

Methodist University Community Oral History Project  
Methodist University  
Fayetteville, NC

**John Matthew Deemer**

Interview Conducted by  
Patrick W. O'Neil  
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Interview of

**JOHN MATTHEW DEEMER**

Interviewed by

**PATRICK W. O'NEIL**

0:04

**O'NEIL:** Okay.

0:04

**DEEMER:** Alright.

0:05

**O'NEIL:** And those levels seem just fine.

0:06

**DEEMER:** Okay, good.

0:08

**O'NEIL:** My name is Patrick O'Neil, I'm here in Fayetteville, North Carolina, outside the Coliseum, on March 9th, 2016, and I'm here with you. If I could ask you to state your full name for the record?

0:19

**DEEMER:** John Matthew Deemer.

0:21

**O'NEIL:** Excellent. So we're here outside a Donald Trump rally, where he will be speaking tonight at I think seven o'clock.

0:28

**DEEMER:** Seven o'clock, correct.

0:30

**O'NEIL:** So I have, if you don't mind, a few questions about your background, about your life before you came here.

0:35

**DEEMER:** Absolutely.

0:36

**O'NEIL:** Could you tell me about your childhood? You said you were born in Ohio?

0:37

**DEEMER:** Childhood, I was born in Akron, Ohio. My dad: horse trainer.

0:42

**O'NEIL:** Really?

0:42

**DEEMER:** Worked for Firestone, as a matter of fact, around Bath, Ohio, there.

0:46

**O'NEIL:** My grandpa worked for Firestone.

0:46

**DEEMER:** And he trained for over forty years, hunter/jumper. He had three horses on the United States Equestrian Team. And then, as an adult, I went onto the racetrack side of things, and became a racetrack photographer. Self-taught—well, I actually learned from the guy who founded the business. The company name was Turf Photos, and all through the eighties and early nineties I worked for Turf Photos. Track photographer for thoroughbred horses, and all the racetracks in Florida and New Jersey. So we would summer in New Jersey, winter down in Florida.

1:25

**O'NEIL:** And did you have a family at this time? This was just you going up and down?

1:28

**DEEMER:** This was just me. And then the family started coming in. An ex-girlfriend of mine. You know, one of those, “oops,” you know, and this was after we broke up. We were gonna get married, but she told me we broke up for a reason, so, support the kids monetarily. That’s the second chapter of my life. I ended up going into the military. Recruiters tell you, you know—. My recruiter was really good. He never sugarcoated anything, he says, “you’re not gonna make a lot of money.” But the kids will be covered medically. We had found out we had twins. We were pregnant with twins.

2:07

**O'NEIL:** Congratulations.

2:07

**DEEMER:** So, two for one, yeah. They're twenty-three, now, beautiful, living in Gainesville with their mom, you know, going to school. Very proud of them. So that's what got me into the Navy. And at thirty-two I went to boot camp.

2:23

**O'NEIL:** Wow! That is old for boot camp!

2:24

**DEEMER:** [Laughs.] That is old!

2: 25

**O'NEIL:** Could your body take it? I'm not sure mine could.

2:27

**DEEMER:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. It was a piece of cake, actually, for me, once I got in shape, you know. And then I hit the deck running. I landed on deck of the U.S.S. *George Washington*. That was my first ship. I was carrier-fleet, Navy, for ten years, and then went into the reserves for another seven years.

2:45

**O'NEIL:** So, timeline: you were in the Navy—

2:48

**DEEMER:** From '94 til '04, active duty. And then from '04 'til about 2013, I was in the reserves, in the Navy Seabees [United States Naval Construction Forces]. Navy didn't have a job for me in the reserves as a Airedale, you know, I was on the flight deck of carriers. And while I was in the Navy, that's when I got my college degree through Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. I figured I would mate the flight experience, you know, or actually flight-deck experience, with a college degree. But, you know, most of the jobs that they're looking for with my degree, they want flight certificates. And I never flew, I just worked on the flight decks. But I did get a job after Navy here in Fayetteville running the fuel system. My job in the Navy was a aviation fuels professional. So that's what I did for ten years in the fleet. And other than college, my military experience got me that job for a contractor here on base. We ran the fuel system. And just recently this last year they redid the contracts, wiping my position out. They no longer needed a mechanic. And they said, "Thank you," you know. After eight years, I just got the big pink slip, no severance, nothing, and was just let go.

