

Rogers, David Audio 08 11 2021 EDIT

SAM HILGARTNER: All right, I'm Sam Hilgartner, rigger and shipwright at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, and I'm here with my friend.

DAVID ROGERS: [00:00:12] My name is David Rogers, I am the apprentice of Mama Girl from Painter, Virginia. We are here at 13252 Indian Trail Road, Painter Virginia, on a Wednesday at around 11:00 a.m. I am about to answer whatever questions Mr. Sam has involving the artwork, spirit, or whatever he deems questionable.

SH: Absolutely. Tell me what you, tell me how you see yourself in this.

DR: [00:00:49] I am in this as a slight punishment. I am totally in this art because of my mouth. Many years ago, my mother started her first piece. She said that she was going to make her great-grandmother. And we watched her systemically make this piece, and I mean, I watched her do it. So, by the time I came home one day and she had completed the piece and finished it, it was an Indian lady standing about four foot tall and she said that that was our great-grandmother and that we were from the Native American origins, and that there were some of my family members that would claim the African American side, whereas

on her father's side they always told us, "You're Indigenous." You know, my mama didn't use the word "Indigenous," but that's what she was trying to say. She said, "We've always been here. We've always been here." All right, so in the process of her telling me that she told me that she has spoken to God and that the spirit of God, or the Creator, had told her that it would take this artwork, the newspaper, and the glue along with this figure of this lady, and it was going to go worldwide. Well, I told the truth. That's why I'm in this. "I don't believe it." I didn't believe it at all. All I'd seen was newspaper that had been painted into a woman and was twisted, but I did not understand, I didn't even care to understand at that moment, you know what I mean? I didn't. Because I had always seen my Mama do art. Her whole life, I've always seen her draw, I've seen her make things and give away, so to me, this was just another thing. So, that's how I got into it because I hated it in the beginning. All right, now the story twists a little bit because I watched her do the art, I watched her do the art. My brother who is in the house there, he helped with the art, my sister all of us kids helped with the art. Mama, we went to the show, we were the tent people, we set up everything because we were trying not to let her lift and

all of that stuff. So, I don't know how many years it had been, maybe one or two years she had been doing this.

Well, one Saturday she called me and asked me if I could go to the Fourth of July show down to Cape Charles. I didn't really want to go, you know? Fourth of July, I had other plans, I could go do other stuff. But Mama said she needed my help, so I went down there. So, when we got down there I unpacked, I did everything I normally do, set up the whole tent. It was a very hot day. We watched the parade we went all ... politics, I'm not politically correct, I'm not customer oriented, I am in it 100 percent for my Mama, so I'm mean. The rest of the show, I'm mean. The show is over, mama said the Spirit told her to pack up slow, so that means she wasn't going to do anything but just stand there and pray and sing or do whatever and I had to pack up slow. So, I started packing up slow, and I got halfway and then a lady came. The lady came and she start talking to Mama, back and forth, back and forth, and by that time, Mama had told me, "Stop packing," the lady just wanted to look at some stuff, so she just looked at it and then she ended up talking. And her and Mama ended up outside of the booth and this what I heard. I heard that lady say, "How do you know that?" From that, it all went to shouting. Mama shouting, the lady shouting, Mama shouting, the lady

shouting, they're running around. The lady stops and she looks at me. All right, when she looks at me, I'm hating the whole moment. I'm tired, I'm hot, I'm ready to go home. I don't understand what's going on with her and this lady out here, I just know that she don't know Mama, Mama don't know her, they're just having a moment. The lady stops what she's doing, pushed Mama to the side, and she comes over there and she hugged me. This lady hugs me and she squeezed me, all right? It took all of my man strength not to bust right out in tears, man. That lady didn't know me, man, but she pushed something inside of me, man. I don't know whether it was the love she just got from my mama, I don't know what happened man, but she unlocked something. She unlocked something, man, and it took all of my man strength, man, just to... I mean, I'm trembling inside, my lip trembling, you know what I mean? And I turn away from her and that's what she go back out there with Mama and they have a couple soft words, they hug, and the lady leaves. Mama says, "Now we can pack up." And Mama goes into this rejoicing moment because all day long, she was questioning, "Why am I here? Why am I here? Why am I here? Why am I here? Why am I here?" because she knows the Spirit sent her there for something but she don't know why. So, after this moment, she is off the chain, man. I

