



sixty, seventy thousand dollars a year, by myself, I can have pretty much anything I want. So ...

JOHN MERROW

So tell me what college is like?

MATT MORRIS

Uh, it's a big change from high school. You know, you always got Mom and Dad there telling you, you know, what to do and stuff. But here ... I'm ... I mean I'm kind of surprised that I have buckled down the way that I have. I mean you actually know you gotta do the work, so I mean ... it's just a lot of free time. I mean you can go out and ... you can sleep all day if you want to ... there's a few days that I do sleep all day. I'll be honest with you. It gets tiring after awhile. You know? Doing papers and all that. But I think in the long run it would be worth it.

JOHN MERROW

You can...

MATT MORRIS

You don't got anybody up here to tell you what to do. It's up to you to succeed and you're fail out pretty much ... it's what comes down to whether you want to make it or you don't. It's a big change from high school. Just a real big change. Because I didn't ... I didn't know what to expect. And everybody's telling you "Oh, it's so hard!" You know what they're saying. But I think once you actually get up here and see what it's all about, you hit the social aspect of it, and then you actually go to your classes, it was a big change, but it wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be.

JOHN MERROW

Tell me about classes. What are classes like?

MATT MORRIS

Oh, they're all ... your teachers are all ... you know, get on you about not doing your homework you know, in high school and everything, but here you don't have to go to class if you don't want to. I mean it's your decision. I mean I missed one or two classes while I've been up here, but that was by mistake. But for the most part, I'm at class every day, and it's just a whole ... you actually gotta listen. You gotta make yourself take notes over the lectures and everything. I mean I could never take a book home and I could make A's and B's in high school. If I'd never took a book home here, I'd be on my way home right now. So...

JOHN MERROW

Do you study?

MATT MORRIS

Oh, I study! You have to. I study. I don't study like our daily lessons, but for tests, I start about four, five, seven days ahead of time, to get ... I mean I don't like to ... you know, one night before, be like "Well, time to study!" You know, because that won't work. So ... I mean ... yeah. I study a whole lot actually.

JOHN MERROW                    Can you tell me, Matt, um, like how many hours on a typical night...

MATT MORRIS                    Just depends. Some nights I don't study at all. Which I gotta do reading. I mean you gotta read pretty much every night up here, and I would suggest, someone come to college, before you go to bed, pick up your textbook, pick up your English book you're supposed to be reading, and just read. Get a day or two ahead, it don't hurt at all to get a day or two ahead. Because if there's a day you get up and you're sick, and you don't feel like doing nothing, or you just on a lazy streak, you can lay around all day and sleep, not do nothing. If you get ahead.

JOHN MERROW                    Are you ... are you pretty disciplined?

MATT MORRIS                    Uh ... I was surprised. Yeah. I'm pretty disciplined up here by myself. Yeah. I get my stuff done when I need to get it done. And I goof off when I can goof off. That's about ... about as plain as I can put it.

JOHN MERROW                    What classes are you taking?

MATT MORRIS                    Western Civ. CAD. English. Bowling. Astronomy. And ... Western Experience ... University Experience.

JOHN MERROW                    Western Civ.

MATT MORRIS                    Western Civ.

JOHN MERROW                    CAD is...

MATT MORRIS                    Computer aided drafting. English. Bowling. Astronomy. And University Experience.

JOHN MERROW                    Bowling is a course?

MATT MORRIS                    Yeah. You gotta have a PE, so I figured I might as well take bowling.

JOHN MERROW                    Tell me about the English class.

MATT MORRIS                    Ah, it's a lot of writin' and readin'. I'll tell you that. It is. (Laughs) I mean we got ... reading somethin' pretty much every ... about every day, unless we doin' a paper. And then you just gotta adjust enough time to get the paper done and turn it in, pretty much.

JOHN MERROW                    What are you reading?

First Generation Freshman-John Merrow Podcast #38

MATT MORRIS                    We're reading The Working Life. It's a book. Lot of ... it's just like newspaper articles, and articles about just different stuff. Just all put into a book. We read about that. And we usually have a quiz on the articles.