4:06

**O'NEIL:** That was it.

4:08

**DEEMER:** That was it. So with my skill set, you know, and college background, military trained, you would think I'd be marketable and could find a job, but where I live, in Moore County, it's really tough. So the best you could hope for is a minimum-wage job, you know. So I feel really underpaid now, as it were. But the frustration of the job market and everything, and where this country is headed—. I've always been kind of a political junkie, I love to follow politics. I've always been pretty much a

Republican, and like to talk politics with my friends at work and stuff, and ask them why they're—you know, I never say, "you're wrong," but I just like to state my principles. I like a smaller government, you know, beefed-up military, like [Ronald] Reagan said. Reagan was the first guy I voted for. I was eighteen years old and he was running for reelection, I think, and that's what got me into it. And, you know, everybody thinks he was the most wondrous president. Which, in memory, he really—he turned the country around. But when he was running, he was hit with a lot of opposition. Even George [Herbert Walker] Bush, Senior, you know, used to call his economic plan—

5:28

**O'NEIL:** Voodoo economics.

5:29

**DEEMER:** —voodoo economics, exactly right. So, you know, he actually—he met with a lot of resistance. So this is the first non-politician running that I've really gotten excited about. This is the very first rally I've ever been to in my entire life. I know about Donald Trump. Being in the racetrack, doing racetrack photography in New Jersey, you know, they call him The Donald up there—.

5:54

**O'NEIL:** Did you ever meet him?

5:55

**DEEMER:** Never met him personally, nope. Never got to meet him. Always seen his, you know, his products, as it were. I actually had a Coke in Trump Tower, you know, it cost I think six dollars and I about choked to death—this was back in the eighties. We were in Manhattan buying photo supplies

and stuff, and I'm, like, "Wow, look at this." And Oprah Winfrey said a long time ago, people aren't what they say, people are what they do. Politicians say a lot, but then we elect them, and we hope and pray, and they get into office and it's really a lot of the same stuff. And the definition of insanity is, you know, doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results. We keep voting these people into office; we're expecting different results, but we don't get it. This guy, he's an outsider. He is our one-percenter for the people. That's what I like to say about him. A lot of people will argue, yeah, it's the big corporations that own the politicians and stuff. Well, in a way, they probably do. You know, the lobbyists and everything, the special interests, and the people in D.C., they got a cake job, a really cake job. I've been in the military, and you tell me what these guys make; I'm like, "Are you kidding me?" You know, we're protecting the shores in the Navy. I work twelve-hour days, these cats work, what, a hundred and thirty-some days a year, and they're pulling down, you know, ten years' salary of mine in one year. Trump is a billionaire. So nobody can buy him. Nobody can pull his strings, as it were. And like they say, you know, the one-percenters, they control D.C. We have no voice. But guess what: this is a one-percenter and he's listening to the people. He really does. That's what I believe, you know. He has the people's, you know—. He really does love this country, he wants to make the country great again, as his whole mantra is, and I'm all behind him. You know, you gotta do something different. You gotta shake it up if you want change. And this is definitely change. [Deemer's step-son approaches.]

7:59

**O'NEIL:** [To Deemer:] Do you need to take a break and figure something out, or—? [Minor exchange ensues.] So, can I ask about the politics you were raised with? Were your parents political? Were they engaged in politics?

