball, marbles, horseshoe, and occasionally went downtown. We went downtown not to shop (because we didn't have any money) but to play with the toys in Maas Brothers Department store. Yes, the store manager didn't mind us playing with the toys at all. When we finished playing, we simply put them back on the shelf. Sometimes, we would play with them all day and nobody would say a word.

Damn, we would fight all the times but we always remained friends. There were no drugs or crime in our neighborhood. The worst thing you did back then was to smoke a cigarette. We didn't need a key to the house, because we never locked the doors. Yep, nobody ever locked his or her doors. Both the front and back doors would be wide open and nobody ever had anything thing stolen. On very hot days, I would go down to the river and watch my friends swim. We couldn't go to the city's swimming pool because we were black. Nope, I did not swim. I can't swim now and I couldn't swim then. I was simply scared to death to get in that river. I saw a lot of friends and others drown. It was a terrifying site to see your friends fished from the river by the Fire Department. Crabs had eaten their eyes out and their bodies had swollen like a balloon. Seeing that site many times was enough for me and to this day, I am still scared to swim. Yeah, I'll go to the beach and stick a toe into the water. That's as far as I would go.

It All Began in the Eighth Grade

The year was 1960. I was in the eighth grade at Howard W. Blake High School. On the first day in my math class, the teacher, Ms. Beatrice Stewart, gave us a test to see how math we knew so she could determine how to adjust her level of teaching for this class.



HW Blake High School

Guess what, I made a flat 100 on that test. Ms. Stewart was so proud of me because no one had ever made a 100 on her test in the twenty something years that she had been teaching. She told all of the teachers about “*Charles Casteel*” and began to brag to everyone about me. When I heard and saw how happy she was there was no way that I could ever let her down. Therefore, from that point to this day, Math became my favorite subject. Ms. Stewart was more than a teacher to me. She was a foster mother to me as well. She would come to the projects every Saturday morning and pick me up to work for her. I did her lawn, clean rooms that she rented out, landscaped her yards, painted, and did just about anything she needed done. Working for her, I would make about \$20 a week. Twenty bucks a week were more than enough to buy all of my school clothes, a pair of Chuck Taylor’s, have money to take my girlfriend to the movies and still have enough money left to buy a hot dog, popcorn, and a soda.

One summer, I guess I was about 15 or 16 years old, she had a huge job that needed to get done. She told me to find so help and I did. We were tasked to remodel an old dilapidated house that she owned. I hadn’t ever done a job of that magnitude. I didn’t matter to her. She had complete confidence in us. We knocked down walls, rebuilt and plastered them with chicken wire and cement, rebuilt the front porch, painted the inside and exterior of the house, and more. This job

took the whole summer. I don't recall what she paid us back then, but I can tell you, I thought we were rich. I think we were paid about \$400 each. Now, I am rich.

I got to know, her husband, Mr. Garland V. Stewart, Assistant Superintendent of Schools Hillsborough County, FL, and her two sons very well. Her entire family treated me as if I were part of their family. Mr. Stewart was very impressed with me. He liked my personality, my work habits, and the fact that I was a good student. He began to talk to me about college and wanted me to become an engineer. He would say "I want you to get one of those \$7,000 engineering job." Mr. Stewart became a foster father to me as well and he is the primary reason that I am a member of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. He never mentioned the fraternity to me but I always saw the Omega shield and an Omega Pledge Lamp in his den. I didn't what they were at that time until I saw the same shield when I went off to college.

I knew math so much that I attended math classes with students in higher grades than me and I outperformed all of them.

First Time I Made the Honor Roll

It is now September 1962 and I am now in the tenth grade. One day during homeroom, I heard my name over the public address system. The guidance counselor was reading the names of the students who had made the Honor Roll. When I heard my name called, I couldn't believe it. I had no idea that I made the Honor Roll. I had three A's and three C's. I didn't know that was



Me, High School Senior, 1965

enough to make the honor roll. Those grades came out to be a 3.0 grade point average (GPA). Wow!! I was very excited to hear my name being called. Look here, from that day on, I made the Honor Roll every six weeks until I graduated from high school.