JOHN MERROW                    What ... what's your ... what class do you look forward to the most?

MATT MORRIS                    Um, astronomy and Western Civ.

JOHN MERROW                    Why astronomy?

MATT MORRIS                    Ah, I just like it. It's just ... I don't really look forward to the class, I look forward to going to the planetarium. That's our lab. And you actually get to look at stars in there, so ... that stuff just interests me. And Western Civ just interests me. I just like learning history. I've always been a good history person, so ... I don't know why, but I just al- ... I'm good with dates and everything. So...

JOHN MERROW                    The ... did you go out last night and catch a glimpse of the eclipse of the moon?

MATT MORRIS                    Oh, yeah. We went out last night. Caught that for a little while. And then ... it was really neat.

JOHN MERROW                    It was hard, it was over- ... it was overcast though for a while.

MATT MORRIS                    Yeah, it was overcast down here for a while. It was hard to see. But...

JOHN MERROW                    I went out to take a look and it was ... yeah. That was...

MATT MORRIS                    Yeah.

JOHN MERROW                    Now you're in this thing called a "learning community." Wh- ... I ... that's new to me.

MATT MORRIS                    It's just like you take a bunch of classes with people on your floors and stuff. Like when you actually have a test, like there's ten, 15 other people that have the same test, same class. So you can go study with them. That's what I like about it. I study with a buddy. And in astronomy I do the same thing. Me and my buddy study ... study it. So I like it better just 'cause you can only study so much by yourself. But if you take what somebody else knows, and you know, and put it together, it's worked for me so far. I've got B's on every test I took. So ... except one. And I didn't study very good for it, so...

JOHN MERROW                    How did you end up in learning community?

MATT MORRIS Oh, had to write an essay about like what ... if I wanted to be in it or not, and I ... I told them I was from a small town, and I thought like a little small community in college, I guess, would help me out. I mean I'm from a town of like 500 people so ... I mean I figured that would help me out. And being here amongst 18 ... whatever it is ... 15,000 ... 18,000 people ... I figured that'd be better. So...

JOHN MERROW Now who helped you think that through?

MATT MORRIS My mom and dad.

JOHN MERROW Did they go to college?

MATT MORRIS No. No. I'm the first one in the family to go to college.

JOHN MERROW What's their feeling about your going to college.

MATT MORRIS Uh, they don't want me to fail. I won't fail. I won't let myself fail. I mean ... I know that. But they're just kind of worried that I'll get up here and goof off, and everything. I mean...

JOHN MERROW Are there a lot of temptations?

MATT MORRIS Oh, yeah. You can go party every night if you want to. I mean ... And I'll be honest with you. There is a night I go partying; you gotta cut loose some time. I mean if you stay in a room it'll eat you up here. You'll be homesick, and ready to go home, and I mean just ... you gotta cut loose every once in awhile. College is supposed to be the best years of your life. So ... can't spend it up in your room by yourself working all the time. So...

JOHN MERROW When you cut loose, what do you do?

MATT MORRIS I go to a party or something. Go to my ... there's a lot of people up here from my high school. Go to their room, play some Texas Hold'em or something.

JOHN MERROW Play some?

MATT MORRIS Texas Ho ... cards.

JOHN MERROW Poker?

MATT MORRIS Poker. Yeah.

JOHN MERROW High stakes?

MATT MORRIS                    About five dollars to get in. About ten people play.

JOHN MERROW                    How about alcohol, is that part of your life?

MATT MORRIS                    Uh, it is, but not a big part. I mean you go out and you drink a little bit. I mean ... that's ... you don't get hammered every night. I mean Thursday night ... Thursday night I'm sure everybody at college can tell you ... Thursday nights ... Thursday night ... that's when you go out and drink.

JOHN MERROW                    And you're not old enough to drink legally?

MATT MORRIS                    Nah.

JOHN MERROW                    But you can get served?