8:16

**DEEMER:** My mom. She told me—. They never really discussed much, you know, Irish-Catholic household. My mom came from the Darby clan, as it were, in Akron, Ohio. She had seven brothers. Nine kids in that family and they had one bathroom in that old Darby house on Flint Avenue. Back in the day, I guess that was [a] livable arrangement, but—. My grandfather on my mom's side was the quintessential Archie Bunker. You just never argued with Pop, you know. He was the old Irishman that—. He worked for, I can't remember—it was a factory in Akron that made airplane clutch assemblies. So apparently during the war they had a really good Christmas, mom told me, she had fond memories of that. And never denounced, you know, America, or Americana. I remember my dad, when he was dating my mom, he used to take fiendish pleasure in injecting a seed, if you will, to, like, one of my uncles. Uncle Jimmy was the only one dumb enough to argue with Pop. And he would say something like, "Well, you know, the Germans"—this was back in the fifties—"the Germans always had better technology than we do." And so he would say, "Pop, you know the Germans have better technology than we do." Well, you don't say that, you know, with this guy. And it would erupt the whole house, and then he would say, "Okay, are you ready? Let's go out on our date." He would just take fiendish pleasure in stirring that argument up. But they never discussed a whole lot of politics. I remember being young, asking my dad, "What are we? Are we Republicans or are we Democrats?" you know, and I'm trying to—about Ian's age, there—trying to figure things out. He says, "Well, we're Republican." But mom told me she voted for [John F.] Kennedy. She loved Kennedy, and the fact that he was Catholic, you know, back then, and my mom really kind of looked like Jackie Kennedy back in the day. I think she styled herself after her. They thought that was the, you know, the best family ever, so. She said that was the time she broke ranks, and voted, you know, Democrat.

10:15

**O'NEIL:** So can I ask, when you think of politicians you've known—you mentioned Reagan—what did you think of Reagan versus the second Bush [George Walker Bush] versus Obama? Where do these people stand?

10:25

**DEEMER:** Reagan injected—. Well, I was staunch supporter of the Bushes. I know the Bush family, I have met them personally. Barbara Bush was the sponsor of my ship, the *George Washington*. So we got to see her many, many times come out to the ship. So I was kind of a fan of hers. But, you know, as the internet gives you access to more and more information, the Bush family, who I've always been a fan of—and I will never say anything poorly of the Bush family—but even Reagan, you know, with the inset of this new world government that they were trying to instill, they thought it was gonna, you know. I'm all about the free trade, but you can see, you know, the behind-the-door—. It's just fraught with—it could be corrupt. United Nations: I've never agreed. I've never been a backer of the United Nations, even though I've got many awards, being in the military, from U.N. I just think it's fraught with corruption. Greed corrupts. And this is where we have a billionaire—how can he be corrupted? You know, he's already wealthy.

11:38

**O'NEIL:** So, can I ask—your military experience, how does that factor into your politics, or does it, or does it not?

11:44

**DEEMER:** Not much. You know, I mean, we would discuss, you know, in berthing and stuff like that, somebody'd be for so-and-so—or, even topics of discussion, like affirmative action, that's a big hotbed

item, you know, with, you know, all my black friends and stuff. And in the military, that's another thing with the race issue. You know, they try and make a big deal out of it; in the military it's nonexistent. Okay, so how does the military get it to be nonexistent, but you see these craziness, you know, on the news. And I'm like, what is wrong with people? And there is a visceral feeling underlying, and there's a lot of people that, I guess, you know, really are upset. But in the military you never see it.

12:29

**O'NEIL:** So let me ask, what's the difference? You said—I've lost your words—you said it's nonexistent. What's the difference between nonexistent race and the other thing you're talking about? What does that mean, exactly?

12:44

**DEEMER:** Yeah, they're just the little brothers I never wanted, as it were, because I was late in life joining the military. But, you know, you're side-by-side with these people. You spend literally twice as much time with your military comrades as you ever did your family growing up or even since, you know, with your wife and kids. I mean, twelve-hour shifts, when the ship is underway, you're twenty-four hours a day with these cats. You work with them [a] twelve-hour shift, you go down, you watch movies, you know, you're eating chow together: you really get to know them. You get to feel how they feel. It's a brethren, it really is. I mean, they are my brothers.