In May 1963, I was inducted into the National Honor Society. I graduated from high school in 1965 as an Honor Student with numerous awards and one award that I will always cherish, the Straight 'A' Student Award. I had no plans on going to college. Even though I had a good average, I did not score high enough on the Florida State-wide Test for high school seniors. There wasn't a SAT test back then. A score of 300 or more was considered passing. I think I made 160 something.

How I Got to College

During the spring of '65, just before we graduated, several of my classmates were going to college. They were going to schools like Morehouse College, Southern University, Bethune-Cookman College, Florida A & M University (FAMU), Edward Waters, Gibbs Junior College, and a host of others. I know my grades were better than most of them. I never applied to a college. Because I knew my dad did not have the money.

After I had graduated from high school, I told my dad that I wanted to go to college. He replied, "Boy, I don't have any money to send you to college". I kept bugging him just about every day. Then one day he said "Get in the car and let's go to Tallahassee." He drove straight to FAMU and went to the dean's office upon our arrival. He introduced himself and said, "I want my boy to go

to college and I don't have any money!" The dean was Rev. Moses G. Miles. Rev. Miles looked at me and said "Son, what's your name? What kind of grades do you have?" I told him "I have a 3.5 GPA and I want to major in math". He looked up my score of that state-wide test. "Well, since you have good grades, I'll get you in." He assisted me in getting a student loan and he got me a job in the girl's dormitory making \$50 a month. Rev. Miles looked me straight in the eye and said "If I have any trouble with you in the girl's dormitory, I will kick you out of school. Do you understand me?" Other guys had worked in the girl's dormitory and were kicked out in less than a month. I listened to Rev. Miles and had that job in the girl's dormitory all of my four years at FAMU.

Every month when I got paid, I had to endorse my check over to the school. I didn't get to spend a penny from those checks. Believe it or not, the student loan of \$1,500 and the \$50 per month were sufficient to pay for all tuition and fees, room and board, and even buy all my text books for each trimester.

≈ 3 ≈

Chapter 3 - From Last to First

Rochester, NY

Welcome to Rochester! It is June 9, 1969, my first day in Rochester, NY as I was to start my first professional job at Eastman Kodak. I am a long way from Tampa. This is the furthest I been from home in my entire life. Kodak put us up in a hotel until we could find an apartment. Kodak's policy was one week's pay equals one month's rent. We eventually found a two-bedroom apartment in Greece, NY (just outside Rochester). I am 1,276 miles from Tampa and I don't know a single person. Several days later, there was a note on my car from the property manager (a nice white lady) saying that a black couple had just moved in and I think you should meet them? Well, we did and we got along just fine. I think his last name was Lamb. Who just happens to be a Que.

Adjusting to Rochester was very difficult. We couldn't find any grits, bacon (they only had Canadian bacon), no sugar cane syrup for our pancakes, no collard greens, nothing. Essentially, there was no soul food. Hell, they had never heard of a sweet potato pie nor sweet tea.

Not knowing Rochester, we would always go for an afternoon or weekend drive in and around Rochester. Low and behold, we found "Soulville". A part of Rochester called "Joseph" was where the black folks lived. Hallelujah! We could find some soul food. Not much though.

On a bright sunny day in October, I was washing my car then I felt something cold hitting my arm. I looked at it and it melted. Some more stuff hit me again, same results. Oh my goodness, it is snow! This is the first time that I had ever seen snow. I was so excited but my excitement didn't last long. The snow kept coming, and coming. I don't think it stopped until April. The snow up there is measured in feet not inches. Then it started to get cold, very cold. Hell, I didn't have an overcoat. I was not prepared for what's about to come. I went out and bought the biggest overcoat that I could find. That thing was full-length and contained a hood and had fur inside. It looked like I was wearing a grizzly bear. Now, I was ready for winter. Bring it on!

