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**Life from the seat of a streetcar**

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NEW ORLEANS -- Gregory Brown is just one of the many drivers for the Saint Charles Streetcar line. Five days a week, Brown drives past the French Quarter, the Garden District and Tulane University. He wears a starched white shirt and tie to work, and an elaborate silver crucifix hangs from his neck. His hair is neatly twisted into small two-inch ebony strands, and his face creases each time he laughs or smiles.

After earning an accounting degree from Morehouse College and working as a local banker for 17 years, he decided to drive a streetcar.

"A lot of my friends and family thought I was crazy," says Brown, 50. "I had worked in banks all of my life and then all of a sudden I wanted to drive street cars. They thought I was crazy, but I love it. I'm free."

A native of New Orleans, Brown grew up riding the streetcar from the Garden District to school, and then to work at the bank. He loves the history behind the streetcar, which has run since 1839 and is the oldest running streetcar in the United States.

"Each machine is just a little bit different. It's your responsibility. And courage, it takes a lot of courage, not just skill, because it takes a lot of nerve to get behind this thing," says Brown. "You are dealing with real rails; this is no joke, this is 52 people on 22 tons."

What brings his job to life are the people. His favorite stop is Canal Street in the French Quarter where he picks up a wide assortment of 50 passengers. His favorite view is of Mansion's Row, where the homes are over 100-years-old and the trees form a cathedral over the street.

One of his favorite passengers was the infamous basketball coach Al McGuire, who was always willing to talk with Brown.

"He has the spirit of the game and is a good basketball mind," Brown says.

"We talked about how he was able to get guys to understand that they were going to go to college to play ball, but it was important they got their school work done because they could be successful in other areas."

Brown's passion doesn't stop at streetcars; his other love is the Saints.

His favorite memories of the Saints' are the opening kickoff against the Los Angeles Rams and Tom Dempsey's 63-yard field goal. His all-time favorite Saint is All-Pro linebacker Rickey Jackson, because he was passionate and consistent and played to his potential.

The Saints haven't fielded a stellar team in a while, but Brown still cheers for his home team.

"Now at least they have a chance of winning, before it was pretty much a given that they weren't going to win the game," Brown says. "I just would like to see them do well. I'm so tired of getting beat down for it but I stick with it. Even when I was at school, people would say 'you have to be kidding, you are a Saints fan, you have to be crazy,' and I'd lose my money betting on them."

Three years ago, Brown had to worry about something more serious than football or his job. After suffering a heart attack and a stroke, Brown was left paralyzed from the neck down. After speech, occupational and physical therapy, he no longer needs a wheelchair and has regained a full range of motion.

"By God's grace and mercy, here I am up on my feet doing all right," Brown says. "I believe that God gave me the will, and because I played sports when I was young, I had that desire and will to fight back. I didn't give up on myself."

Now Brown considers himself a more conscious and humble person.

"I think before I speak and I don't just react any more," he said. "Being able to recover and endure what I endured, I feel like I'm on the happiest person I know."

Brown only hopes that he can have the day off from driving the streetcar to see the Saints win a championship.

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