13:24

**O'NEIL:** Okay, so what's different out of there?

13:26

**DEEMER:** Well, and guys will come in from outside into the military and start saying things that could be construed as, you know, I don't know, one way or the other, in a racist tone, and it gets squished way before. Even in boot camp, they say, we don't have black or white, we are Navy blue. We're all the same, you know. And that's why they shave your heads, they make us all look alike. It's an indoctrination through boot camp. And just living in the military as long as I did, ten years active duty on those carriers, yeah, we discussed it. You know, we talked about it all the time. And, you know, we would make light of it. It was kind of a subject of joking, almost, you know. I mean, they would say things, you know, like, so-and-so is too white. But he was a black guy, you know, but he was acting different. I just have really good memories of being in the military, and I just miss all my shipmates, you know. They were fun. Really had a good time.

14:35

**O'NEIL:** So what Mr. Trump says about race, do you buy what he says? Do you think—?

14:42

**DEEMER:** I think Trump loves all people. And I remember the media trying to gin up this thing with the [former Ku Klux Klan leader] David Duke connection and stuff. That I can tell you as a fact, it never happened. But it tried to become a thing through the media. And Trump supporters, I guess, know this. You know, they just know this. If you know Donald Trump the man—[actress] Jennifer Hudson, he even put her up in an apartment when her house burned down. You know, there's not a—. If you look at a man's children, it's a good idea on how the man is, and all his children are raging successes, you know, in their own right, that's a good measure, you know, if you ask me, if you're gonna judge a person, somebody whom you don't know. People pick politicians, but do they ever really meet them and get to spend days and days with them? No. So it's kind of a shot in the dark. So, given the latest economic

hassles that the United States has, I mean we're nineteen trillion in debt, and it's just climbing every day, a business man, to me—Trump has been a CEO for over thirty years. That's Chief Executive Officer. What is the President of the United States but chief executive officer of the United States of America? I think we need a good cat that's a good negotiator, that's good in business, that knows when he's getting ripped off and will stop it and change, switch tracks. And I trust that. It makes me sleep at night, you know, knowing that, I mean—. We got two other freshmen senators running against him. [Senators Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz were both in their first terms.] Well, we have a freshman senator that's sitting in the White House right now, and how—you know, how's that working out for us? [Deemer's wife approaches, says, "They won't let us take these in."] Oh, really? [Deemer's wife: "No! I'm like, this is a rally sign, and we can't take it into the rally?"] Oh, we have to buy 'em. Probably have to buy 'em. [Deemer's wife: "No, it's something about, they're afraid we'll fling 'em at people."]

16:35

**O'NEIL:** [Laughs.] Fair enough. The number of things you could fling at people.

16:40

**DEEMER:** Yeah. Yeah.

16:41

**O'NEIL:** So, listen, I don't want to take too much of your time, but I'd be grateful for a couple more minutes.

16:46

**DEEMER:** Sure, sure.

16:47

**O'NEIL:** So, religiously, you say you were raised Catholic—

16:51

**DEEMER:** Raised Catholic.

16:52

**O'NEIL:** Do you still attend?

16:53

**DEEMER:** Well, teenage years, you know how you do the rebellious thing. Mom tried like heck to get us to church. She was devout Catholic, drug us to church every Sunday, catechism class. Then when we were big enough to fight back, "Mom, it's my only day off, come on." And she just got tired of fighting us. And now I've grown, you know, I've been in the military. I don't seriously go to church every Sunday; I do couple times a month, you know, when I feel I need some, you know, some kind of a, I guess, holy healing, as it were. And now it's more just Christian-based, you know. I go to Grace Church that's there in Southern Pines, huge outfit.