During the winter, you need snow tires and chains on your car in order to get around Rochester. Sometimes, it snowed so much even snow tires and chains weren't enough. Therefore, one day, I tried walking to work. My job was about a mile away. When I started out, I decided to cut across an open field to take a shortcut to work. When I reached the field and took my first step, my foot sank until the snow was up to my knees. Walking to work didn't work either. I had to get to work so I tried walking to work again but this time I bought some snowshoes (looking like tennis rackets). I eventually got to work but I abandon walking to work from that day on. I was forced to learn how to drive in heavy snow. I had never experienced that much snow and cold weather. I soon found out that Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse were in the so-called "snow belt" of upstate New York. Snow in Rochester was just as common as sand on a beach in Florida. I was downtown shopping and I saw this guy walking down the street. I looked and looked and then I called out "Herbert". It was Herbert Smith. We grew up together in the projects, attended

the same high school, went to FAMU, and were fraternity brothers. I was shocked to see a homeboy in Rochester. Herbert had taken a job with Xerox. He hadn't found an apartment yet, so we invited Herb and his family to live with us until they find a place. This was a real blessing. Now, I have a homeboy in Rochester. Life in Rochester just got a little better.

Buying My First Car

Living Greece, NY and now working downtown, I depended on the bus to get to and from work. After about a month on the job, while waiting for the bus to



1967 Ford LTD

go home, I noticed a car rotating on a pedestal about 20 feet above the ground. I walked over and looked at the car. It was a used 1967 Ford LTD. I kept looking up at the car then a salesman came out and said, "Can I help you?" I said "I want that car, and I don't have any credit because I just graduated from college". He said, "Sorry, I can't help you". I replied "How in the world is someone supposed to have credit when just graduated from college. Somebody has to be first. I just got this job with Kodak." He said, "Hold It, Hold It! You work for Kodak? Why didn't you say that the first time?" He had that car lower and I was on my way to buying my first car. However, there was another problem, I didn't have a down payment. The deal was off. Maybe not, the salesman got creative and called a loan company. They came over to the dealer and I gave me a loan for \$500. That loan became my down payment. I ended up with a car note of \$1,995 and a \$500 loan. My car payment was \$59 a month and \$16 a month for the loan. I kept that car for five years and put over 120,000 miles on it. It was a good, reliable car, very quiet,

and smooth. In fact, Ford aired TV commercials where Hugh Downs will be in the back seat with a jeweler who cut a diamond perfectly while riding in the LTD.

Learning To Code



*Kodak Corporate
Headquarters*

I was hired as a computer programmer trainee. That year, Kodak hired 600 computer programmer trainees and I was the only black. Trainees were from a variety of schools including Rochester Institute of Technology, Syracuse, Cornell, State University of New York, to name a few. This was a six-month program where we learned to program the IBM 7080 mainframe computer in languages such as K-Koder (Kodak's version of the assembler language), 11-digital actual (a machine language), and COBOL (the top programming language for business).



IBM 7080 Mainframe Computer

Things were not going so well for me. I didn't understand one damn thing about computer programming. In fact, I did not know what a computer was. We didn't have computers at FAMU at that time. My co-workers would tease me almost every day as the affirmative action guy. They said affirmative action was the only reason that I was hired. They would call me, "Oh dumb Casteel". I used to go home and cry at night and was afraid that I would be fired any day. This went on and on for quite a while. I just didn't get it. I had no clue about computer programming.

I felt really bad about my ineptness as a computer programmer trainee. In 1967, an article in Harvard Educational Review stated that “Black colleges should be closed. They are an academic disaster area.”¹ Here I am at Kodak validating this report for I was ranked dead last in class.