mean, she's running around, she's shouting, she's let me pack up the art. Well, what do we see? Here's the lady come back up the walk, the same lady that just was shouting and hugging me and everything. The lady said, "Stop, I forgot to get something." Man, that lady walked inside there and said, "I want that that, that, that, that, that, that, that, that, that, that, that, that," and I started packing up and packing up, and the joy rose inside of me because Mamma gave her something and then she came back and gave Mama something. And the monetary value of the money that she gave her, I don't think was nothing compared to what Mama gave her, you get what I mean? Because she wanted to give more, but Mama said, "No, no, no, no, no," finally Mama was like, "If you buy it all, I have nothing to give anybody else." And that's when the lady stopped. I think the lady would have bought it all. That's what I believe because something freed her during the conversation because she gave me a part of it because it freed me from my meanness. From that moment on, I started watching this artwork. I started watching it. From that day on, I started watching the artwork. I started watching my Mama. I started watching the artwork. I started watching my Mama. I started watching the artwork. I started watching my Mama, all right? And then it changed even more when I'd

seen something. I said, "I do believe these people are getting blessed some kind of way by having this Mama Girl folk art." I don't know what it is because I'm seeing these repeat customers, and they're coming back with joy to buy, you know what I mean? They're not penny-pinching. No, they're coming back, they don't care what you say it cost, all right? So, what I did is, my mom called me, we had a big show coming up for North Carolina and I said to myself, "I need to become a customer, because I believe that there's blessings on the other side." All of us kids were given artwork. We all were given artwork but in my mind I said, "There's something special about being a customer." During that time, I went there early that morning and I walked through the whole shop, the whole shop, and I said, "I think I found the piece I wanted." And the piece that I bought, the very first piece I bought, I think it cost me 115 dollars, something like that. It was a lady standing on top of the world with her hands up to the sky, with watermelon trees down the side of her. I said, "Mama, when I looked at that piece, I'd seen you giving birth to me and dropping me on the Earth." I'd seen it, man, just as plain as day when I looked at that piece with all of the art, I'd seen her giving birth to me and me hitting the Earth and following her mission, you get what I

mean? I'd seen that. So, that's when I started to follow, I started to participate, I started to paint, I started to mold, and that's how it started. It didn't turn official until 2015, but it was... all right, you see that field back over there?

SH: Yeah.

DR: [00:09:14] That's where I was trained at. We worked those fields. When you came up Indian Trail Road, all the fields on all sides, we worked, all right? Mama Girl's grandmother is buried right in the next property, her mother's right there, right now, all right? My father's house, my grandfather's house was right back there in that field. So, my dad lived back there in the field. My grandmother, my mother's grandfather lived right up the hill. So, Mama Girl was raised right down the street, there, my daddy was raised back there. My Mama walked up Indian Trail Road, this road went all the way back into the field, she walked back that lane to meet my daddy. She had three kids, you know what I mean, by him before he passed away from a brain tumor.

SH: When was that?

DR: [00:10:07] I was young. I want to say 75. I never met him. I never met my father, not one day. I've only seen possibly two pictures. He has a twin brother, but that was

a different relationship, but no, I never met him. So, for the longest time prior to my stepdad coming in and filling that role, Mama Girl was my everything, man. She was my everything is my everything. My everything, you get what I mean? So, that's how I ended up doing this because I hated it in the beginning. I genuinely did not like it. And I genuinely could not believe, in my little bit of faith that I had, little bit of faith, that newspaper could turn into a healing agent. But I have been shown different. I've watched this, me, myself, I've shipped it to New Zealand, London, Spain, Africa. I've seen those people come here; you know what I mean? I've seen them go to my mother's house, which is around the corner, I've seen them come to Painter, Virginia, for Mama Girl folk art. Now, there was two sides of this, also. Hey, how you doing, sir? That's my neighbor up the street. Mama also... when she worked in the fields, the planes used to fly over top of us and spray us. It sprayed the crops, it sprayed us. Mama had an allergic reaction, with that allergic reaction, she ended up couldn't go into the fields anymore because of the pesticides or whatever they were spraying, it was just too strong. Also on the other side, she was unable to go to church. She was unable to go to church because everybody comes to church looking good and smelling good. Well, the

strong fragrances of the perfumes and everything would set her allergies off, which would cause her to have the seizures, same as what happened in the field which caused her to be in Virginia Beach Psych behind the seizures, while they thought she had some mental issues, but she didn't, it just were those smells. So, now, Mama had to start her own house church. Mama became the pastor of her church, the Church of Art. I was the only pastor ordained to speak, and so, that's why I was the guy that got to go around the country and speak because it wasn't just at anymore, it was also a spiritual healing. A spiritual healing. We never pushed the name of God on people. We never... I didn't, you know what I mean? My Mama has her way of doing it. But when I took over when I started the ministry and started to go about, I softened it up some. The reason I softened it up some because a lot of pain has come behind organized religion. A lot of pain. So, in the midst of all of that, I did not want to trigger anybody's pain and simply trying to give them love. So, a lot of my words just simply came back to love, love, love, love. And then I just took the concepts that Mama Girl had already gave me. Mama Girl said that when she was a kid, the brain was considered the melon, and they would always say, "Water your melon, stay hydrated because you're in the field," so

she equated that with the watermelon. So, Mama Girl loves the watermelon. Then, she also paid attention to the amount of seeds that the watermelon gave you. So, she said, "Okay, if the watermelon that's in the ground gives me that many seeds, and I equate the watermelon with my brain, so I have seeds in my mind. The seeds in my mind come out through my mouth, so I must be very cautious about the seeds that I plant." So, that's why she started doing the artwork that portrayed spiritual pieces, so it opened up the door so if somebody wanted to come and hear about Christ, they would see a Christ scene. They would see Jonah. They would see Noah in the ark. And these wouldn't be your traditional teachings that would come directly out of the Bible. Some of the stuff my Mama taught I ain't never heard before, you know what I mean? It was definitely something spiritual, more catered to the spiritual person that she was talking to, not a mass message, you get what I mean? It was more catered directly to the person. Because I've got my own catered messages, you know what I mean? One of the catered messages that I got was, "Be a spirit." When I first tried to do this art and tried to mold art, I was a man. I was a man. As a man, my hands were stiff, they were rugged, they were rough, somehow they would not bend according to my mine.

But as Mama taught me over and over, "Let it go, man. Let it go, let it go. You can't really think about anything when you doing this art. You can't flow with anything." She said, the way she got into is just simply praise, "Thank you, thank you, Spirit. Thank you, thank you, Spirit," and from there, man, it picks up. If you ain't careful, you're yelling in the house, man, "Thank you, thank you," and you never say, "For what?" You never say, "For what?" There's too many things going on in the day for me ever to name what I'm thankful for. I'm just saying, "Thank you," because that's what I see my Mama do, all right? And another thing I always heard my Mama say, "Help me. Help me." My Mama would go throughout her day, man, you'd be looking around and she said, "Help me. Help me. Help me." She would be asking the Spirit to help her. it's not like she wanted to make a decision on her own. Help me/ Help me. So, that's what I do. I spend my days, "Help me. Help me. Help me." Time is our gift. When I went... when I was in Richmond, a gentleman approached me, I went to Hardee's. when I went to Hardee's, the janitor stopped and went on break because I spoke to him in the bathroom. I just spoke to him, said, "Hey, how are you doing, sir?" He said, "I'm doing fine," and he looked at me all strange. So, next thing I knew he went on break and

he said, "Can I have lunch with you?" And I said, "Yes."