17:36

**O'NEIL:** How's that different?

17:38

**DEEMER:** Well, it's very different. I mean, Catholic is, you know, very, very formal, you know. And my dad, he had to convert to Catholicism to marry my mother. I think he was Lutheran when he, you know, first grew up. And he had to convert. And he had to go to these classes for six months of training. And then he had a missal, which was a prayer-book, and it was in Latin, you know. And he loved it and really got into it. But now the Catholic Church has kind of changed their whole core beliefs, I guess. You know, I guess it's not good for business, you gotta change, you know, that kind of thing. So I've been disillusioned so much, you know, with, you know, the, oh my gosh, the accusations of all these Catholic priests and stuff. But my memories as being a Catholic here—. Now we first moved down here to Moore County in 1968, my dad working for Firestone over here. And I remember going to St. Anthony's Catholic Church right in downtown Southern Pines. I have the best memories of that church. We had Christmas parties. We had Halloween parties. I remember dressing up, you know, bobbing for apples, and we always won—the Deemers always walked away with all the costume contest winners. And Father Brown gave us each a silver dollar, that was our trophy, you know. And we got, like, five of 'em, I mean all of us kids! Everybody was like, what!?! And my mom hand-made all our costumes. I remember my brother went one year as the Cat in the Hat. And he was seven feet tall. She made this outfit, and he really was the Cat in the Hat, and ducked his head to come into the, you know, the big auditorium there. But I have great memories of the Catholic Church. I guess for convenience and everything else, you know, Grace Church, they're open all the time, twenty-four/seven, they have masses, oh my gosh, every day of the week. But it's more singing, you know, and nothing pushed on you, where—the Catholic Church never pushed anything on me, but it's very structured, you know. When you're fighting kids in the morning, it's tough. I want the kids to be quiet, you know, in mass, and at Grace Church everybody's singing, so who cares if kids running around? So I guess maybe out of convenience, maybe I've gotten lazy, but my faith has always been strong, you know, from that Catholic-based faith, I guess, you know.

20:01

**O'NEIL:** So can I ask one more set of questions?

20:05

**DEEMER:** Sure.

20:05

**O'NEIL:** I'm curious—what does America mean to you? When you think of America, what should it be, and what do you think that—? Do you know what I mean? Where do your ideas about America come from?

20:15

**DEEMER:** I like Reagan's picture of America, that shining City on the Hill, you know. I think that's what everybody—the American dream. You work hard. You save up enough money for a down payment. You and your wife starting out, you start struggling, but you buy your first house. And you're making payments on your house. Now you're having kids. The kids grow up. The house is paid off, you take a second mortgage on the house to put the kids through college—that's just Americana. That's the American dream. That's how people did things. Now I think the American family, as it were, is fractured, you know. There's so much different coming in. But that whole dream of America is still here. I believe it's still strong. I think people get very—I've seen it in the military, when we're manning the rails, pulling into a foreign port, and they're cheering us. There's American pride, you know.

21:14

**O'NEIL:** So, can I ask—about that City on the Hill, what do you think about things like torture and things that some have argued make the rest of the world not see us as a City on the Hill, make them see us as something not to be cheered for? Or perhaps did—were you in Iraq or Afghanistan? Perhaps you experienced—

21:32

**DEEMER:** Oh, yeah. Yeah, I was in Kuwait.

21:34

**O'NEIL:** So I guess I'm wondering, can you put those things together?

21:39

**DEEMER:** I can remember being in Turkey, Anatolia, Turkey, for liberty port. And all the Turkish people were like, "Yes! Go America! Go America!" This was at the onset of, you know, us clashing back against the terrorist attack. The world is in an upheaval. So it needs that shining City on the Hill. It needs to look to America. America tries to be everything to everybody, which everybody knows is impossible. You can't be the police force of the world and still be loved and admired by everybody. That's a tough job. That's asking a whole lot. Almost impossible. So what do you do? With me, I go back to my military training: leadership by example. And that's I guess the resonating thing I hear with Donald Trump: let's make America great again. We gotta shore up our shores. We gotta make our house in order. Then everybody'll look to America. And then when we lean one way, they're gonna follow. That kind of thing. This is how Reagan brought down that wall. He made it so it was—in comparison, it was just impossible to think of anything else. So I think that's where we need to get. We need to fix our own economics, number one. Nineteen trillion dollars in debt: we owe everybody our shirts. And me being

the father of a household, I know how that feels. Hey, I don't like to be in debt to anybody. That's where America is: we're in debt to everybody. No! We need to be, you know, that shining City on the Hill, that we don't owe anybody, everybody looks to us for leadership. And I think that's the best way to promote democracy, freedom, human rights, this kind of thing. Once we get economically sound, people will listen to us. But they're not listening to us anymore! We're doing some crazy stuff, chasing our tails, trying to stop a fight that, really, you can't even see, you know.