MATT MORRIS                    Uh ... can't put me on the spot like that. Nah...you just...I don't know. You can get it when you can get it, I guess. Can't go out and get you know, so drunk you can't make it back to the dorm, I mean. You gotta use your head. I mean ... go out drinking, you know, drinking just having a good time with your friends, you know? And I mean ... you ain't gotta go and get to where you're puking and all that you just ... I mean I don't ever get that bad. I just drink to have a good time and then just sleep it off, go to class on Friday, and then it's usually about the same thing you do just about every week, I'd say. Go out on Thursdays.

JOHN MERROW                    We went out on Tuesday. At one bar. And there must have been 150, 200 students. And two o'clock in the morning. Is that ...

MATT MORRIS                    Ah, we don't go to no bar. I mean we'll go to ... I mean I go to A.G.R., there be just a bunch of country guys like me, so I go over there, hang out, and drink a few beer. I mean it's about what you do. There's probably 35, 40 people over there. And you just sit back and drink beer and bullshit pretty much all night. I mean ...

JOHN MERROW                    You don't play poker then.

MATT MORRIS                    Nah. Play poker usually I mean, any night. Usually any night out of the week besides Thursday. We'll play sometimes on Mondays. Sometimes on Mondays and Tuesday. Sometimes Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. You now, if you got the time.

JOHN MERROW                    So if I ask you to tell me number of hours you spend on a typical day ... I mean you said you do some reading and homework. If you added up the time ...

- MATT MORRIS Oh, probably two and a half, three hours a day on schoolwork. After my classes. Just depends. If you got a paper or something, a test to study for. Then those hours are triple. Double and triple. Just depends on what kind of paper, what kind of test you got.
- JOHN MERROW Is college living up to your expectations?
- MATT MORRIS Yeah, I like it. I mean I'm glad I made a decision to come here. I met a whole lot of people. You're going to meet a whole lot of people if you go to college, I mean. It's just the social aspect of it. But I guess any way you slice it, there's two sides of it. People like to party, and people like the social. I like both of them.
- JOHN MERROW What about the idea of learning stuff?
- MATT MORRIS Uh, I learned a whole lot since I've been here. I mean not just by ... not just at your classes, but at you now, disciplining yourself. Ain't nobody up here to push you. It's your choice to come. So...
- JOHN MERROW I thought...
- JOHN MERROW I thought the learning community was sort of a way to push you?
- MATT MORRIS Ah, they do push you. I mean just 'cause you know, you're students, they're always talking about the tests. So, I mean you get a lot of input from them on how they study, how you study. I think that's the best thing that the learning community does. They let the students go their own little way. In a learning community. And they ... I mean we've always studied together. So I mean it's been close for us, I guess, so...
- JOHN MERROW You're the first in your family to go to college.
- MATT MORRIS Yes.
- JOHN MERROW How are you paying to go to college?
- MATT MORRIS I took out a loan. I'll be paying it back when I get out. So ..
- JOHN MERROW Are your parents helping?
- MATT MORRIS No, I gotta pay it back whenever I get out. So ... I gotta kind of make the most of it myself. I think that's one of the reason that made me get that construction job this summer, before I came here. I really don't want to be working with my body all my life. So ... because that stuff's just tiring.

First Generation Freshman-John Merrow Podcast #38

JOHN MERROW                    So how much did you borrow?

MATT MORRIS                    I have no idea really. I probably have 40 ... \$50,000 loan to pay back when I get out. So...

JOHN MERROW                    But Western Kentucky's not that expensive.

MATT MORRIS                    Uh, interest. Interest.

JOHN MERROW                    Is Western Kentucky giving you any scholarship help?

MATT MORRIS                    Not right now. That's why I'm trying to buckle down on my schoolwork and get a few ... always get a few scholarship opportunities.

JOHN MERROW                    But you...so this is your money.

MATT MORRIS                    Yeah, this is my money.

JOHN MERROW                    What does it do when it's your money? What does it do to your head?