And the only question he asked me is, "What did you do with your present this morning?" I said, "Sir, I don't know what you're talking about." He said, "You got a present early this morning, what did you do with it?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "From now on, I want you to remember about your present. Remember your present." He said, "Every day you get your present, man." I said, "What's your present?" He said, "Your present." He said, "Man, what are you doing right now? Right now?" He said, "Man, are you back there, or are you way up there?" All right.

At that very time, I had just recalled that that was the same day Kobe Bryant died. And that man had not known me about my present. Listen, that's when I went on back home and I got back into this art. Because it reminded me, all right? That little spot right there, that's called Colorsville. That little town right there? This is what you see here, me trying to start, this little compound where you've got that shed there, another shed on the other side, you've got this house hooked to the trailer, my brother's in there, he's redoing that trailer section, then you have the camper here, then we've got this little shed here, all right? That's a small version of this little town called Colorsville. The object of that town, Mama

said the kingdom of God is like a color of a peacock's tail. No color wants to be elevated; they all just want to be together. All right, so in the process of that, we wanted a town. We wanted a town where we make every house a different color, and we wanted a town where the people that come in only had one thing in common, Mama Girl. Because we already know we got people all over the world. Man, I would say in just about 50 states, 30 years of business, 50 states. So, I desire to build Colorsville, man, for a town where people can come, man, and lay down your color, man. Lay it down. When you come in here, you're a spirit, man. You go to any interview that Mama Girl had over the 28 years she was in this business, officially, she always talked about the spirit, the spirit, the spirit. The spirit is just like this wind, man. Ain't no color on the wind. The spirit. It's my spirit that accepted you to come sit down and talk to you, my spirit. Because I could already feel something in your spirit, all right? Everybody doesn't like this art. There are some people that that are not fond of Mama Girl folk art, you get what I mean? For whatever reason, whatever, whatever, whatever, whatever, whatever. I met some of them, you know what I mean? And it's just not their thing. And they're not offensive, it's just not their thing. But for the

people that it is their thing, I love every last one of them, man. I love them because how can you not love people that stuck with your Mama? All right. Mama put a blessing over her artwork. I'm going to tell you how she did it, and I didn't know it at first. Mama said, she would start off by one, using the money to bless her kids. That made her a good mama, you know what I mean? She didn't use it to get famous, she didn't do all of that, you know what I mean? So, most of the time, a dollar came off every piece for her kids, because she had four kids, you know what I mean? So, the kids were already in the wealth with her. All right, the second thing is, there's a couple people that Mama thought highly of, never met them, she thought highly of them, all right? T.D. Jakes, Joyce Meyers, and Joel Osteen. She loved those people, man. I'm telling you; she loved those people. All right. What I would say is there's countless amounts of art that was made while listening to them. While listening to them do their ministry, do their preaching and do all of that, Mama would just put that chatter on and she would do that. And this is what she said. She said, "I don't know these people personally, but I do believe their intent is to help people." She said, |I do believe their intent is to help people, so because of that, I'm going to partner with

them." So, Mama would take a certain portion of the money that she made from her art, and she would send a donation to T.D. Jakes, to Joyce Meyers, and to Joel Osteen. And in her mind, and in her spirit that added another extra layer of protection over all of her customers because if she had a customer that wasn't being generous, or wasn't donating, I guess in her way she wanted to counteract the karma. You get what I mean? She wanted to interfere with the karma of them, you know what I mean, by saying, "Hey, look, if you give me, I'm going to give, so now, we all covered."