23:56

**O'NEIL:** So I'll ask one more time. You talk about human rights and democracy. Mr. Trump, I believe, says we're not torturing enough, we need to do more. I mean, do you feel a certain way about that?

24:07

**DEEMER:** There's—yes.

24:09

**O'NEIL:** Does that strike you as contradictory, or is it—?

24:10

**DEEMER:** Okay, well, when I was—. No. Absolutely not. And I'll tell you why. Trump says we don't need to do—we're not doing enough. Because there's an anger there. If you've ever witnessed a beheading, there is true anger. Now, me being in the military, one of my chiefs showed me a video of a contractor that had gotten caught. Long story short, I witnessed a beheading. This does something to your very soul, to see that, and to know that there are people like this. So how do you think we got, you know, what's-his-name?

24:49

**O'NEIL:** [Osama] Bin Laden?

24:49

**DEEMER:** Bin Laden. They had to do certain things that—are we proud of? No. No. Do we talk about it? You don't like to talk about it. Some things are necessary to eradicate a total evil. Now, I believe Trump when he says we're not gonna, you know, break the law, we're gonna stick with the Geneva Convention and stuff. But these cats, they're not, you know; and so when somebody does not believe in the Geneva Convention, they don't wear uniforms—I mean, this is like we hit with Vietnam, you know? And we're held to this standard. And I've talked to, over and over again, a lot of Marines that I knew that were in Somalia. They could not return fire even though they're being shot at. And one guy—. Okay, say you and I, we're fighting, right? We get to know each other. We're like, I know your—I mean, I've seen pictures of your family, so we're getting really close, and "Oh yeah, I love this." And we're talking sports, and we just love this, and then, wham! And you get hit with a bullet that darn near rips your shoulder off. And I say, "We need to return fire," and they say, "Stand down." Stand down—are you kidding me? He just hit my friend! You know, human nature—you're gonna want to retaliate. So it's a really tight rope, because, yeah, we are fighting for human rights, but we have to eradicate evil. And I believe it's an evil. It's a mantra, it's a religious mantra they're—. You know, none of these cats have jobs, you know, they're listening to what these idiots are selling 'em, and they become radicalized, and that's a very dangerous, dangerous thing. When you want to kill a human being just for your quote "cause," you got a problem. You know, you got a problem. Because I am for human rights. I mean, I'm a military guy. I believe an eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth and all that, but, you know, when evil is killing your family, and best friends, I mean—. And Donald Trump believes this wholly, because he knew

a lot of people that came down in that [World] Trade Center. He knew a lot of the first responders that died trying to save those people. There's a visceral kind of—you know, you want to get 'em back. You want to get that bully back. But cooler heads always prevail. But they just—you know, this stuff you see over the internet and stuff, it's upsetting. It's very upsetting. So, like I said, I believe in him when he says we gotta make America great again. America will become great under his leadership. Then you'll see the world kind of fall in line. You'll see these knuckleheads that are just doing craziness around the world, they just kind of disappear, they become so insignificant nobody's looking at them anymore. You know. Because right now they have a certain legitimacy and a significance, because the media just keeps—and they say, "Yeah! We got a movement!" No you don't. You know, you're against human rights, I just—I can't back it, you know. So that's my opinion—

28:02

**O'NEIL:** I very much appreciate it.

28:03

**DEEMER:** —[laughs] wordy as it is. I apologize.

28:05

**O'NEIL:** No, it's great. Thank you so much. I'll stop the recording now.