MATT MORRIS                    Uh, makes you work a little harder. I mean ... you're taking Mom's money to the mall and you buy anything. You take your money, and you look for the best buys. 50 percent off. Instead of...that's kind of how I look at it. So...

JOHN MERROW                    What's your sense of other students here? I mean do they ... are they like you?

MATT MORRIS                    There's a few of them like me. There's a few of them not. There's a few of them that take this freedom and just go nuts. There's a bunch of idiots up here to be honest with you.

JOHN MERROW                    You lost me on that. What...

MATT MORRIS                    Oh, there's just a bunch of people up here that come up here, and they get freedom, and ... people that's never partied before, they go out and party, and they look like a bunch of idiots. I mean ... I just ... there's a lot of people up here that I do like, but there's a lot of people up here that are just idiots when it comes to having free time on their hands.

JOHN MERROW                    You know, I was in a class of macroeconomics, which is advanced econ- ... a lot of seniors, and sophomores, and the rest were juniors. And I said how many of you do an hour or less work to get ready for class a day? And there were 50 kids in the class. And about half the hands went up.

So these kids saying they just do an hour- ... they just do what ... I guess what they have to get by.

MATT MORRIS

Yeah.

JOHN MERROW

What's your reaction to that?

MATT MORRIS

Sometimes I do what it just takes to get by. Or sometimes you can't. When you ain't got a paper or nothing to do ... quizzes, papers, and test, weigh the most on your grade. I mean you can get by without doing some daily work. I mean you can. You're gonna slack off some time. You ain't going to do all your work. But when it comes time for tests, quizzes, papers, it's you know, it's time to work. And if they do just an hour on that, and then I'd say they're probably doing rough in every class, is what I'd say. I mean I know people that write their papers before they come to school Friday morning. Before they go to class. I mean ... if they can do it and get by, then they can do it. I can't do it and get by. So...

JOHN MERROW

Now you talk country.

MATT MORRIS

I am country. I mean it's just ... it's just where I'm from.

JOHN MERROW

But when you write, do you write country?

MATT MORRIS

Nah. I'm pretty ... I'm a decent writer. I mean I can write with the best of 'em. I'd say I can write an ... an introduction and a conclusion with the best of them.

JOHN MERROW

Do you take any grief from people because you're ...

MATT MORRIS

Oh, yeah. Girls think it's cute though, so ... so I mean ... I don't ... it don't bother me none at all.

JOHN MERROW

But you couldn't write that sentence. It don't bother me none.

MATT MORRIS

No, you couldn't write that sentence. But...

JOHN MERROW

How would you write it?

MATT MORRIS

It doesn't bother me at all. Or it doesn't bother me. I mean...

JOHN MERROW

Does this...

MATT MORRIS

It's where you come from. I guess ... just where I come from ... all my buddies are country. I mean so...

First Generation Freshman-John Merrow Podcast #38

JOHN MERROW                    So is the country for real?

MATT MORRIS                    Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

JOHN MERROW                    But you can ... you can ... you're bilingual.

MATT MORRIS                    Yeah, I can mingle with the city folk I guess. You can mingle with them. They ain't too bad. I mean I'm a good bull shitter. So bull shitting gets you far in life.

JOHN MERROW                    You're gonna ... Do we have to use that on television?

MATT MORRIS                    I'll be honest with you. I ain't gonna lie to you. I mean I've learned that bull shitting gets you far in life.

JOHN MERROW                    Did ... are there people who look at you and say "Oh, he's country" and dismiss you.

MATT MORRIS                    I'd say so, yeah. I mean but...I'm here, I'm going to make it. I mean we're not all dumb hicks from where I come from. So...I mean I know there's a kid that graduated...lives a mile up the road from me...as country as me...and he's probably twice as smart as me. And I mean he's as smart as they come. He is. So ...

JOHN MERROW                    One of the things I noticed, Matt, is there there's a number of...fair...seems like a fair number of kids who have a lot of stuff. You know, cell phones, ... and so on.