That's why I wanted the art in my house, because I wanted to be under the blessing, not as a son, but as a customer, because I've seen the intentional blessing that was put out there for the customers. I've seen her, the prayers that she put into this work for the customer. My Mama was a very generous tipper. Oh, she was a very generous tipper. The reason she said that, she used to tell me all the time, "David, you can't eat art." She said, "Not a piece of art that I've ever sold can anybody eat." She said, "But they keep coming back, buying it and buying it, they give it to their kids as gifts, they give it to their in-laws," so she said, "So, when I see somebody out there working for that small wage and they serve me, I'm going to give it up. I'm going to give it to them because you can't eat this. You

can't burn it. The only thing you can do is take this art home, look at it, and charge up. And charge up, because it's full of energy." Oh, it's full of love, man. It's full of love, and it's an ancient love, man. It's not a new love. It's an ancient love, all right? A love that has to be manifested, has to be. I mean, this artwork don't let you sit still. It won't. Listen, it won't let you sit still. I have a piece that called out to me, and it said, "Make me," and it would not leave me alone until I made her. I can show you. Before you leave, I'll show it to you. Eve.

SH: Oh, really?

DR: [00:23:22] I made Eve. She's standing this tall, about that tall, and she has a snake wrapped around her. Eve called out to me, I'm telling you, I want to say Thanksgiving Day 2019, Eve called out to me. My Mama had passed. We were still in Richmond. My wife's mother passed the same year my mother passed. It was a hard year, 2018 for us. A hard year. So, we just didn't know what we were going to do, man. We lost our mama's, man. So, Thanksgiving came, well, when Thanksgiving came, 2019, man, I'm broken, man. My Mama's gone. I'm broken, man. I just can't ... I can't get it. So, the family wants to go do something, I said, "You all just go do whatever you all

want to do, man. Go do it, just leave me here." That's when Eve called me. And the way she called me is, she said, "Did I hear you call yourself a man?" What do you mean? I'm talking to my mind. I said, "Yeah, yeah, I'm a man. You know what I mean? I'm strong." She said, "Oh, yeah. I don't think you're a man." So, by then, man, I'm balling up paper. I'm balling up paper, and before I knew it, I made a head. You get what I mean? I ain't start on the body, but I made her head because she's talking, and what she said is this. She says, "Every time," and she's not talking to me, as a man. I believe she's talking to mankind; you know what I mean? She ain't talking to David Rogers. She's talking to mankind. She says, "every time I check, you know what I mean, man is calling himself a man, but when man was under pressure, he turned into a snitch." She said, "When the Creator of all asked you why you ate from the tree, you blamed me. And you pushed the punishment over to your rib. So now, I'm your punishment because you pushed the punishment over to me. So, now I'm your punishment." She said, "My beef with you is, we've had kids. Every last one of the kids believed that we got kicked out of the garden because of me. So, there's a level of respect I can't get from my kids because they think I'm the bad guy when you are the bad guy, because you

ain't man enough to say you a man. Or better yet, you man enough to say you a man, but you're not man enough to take the consequence of being a man." So, when I had this conversation with Eve, man, it just changed me. It changed me and it made me look at, one, my wife different. And the whole environment, you know what I mean, and my American version of being a man. You get what I mean? The pay the light bill, the pay the phone bill, to do all of that, but not be in charge of the emotional side of my house, not be in tune with the vibration of the spirits and of the souls and of everybody and not willing to take the 100 percent. So, that's when I started saying, "Hey, look. I'll take 100 percent. I'll be the blame for whatever. Whatever it is around here, whatever it is," and that's what I teach my boys. I say, "The buck stops here. I'm to blame for everything." I said, "If you've got any complaint, you have to bring it to me because I'm the one that's wrong." I said, "Then, when you come," I'll listen to a man, oh man, what is his name? I want to give him credit, man, because this saying changed my life. Well, I'm going to tell you the saying. He said, "God did not give me the ability to make all right decisions. He gave me the ability to make a decision, and if it's wrong, make it right." That took the fear out of making a decision. So,

I make a decision quick, now. If it's wrong, I make it right. You say, "Do an interview?" Yes. Quick. Yes. I have nothing to hide. I'm not embarrassed by anything. The only thing I'm ashamed on is that I didn't jump on the boat sooner, meaning... and I guess if I had jumped on the boat sooner I wouldn't be here because I couldn't do nothing but be mean, and I didn't like it at first, so I guess... I didn't. I didn't like it at first, man. But God knows, man. And then, it's the spirit of this thing, man. I don't even know how to explain it, man. Imagine something that comes inside your body and make you feel like you're 18. I used to see my Mama dance and run, man, just like she was younger than me, because of something inside of her, just a joy that gets inside of her. And now, I get to feel the same thing. All right, I get to hang pieces on my wall that I can't believe I made. I can't even sell them because I think I lose my mojo.