About a third of the way through training one afternoon, the instructor was explaining how to flowchart your computer program logic. He was diagramming how data is input and how it flows through your program, the processes that will be performed on the data, the conditions (switches) where decisions will be made to perform a task do this or that or branch off to somewhere else, and how to output the final results to magnetic tape. Watching the instructor flowcharting the logic and BOOM! It all came to me. I just had an epiphany. I completely understood everything that he was doing and then I realized what computer programming was all about. I shouted out to the instructor, “Is this what computer programming is about?” He said, “Yes!” I slammed both fists on my desk as hard as I could, BAM! “Well, I’ll be damn!” I had just connected programming to mathematics, i.e. solving problems and using logic. Low and behold over the next three months, I went from dead last to number ONE. I was the only one most of the times to have my programs working 100%. Now, I said to my co-workers, “Who is the dummy now?” They had to come to me for help. Ha! Ha! “*So much for the Harvard Article about black colleges*”. I outperformed everybody in the training class and gained my confidence to take my seat at the table of success. I was indeed very proud of myself and I never looked back for I was a bona fide computer programmer at a Fortune 500 company.

¹ The American Negro College”: Christopher Jencks and David Riesman’s Spring 1967 Harvard Educational Review Article

Called to Active Duty

We stayed in Rochester until I was ordered to active duty to the U. S. Army. My six months were up in December. I had to report to Fort Belvoir, VA on January 6, 1970. We packed up our belongings and were on our way to Tampa. Everything we had fitted in a 4x8 U-Haul trailer. I had to take the family to Tampa before I reported to active duty. The trip from Rochester to Tampa was the scariest in my life. It had been snowing for days and I had no choice but to get on the road. Would you know, it snowed so badly, it took over 12 hours just to get to Syracuse that was only 90 miles away from Rochester, so we spent the night at a Holiday Inn.

The next day and still snowing, we were on our way on I-81 south. The snow along the I-81 was piled so high, it looked like we were driving through a tunnel. Most of the time, my top speed was 35 mph. The car would hit a patch of ice and we would spin a little. I am scared to death. My two months old daughter is being held in her mother's arms in the front seat (There were no car seats at that time). The U-Haul is swirling back-and-forth. Snow is blowing in blizzard conditions. The wind is howling. Once in a while I-81 became clear and trucks would pass us with snow blowing from their roofs that practically blinded me. There were overturned tractor-trailer trucks and cars for miles along the interstate. I-81 in New York and Pennsylvania were curvy and ran right through and around mountains. There wasn't a straight road anywhere going through those mountains. It took another 16 hours to get to Baltimore from Syracuse and over 28 hours of driving time spanning two days to reach Baltimore from Rochester. When I reached the Baltimore area, there was no sign of snow. I made up my mind right then and there that I am

not stopping until I we got to Tampa. Hell, I don't even remember stopping for gas or getting something to eat. This was a trip that I would never forget.

≈ 5 ≈

Chapter 5 - Have It Their Way or Else

Leaving active duty, the Army paid for my relocation to Miami, where Burger King Corporate Office is located. We rented a three bedroom house and I was set to start my new job.

It was January 8, 1973, my first day at Burger King. I reported to my new boss, the Director, Data Processing and he said, “We have a problem with the General Ledger System. Go down to the computer room and see what is happening.” I didn’t get a chance to see my desk nor being introduced to my



*Burroughs 3500 Mainframe
Computer*

co-workers. I went to the computer room to investigate. Burger King was using a Burroughs 3500 mainframe computer with punched cards and magnetic tape. No disk for random access was being utilized. When the General Ledger would run, it would terminate without producing any output whatsoever. Why would the system just terminate? I spent about 23 hours non-stop in the computer room, reading COBOL code line by line, program after program, and with no documentation. As part of my forensic computer code investigation, I found out that if the General Ledger did not balance, it would not proceed to the next scheduled program, so it terminated. I had to review every transaction (about 2,000 punched-cards) that had been posted

to the General Ledger and manually total each debit and credit to find why and where it was out-of-balance. I am literally eyeballing every punch card in the General Ledger Master file. Yes, at that time, the master file consisted of a long deck of punched cards. About, 7:00 A. M. the next door, I found the mistake. The General Ledger was out of balance by 43 cents. I made the correction, inserted the changed punched-card in its proper place and the General Ledger ran like a champ. Having solved the problem, it is now about 8:00 A. M. and I decided to go home to get some sleep because I had been in the computer room all night. As I was walking out of the door, I ran into the director, I told him the problem was resolved. He said, “Where are you going?” I told him I had worked all night and I am going home to get some sleep. He didn’t care and made me stay at work.