MATT MORRIS                    Oh, yeah. I got a cell phone there or something, but I ain't on it all the time.

JOHN MERROW                    But is there that? Is there that ... some students anyway seem to care an awful lot about what they look like and all the stuff.

MATT MORRIS                    I don't care what I look like.

JOHN MERROW                    No, I don't mean you. I just ... your sense ...

MATT MORRIS                    Oh, there's a lot of students up here that do care what they look like and everything. Get up, dress up, and go to class. Whatever blows your skirt up, I guess. I can't do it. I get up ... what you see is what you get. I mean my hair is always like this. I wear my hat, my Bud Light hat. Budweiser hat to class every day. And nobody cares what you look like in class. You're there to take notes, and to get a grade. It ain't a fashion contest.

- JOHN MERROW                    Is ... is there a difference between getting a diploma and getting an education?
- MATT MORRIS                    Oh, yeah, there's a big difference. If I disciplined myself to where I do my work up here, then that's the difference between me just getting my diploma in education ... I've actually learned something. Disciplined myself to do work when I get out in the work force. What you learn from high school or college-it's getting an education right there. I mean in the social scheme of things. Gettin' an education in. How much more advanced classes are in college than they are in high school. High school you know, you don't have to do much to get by. College? You take the hard stuff, well, it's tough.
- JOHN MERROW                    Are you going to take tough courses?
- MATT MORRIS                    Oh, yeah. I'm going to take some tough ones.
- JOHN MERROW                    Why?
- MATT MORRIS                    Just because see if I can do it. If I can't, then I'll drop out of that class. I mean ...
- JOHN MERROW                    Are you going to take courses in different stuff?
- MATT MORRIS                    Oh, yeah. Like next semester I'm taking anthropology. Maybe. I don't know. I'm kind of still contemplatin' that. I'm taking geology, psychology, business, public speaking, religion, college algebra. I mean that's kind of about as ...what's the word I'm looking for ... as wide array of classes you can get, I'd say.
- JOHN MERROW                    Sounds challenging also.
- MATT MORRIS                    Uh, it'd be pretty tough, I'd say. But you got a lot of free time. So you might as well use it. Not working, so...
- JOHN MERROW                    How are you going to make your living?
- MATT MORRIS                    Uh, hopefully I'll be a computer aid and drafter. And I could make me some good money. And I'm not getting married. I'm going to keep my money for myself and race. So ... I'd like to just get a motor home and two race cars and go race. And you'll never see me again. If I can do that. But sometimes it just don't work out that way.
- JOHN MERROW                    You ... you lost me there on the computer ... where do computers come from? We've been talking racing.

First Generation Freshman-John Merrow Podcast #38

MATT MORRIS                   It's just something I want to do. I did it a little bit in high school and then just ... that's where I think the world's going. Computers. So might as well get ready for it, I guess. 'Cause manual labor's going to be out the door before too long.

JOHN MERROW                   You said "I don't want to ... when I grow up or when I get older, I don't want to make my living with my body." Explain that?

MATT MORRIS                   Well, when it's 105 degrees, I'd much rather be in a suit and tie at a desk somewhere, or in my own office, or working on the computer instead of being just ... I mean just being ... I wanna ... I can't really explain it to you. It's just ... have you ever worked a construction job?

JOHN MERROW                   I've built a house.

MATT MORRIS                   Was it hard?

JOHN MERROW                   Yes.

MATT MORRIS                   Was it time consuming?

JOHN MERROW                   Yes.

MATT MORRIS                   Was it hot or cold?

JOHN MERROW                   Yes.

MATT MORRIS                   Well, then it's worse than being inside with a suit and tie at a desk somewhere. Or working in front of the computer. I just ... I worked at the Jim Beam plant. Makes whiskey. It's in Boston about 20 minutes from my house. You got and you just ... you do ... like we built two or three warehouses and we like ... being up on the seventh floor of a building is just ... whoa. Building all that. You've got to build the dungeons, if they all go in, outside walls and everything. And it's just ... time consuming, tiring, get up at six o'clock and get off at 3 o'clock. I mean I'd rather be able to make my own hours if I want to.

