My name is Viranel Clerard. I'm a photojournalist based in Detroit that documents public art. My sense of identity changed several times as my adulthood started off being Haitian, my first language is Haitian Creole and learned that before I learned English. So in a household, that's all I knew, is I'm Haitian. Then I started school and now I'm Black, but Black kids I couldn't connect with because our home life wasn't the same... we didn't eat the same food... we didn't listen to the same music... then I couldn't connect with the White kids either because I'm not White. I don't have the same background. So I grew up very isolated... and that's where my creativity kind of grew because I had to figure out some way to make myself feel accepted in the world that I lived in.

I went to a school called Von Steuben that's right up the street from my childhood home, and my parents were late and I'm like, you know, it's less than a mile away from where I live. I'll just walk home, you know, spare my parents the trouble and just walk home… and they'll see me when I get there blah, blah, blah... and it was the biggest deal. I don't know how long it took me, but by the time I got home... cops were there like, everyone thought I was dead. Because it was truly the kind of neighborhood where that was very possible. There's a lot of school... like controversy about school shootings happening now. But where I grew up, there was a high school right up the street Osborn. Osborn is a school that, for an entire year straight every single week there was a school shooting.

So a little bit later when I was 17, I wanted to become a journalist. So I said, I'm gonna to be a journalist... I have to work for *Detroit News*, that's what a journalist would do. So I got a job as a janitor. I worked there for six months networking with everyone. And then one night I got a call from my friend and he told me to meet him up. I knew this guy since my childhood... grew up four houses away from me. So he says to meet him up after work. I met him up after work. Went straight to his and I ended up being carjacked... and got

everything stolen from me and just basically left for dead in the middle of the night, around midnight. And after that happened... I just decided I got to continue on. I went to work the next day with a black eye... All of my coworkers are asking, Hey, what happened? What happened? And I saw that as my opportunity to get this great story, that ended up being my first front page story for the *Detroit News*.