Right at that moment, I concluded that Burger King was not a good place to work. In fact, what scared me the most about Burger King was that if you made a programming mistake, you were fired! You were not given time to find and correct a simple programming error. I am now stressed out to the max. My heart is pounding at 100 beats per minute and I am nervous as hell. I am too scared to test or run any of my programs. I would read every line of code over and over, and desk checking everything. I kept checking each line of code over and over until I *memorized* every single line of code that I had written. I remember one day, my cubicle mate was asked to see the director. When she returned, she began packing her things. I said, “What’s going on?” She said, “My program blew up (aborted) last night and I was fired”. Now, my heart is beating like crazy. I am nervous and just terrified to run any of my programs.

I had done everything I could do. I had written all of the program, desk checked everything, and compiled the new General Ledger System that was to be used by Burger King's franchisees. There were about five or six computer programs that comprised the system. The time had arrived, it was time to test my computer programs. I submitted them and it was the next day when I found out that they had performed pretty well with the test data that I used. Computer time was a premium back then. You were lucky if your program ran at all. Most of the time, your program will be just sitting in the queue. It could be two or three days before your program was compiled or executed. I was very happy with the results. I made some minor changes but I needed to find a way to speed up the testing. When the new General Ledger System would run, it took about six hours to complete. The General Master File had thousands of vendor transactions to process. I needed a way to speed up the testing. Bang! I have an idea to speed up the testing. I added a patch to just process the first 100 vendor transactions. Therefore, with high confidence, I submitted the test with the patch. Low and behold, I got the results back the same day and everything worked well. Now, I had to put the new system in production. That was on a Friday afternoon. About 2:00 AM Sunday, I was awakened by a call from the Burger King Computer room, "Sir, we have a problem with your system. It is in a loop and it is printing one transaction per page". "Terminate it now! I will be right there" I said. When I arrived at the computer room, the computer operator had let the system run until it had printed 26 boxes of two-ply paper. In addition, he had decollated all 26 boxes and it filled the entire computer room, i.e. floor-to-ceiling and wall-to-wall. It was a mess. I found the mistake in a few seconds. I simply forgot to remove the patch. Therefore, when the system went passed the 100th vendor transaction, it went into a loop.

It's now Monday and I had to go to work. I eased into my cubicle and pretended not had happen. At about 9:00 AM, I could hear that the director had come in. In about 15 minutes, he came to my cubicle and said, "Come go with me!" Oh shit!! This is it! He is going to fire me. I am nervous, scared to death, perspiring, my heart was beating faster than the Marching 100 fast cadence, you name it. When we got to his office, he closed the door and said, "I heard about you fiasco Saturday night. Don't let that happen again!" Whoa, he didn't fire me! I don't know why. I still had a job at Burger King. As time went on the job became more and more stressful until I transferred to another department, Advertising. That's right, I was writing slogans for Burger King. No, I wasn't the creator of "Have It Your Way!" I had now been at Burger King for six months and it was time for me to leave. I searched for jobs in and around Miami with no luck. I just gave up searching for a job in Miami so I called the colonel from my Army days. I asked, do you guys have any job openings up there? He said, "You want to come back? We will be glad to have you". Thank you sir!

Now, we had accumulated enough furniture to fill a three bedroom house so I called a long distance moving company for the move back to DC. I get a price quote from Bekins that was way out of my price range for the move from Miami to DC. I didn't know what to do. The job at Burger King wasn't working for me. I couldn't find another job in Miami. I was desperate so I called the colonel and thanked him for the job offer but I can't afford the move back to DC. He understood and thanked me for wanting to come back. About two or three days later, he called

and said, “The Army will pay for your move back to DC and we will put you up in a hotel for 30 days until you can find a place to stay”. Hallelujah! We were on our way back to DC for good.