JOHN MERROW                   You ... you don't want to do that all your life?

MATT MORRIS                   No, definitely not. I'll say they should be the highest paid Americans out there. People that do that. I couldn't hang off the side of that building. Couldn't down and all that. Ain't no way.

JOHN MERROW                   So is college a way out of that?

First Generation Freshman-John Merrow Podcast #38

- MATT MORRIS                    College is a way out of that, yeah. For me, anyways. To try to work on the computer. I mean that's what I want to do. So ...
- JOHN MERROW                    We have to come check up on you in five years.
- MATT MORRIS                    That's fine. You come check up on me.
- JOHN MERROW                    Is being here making you a different person ? Are you a different Matt Morris?
- MATT MORRIS                    Uh, yeah. Big time. At first I got a whole really wild, you know? Partying and everything. But now I kind of settled down, and you know, that ain't where... where you want to be. You know? I mean there's a time and a ... like I say, there's a time to cut loose, and a time to be serious. So and I think I found that fine line there. So ... I think I found it. So ...
- JOHN MERROW                    But if you become a different Matt Morris ...
- MATT MORRIS                    I will become one for the better. That's for sure. I come to college. I'll guarantee that. Just by meeting as many people as I have, I'll become a better person, I mean. Not considering the education I'll get, or what I learn, and all that. I mean. Just the social aspect will make you a whole better person.
- JOHN MERROW                    Do you worry that back home they're going to say "What ever happened to good old Matt Morris?" "Oh, he went college on us."
- MATT MORRIS                    No, I go home. I still remember where I'm from. That's for sure. I know a whole lot of people back home that are you know, rootin' for me and everything. And I go home ... when I go home I visit people and everything. I mean ain't nobody going to forget about me, that's for sure. So I'm just trying to figure out what I want to do right now and stick with it. I may not stick with computer aided drafting. I may do something in history. Because I'm good at history. It's up in the air for the next two years. When I become a junior, then I'm going to pick my major, and I'm going to stick to it.
- JOHN MERROW                    So you're going to be kind of searching around.
- MATT MORRIS                    I'm going to go all around. I'm going to go anthropology, I'm going to go with geology. I'm going to go with meteorology. I'm going to do a little bit of everything.
- JOHN MERROW                    I mean are you looking for something when you go into these ...

First Generation Freshman-John Merrow Podcast #38

- MATT MORRIS                    Yeah, I'm just looking for something that you know is my forte, I guess. My expertise. There's stuff that everybody's good at. I mean if I can find something I'm good at, then I'll do it.
- JOHN MERROW                    Somebody said, that's the goal. Is find something you're good at, that you could get paid to do.
- MATT MORRIS                    Yeah. That's what I'm saying. You know? If people would pay me to do something I like, what else could be any better. And then I'm going to pay to do what I like. Go racing.
- JOHN MERROW                    MATT MORRIS WILL BE A JUNIOR AT WESTERN KENTUCKY NEXT FALL. HIS LAST SEMESTER WAS HIS BEST EVER—HE FINISHED WITH A SOLID 3.0 GPA. HE SAYS HE PLANS TO MAJOR IN EDUCATION AND METEROLOGY. AND ON THE RACE TRACK THIS PAST YEAR, HE WAS A BIG WINNER—TAKING HOME OVER \$9,000 IN PRIZE MONEY. I INTERVIEWED MATT FOR OUR DOCUMENTARY “DECLINING BY DEGREES.” FOR MORE INFORMATION, please VISIT OUR WEBSITE: PBS.ORG/MERROW, that’s M-E-R-R-O-W. VALERIE VISCONTI AND JOHN HEUS PRODUCED THIS PODCAST. I’M JOHN MERROW. WE’LL BE BACK NEXT WEEK WITH ANOTHER PODCAST. THANKS FOR LISTENING.