[laughs] You get what I mean? You think you lose my mojo because it's like, when the spirit comes inside of you, man, it comes inside of you and it is its own entity, all right? This is what Mama wanted. She wanted a piece of land where she could have food growing everywhere. So, you see we have the corn, the beans, the cucumbers, the blackberries, I've got watermelon growing, tomatoes,

cantaloupes, collard greens, we have everything but also, these are the crops, we had a hand in all these crops. We didn't do a lot with corn, but we ate a lot of corn, but man, we harvested all these crops with our hands, man, right there on the Eastern Shore. And right now, it saddens me that we're turning into a food desert. A food desert, man. Because right now, you rode past a lot of corn that's not being eaten. That's industry corn. When I was a kid, man, this whole road was food. The whole road was no industry crops nowhere. It wasn't. This is Indian Trail, man. It blew my mind, and I must say, I'm saddened because for the longest time, me and my Mama, we did have a battle because I struggle with African Americans. I struggle with African American because when I went to school here in Accomack County, they didn't tell me that I could be an Indian. They didn't tell me that. They didn't tell me that the original people, man, looked like me. They didn't tell me that. They made the Indians seem like a distant, distant guy that didn't appreciate his land, so they had to take it from him. And I never anticipated the story that they were telling me in school were about me. I never would have imagined when I was in school that I was the very Indian that their book was disrespecting, even though my mother had told me my whole life. My mother told

me, "Didn't nobody bring us nowhere. We've always been here." That's what she said. But because I went to school and they told me I was African American, I picked up what they said and disrespected what my Mama said. And it's like... and then, it's even more aggrieving when you get older and older and you study and you find out that the main tradition is oral tradition, and how you pass down your bloodline and your genealogy is through word. So, my Mama did her part. She did her part. She passed it down and she told us. I'm going to show you the picture. I'm going to show you the picture, you've got to see it.

SH: Yeah. Oh, wow. Look at that.

DR: [00:31:21] This is the first piece.

SH: Wow.

DR: [00:31:24] This is the first piece. This is the lady when I walked into the house. This was the lady I'd seen.

SH: Wow, look at that.

DR: [00:31:31] My sister still has this. And my mother said, "This is our ancestor." She said this is my great-grandmother and she looked just like that, with the hair and she said she wore the colors.

SH: Beautiful.

DR: [00:31:43] And can't you see where Mama Girl folk art come from?

SH: Oh, yeah.

DR: [00:31:46] Can't you see? When Mama first started this business because of the people that talked to her, it didn't start out as Mama Girl folk art. The people that talk to her convinced her to make it Mama Girl African American folk art. So, this business started out as Mama Girl African American folk art until the spirit said, "I will not have it." The spirit nixed it, took that African American right out, and it said, "No, no, this is Mama Girl folk art, and we're about the spirit of God, the spirit of the Creator." And because of my mother coming out of this church, you came with Jesus, and the traditional names, but what if I said, man, we talk to people all religions, man, every single one, man, and there was no jockeying for power, because everything in our opinion is love, you know what I mean? If your book tells you to do x y z, z, z, z, and you will be accepted and you get your love, hey, I'm not against that. If mine tells me to do x, y, blah, blah, blah, blah, and I do that and I get, I'm not against that. Listen, the goal is to love each other and appreciate this land. This land. Because maybe this land will get tired of us, one day. Maybe this land will get tired of our bickering. It's been around way longer than us. I think it can do without us. Maybe it shouldn't have to, but it

can. It can. So, you have any questions? I know that was
a long spiel.

SH: No, I think that's great.

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