NEWS RELEASE

A violin plays a place in history

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The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., displays a piece of Anthony Judkins' family history. Nestled within a museum display case, rests a violin that belonged to his great-great-grandfather, Jesse Burke, who played the instrument for the man that owned him and later as a freed man.

In September 2016, President Barack Obama, Stevie Wonder, Will Smith and Oprah converged on the Smithsonian complex to attend the Grand Opening Dedication Ceremony of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. It had taken 50 years of lobbying and planning for the museum to launch.

It was a poignant day for Anthony, an American Airlines Corporate Safety Specialist at Los Angeles International Airport. He remembers the pride he felt reading the description imprinted on a small plaque that sits beside the violin. It tells a much bigger story:

"Jesse Burke's daughter, Darkus Burke Freeland, recalled that this violin was given to her father by the man who owned him. She remembered her father's skill and that he was assigned to the task of playing for the slave owner, his family and guests."

For Anthony, this experience was a chance to reflect on how his own story and history intersect.

"It is a privilege and an honor to have my great-great-grandfather's violin inducted into the museum," Anthony says. "I am a third generation piano player, and now I know who I got my musicality from. It was a moving moment when we visited the exhibition as a family, and it is wonderful to be able to share."

Even for those without a profound personal connection, visiting the museum can be a deeply moving and memorable experience. Inside, stories are brought to life through significant objects — Harriet Tubman's shawl,

Chuck Berry's candy-apple red Cadillac, and the grips worn by Gabby Douglas as she spun around the uneven bars during the 2012 Olympics. And, of course, one very special violin.

"There is such rich cultural content in the museum, demonstrating how much the African-American community has contributed to our country," says Anthony, who joined American in 1991. "Mindful of our history and how far things have come, I feel lucky living in a country and working for a company that celebrates diversity of all types, with everyone working together regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation."