

**Oral History Interview of
Clarence Priestley**

**Interviewed by: Cosby Morton
June 17, 2013
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*African American Interviews***

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Interview Series Background:

The African-American Oral History Collection documents the diverse perspectives of the African-American people of Lubbock and the South Plains. These interviews and accompanying manuscript materials cover a myriad of topics including; early Lubbock, segregation, discrimination, politics, education, music, art, cultural celebrations, the May 11th 1970 tornado, commerce, and sport.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features former school principal, Clarence Priestley. Priestly talks about growing up in east Lubbock and working in the Lubbock Independent School District. Priestly discusses segregation and the impact that this had on the school system. Priestly also talks about the culture of east Lubbock.

Length of Interview: 01:27:40

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Cosby Morton (CM):

Good afternoon, today is June 17, 2013. My name is Cosby Morton and I represent Southwest Collections with Texas Tech, and I have the honor today of talking to Mr. Clarence Priestley. Mr. Priestley, good afternoon.

Clarence Priestley (CP):

Good afternoon, Mr. Morton.

CM:

Let me first ask the question, Mr. Priestley, when were you born?

CP:

March 1, 1930.

CM:

Okay and where were you born?

CP:

Here in the city of Lubbock.

CM:

Okay, so you're actually a Lubbockite. What were your parents' names?

CP:

Mr. and Mrs. Roger Carlton Priestley.

CM:

All right, where did they come from?

CP:

From Pleasanton, Texas, and that's located south of San Antonio, about thirty-seven miles south of San Antonio.

CM:

All right, what brought them out to this area?

CP:

Well first off, I think basically Mr. Eli Sullivan who was a relative of ours was here in Lubbock, and I think he encouraged my dad and mother to move from Pleasanton to Lubbock, Texas. Eli Sullivan.

CM:

Okay, I knew Mrs. Sullivan. I never knew Mr. Eli Sullivan.

CP:

Yes, that was auntie and she lived to be 102 years old before she passed a few years ago. Her husband was a mechanic. He worked on motor boats and cars, and he was a very good mechanic, Eli Sullivan.

CM:

All right, when you were born, sir, March 1, 1930, were you born in a hospital?

CP:

No.

CM:

Okay.

CP:

Midwife.

CM:

Midwife, and the reason I ask that because we have a—all my mother's siblings were born midwife, they were not born in a—now your father, what does your father do?

CP:

My father was a cook at Lubbock in a hotel at that time, Pioneer Hotel downtown on Broadway now. He was the chef and cooked for two years. And then previous to that, he worked on the railroad for two years. Past that, he shined shoes at Codger's Barbershop on Texas Avenue here in the city of Lubbock. He shined shoes for fourteen years, and then he went into the barbeque pit business for himself. He and my mother ran Jim's Barbeque for eighteen years here in the city out on Railroad Avenue here in Lubbock.

CM:

Was that close to the railroad tracks, right there by the railroad tracks?

CP:

Yes.

CM:

In the area that we call Queen City?

CP:

Right, it was in Queen City and he had a very lucrative business, he and my mother. They ran it for eighteen years until the urban renewal in 1958 came and tore down everything in that area as you know.

CM:

Okay, so urban renewal—

CP:

And also my father worked in the school system for several years as a custodian.

CM:

Okay.

CP:

For about three or four years, he worked as a custodian and my mother, Mrs. Nettie Priestly, worked in the school system as an aide. And I you are familiar with that because your mother Mr. Morton was one of the best aides I ever had anyway when I worked in the school system.

CM:

Yes, and I was talking to some people at Ella Iles and they brought up your mother's name. Yeah, when I was asked, Are you doing some research over there, and they mentioned your mother working over there.

CP:

She worked there I don't know how many years, probably four or five or six years. She enjoyed her work and I always thought about her in the same frame of mind that I did your mother, beautiful lady.

CM:

Well I appreciate that, thank you very much.

CP:

A very, very good aide.

CM:

Where did you live at, at that time? When you first came here, where did y'all live at?

CP:

Well, we lived on Date Avenue, and that's where Mrs. Mae Simmons used to live, right by Miss Bonita Holmes now, the school board, it was right by her, that's where we lived.

CM:

Okay, and at that time I think Twenty-Second, East Twenty-Second went through there.

CP:

Yes.

CM:

Okay, so was it Date Avenue then or was it East Avenue D?

CP:

Probably East Avenue D. Now, I was born out on just off of Nineteenth Street between Avenue Eighteenth and Nineteenth Street. We lived in servant quarters at that time, what they called at that time, servant quarters, and that's before we moved down to where I'm talking about now.

CM:

A lot of people don't know about the servant quarters. My aunt lived out there. A lot of them now you see them as Texas Tech apartments, in the back, the garage apartments, but they were actual servant's quarters.

CP:

Yes, because my mother and dad and my brother Roger and myself. We lived—they had an upstairs servant quarters in the backyard, and that's where we lived at first and then moved down to where I'm talking about now.

CM:

Okay, now Miss Simmons's house there which is actually the corner of East Twenty-Second and East Avenue D at that time. Now, you moved from there. You moved down to the current location which is down—I guess that's 210—?

CP:

2102.

CM:

When did you move there, sir?

CP:

That was about 1938.

CM:

Okay, when did you start school?

CP:

Oh, I started to school when I was five years old. What happened is, I went to where my brother Roger was already enrolled in school. I said, "Well, I'm going to beg my mother and dad for me to have a chance to go to school, too." And when I went up there, Mrs. Ella Isles who was the first grade teacher at the time told me, she said, "Clarence, sit in that chair." And she said, "Whenever you're feet and when you grow tall enough that your feet touch the floor, then you can start to schooling." And that was heartbreaking to me because I wanted to go to school so bad. So I went back home and of course I grew and so forth. So when I was five years of age, which they didn't check on ages as much then. So I started to school when I was five years old.

CM:

Okay, and something they didn't have then also was kindergarten.

CP:

Right, no kindergarten, you just started first grade. Of course, I knew basically that most of the first grade material because of my brother being ahead of me and seeing him doing homework and so forth.

CM:

How much older than you was he?

CP:

Almost three years older. He was almost three years older, like about oh close to two months. And in fact, as you know, he just passed on April 13.

CM:

Mr. Roger Priestley was a teacher over in the El Paso school district.

CP:

That's right, he worked over there thirty-seven years in El Paso before moving here in 1986. And we both retired the same year. I retired from the Lubbock Independent School District in May of '86 and he retired from El Paso Independent School District. So I've been retired twenty-seven years from the Lubbock Independent School District.

CM:

When you went to—now was it Ella Iles or it was Dunbar then, I would imagine.

CP:

Yes, it was Dunbar.

CM:

Was it on Date Avenue?

CP:

Yes.

CM:

Okay, so you started on Date Avenue?

CP:

Well, no, now when I went to school in front of Mrs. Iles, I was in the first grade, it was on Avenue C.

CM:

Oh okay, Avenue C. And to talk about Mrs. Iles, Mrs. Iles of course is steeped in the history of the school over there. There's an elementary school named after here. Tell us more about Mrs. Iles?

CP:

Mrs. Iles obviously was a very special teacher, not only for the academic areas that she taught, but she was a very caring person for the students that she taught. I could give you one example. Now, we didn't have a cafeteria at that time, naturally, so you either had to take your lunch or you could buy hamburgers over at Saderry's across the street. He had a restaurant over there. So what we would do is my mother would always provide us with a lunch. And if you ran a little short or if Mrs. Iles had some food that you liked and she knew it, then she would share her food with the students in the classroom. In other words, she didn't want us to go hungry and our parents didn't, so we took our lunch basically. And maybe on a few occasions she would provide some of the food herself because we, like I said, didn't have a cafeteria. It was completely segregated at the time out there, so no cafeteria available.

CM:

So how'd you get down to the school? I mean, you were living on Date, or East Avenue D, how did you get down there?

CP:

Had to walk.

CM:

At five years old?

CP:

Oh yeah.

CM:

That's amazing.

CP:

My brother would stay out and other students would just walk. In fact, we enjoyed it. But of course, back in those days, you could walk anywhere you wanted to and not be bothered by somebody trying to jump on you or rob you or kidnap you and anything of that nature.

CM:

Because community sort of took care of all the kids.

CP:

Right, it was a community thing. Everybody knew where the school was located, and they were used to seeing us, well in what we used to call the flats on Avenue A and so forth. They knew school kids, so and they were very respectful and nobody bothered you. You could walk to school, spend the day, walk back home.

CM:

And for clarification for the people listening, the flats were actually south of Nineteenth Street west of Avenue A, and I guess north of Nineteenth Street and south of Broadway.

CP:

That is correct. Like I said, you could walk to school or walk anywhere in Lubbock and nobody bothered you.

CM:

So you crossed that main street, well, I guess Nineteenth didn't go into the overpass at that time?

CP:

Oh no, no, no. In fact, you didn't have a lot of paved roads, period in Lubbock, but certainly in East Lubbock, you didn't have any paved roads.

CM:

Oh okay.

CP:

It was all dirt. In fact, I can remember when my parents bought a bicycle for Roger who was my brother, and myself. They put me on the bike at the top of the hill where Ella Iles School is located now, and my feet were too short to reach the pedals, and they got the biggest kick out of they started me on the top of the hill and pushed the bike off and I came down and it was real deep dirt on the side. and I was trying to guide it and I went over and tripped over and they all got a kick out of that because no pavement, there was no pavement.

CM:

I actually remember that because at that time I was growing up over by the graveyard and we had dirt streets, too. In the first grade, when you started with Miss. Elle Iles, what were some of the kids that were there with you?

CP:

Now that's a good question because a long time ago—and I don't remember the names in particular in this case. Now, it wasn't an extremely large class, of course. It wasn't a whole lot of students. I don't remember how many was in the class, but I'd hate to give a rough estimate, but it wasn't a real large class.

CM:

So you were there in the first grade? How long was the school down there that you attended?

CP:

Well I'll tell you, the school that's on Date Avenue now, it was built in 1958. And what happened is, it involved all grade levels, you know, there wasn't any such thing as kindergarten and so forth. So when you went there, you went through the whole deal up through twelfth grade. At first it wasn't the twelfth grade of course, as you know. By the time I came in 1946 from Dunbar High, it was the twelfth grade deal, see.

CM:

Okay, so 1938 was when the school was built. Now Mrs. Barron, you know Mrs. Barron, she explained to me about the fact that it was not the twelfth grade, it went through the eleventh grade. And people then had to go somewhere else to get to twelfth grade.

CP:

Well, the eleventh grade was it so if you wanted—that was high school for you, in other words, that finished you up in high school.

CM:

Well, why was that?

CP:

I'm sure it was from the state level that they mandated it. I'm assuming, I don't really know because see, by the time I finished it was the twelfth grade over there. So they added it and normally that kind of information comes from the state. That's kind of a state mandated thing. Now, unless they had something to do with it locally, which I don't know.

CM:

I've heard other people talk about that, that it made have been state—it could've been.

CP:

Of course, I know how it is now, there's state mandated and you have local policies also, as long as it's incorporated with the state level.

CM:

Some of the other teachers, as you went through the twelfth grade there, Mrs. Ella Iles, of course, you associated with Mr. E. C. Struggs.

CP:

Oh yes, he was principal there as you possibly have heard for thirty-five years, he was principle of Dunbar. And we had Mrs. Lusk.

CM:

Oh, Mrs. Mildred Lusk.

CP:

Mrs. Mildred Lusk taught English and American Literature. You had—well we called Prof Hillman.

CM:

Damon Hill Senior?

CP:

Damon Hill Junior's dad. He stayed with my parents and us for about three or four years when we first moved in and got on in the system in the Lubbock Independent School District.

CM:

And that's something interesting that I've heard a lot of people, Mrs. Holmes mentioned the fact that Mrs. Hill—before she got married to Mrs. Hill stayed with them which is Mrs. Woods. So was that just a—there was no housing, I guess.

CP:

Well, I was about to say, whenever a teacher was hired in Lubbock, it was normally a situation that I just mentioned. They had to have somewhere to live, and so they would just move in with somebody who would accept them because you didn't have a lot of rental property and that kind of—you didn't have apartment complexes and that kind of thing like you do now. Now people come in and they'll purchase a home or something like that. Back then, like I said, I know Prof Hill stayed with us for three or four years.

CM:

Okay, so it was definitely the community because you had the teachers in your house.

CP:

By the way, Prof Hill—I can't help but call him Prof Hill, he was a real good coach.

CM:

And I want to talk about that, too. You played football for him, did you not?

CP:

I did, I played one year for Prof Hill. The thing that stood out about him, of course he was dedicated and committed to coaching, and so he wanted you to do right off the court as well as on the court. Of course, he lived with us for a while and so he used to take me to all the football games and he used to take me to wrestling matches and that kind of thing.

CM:

Really?

CP:

Oh yes. The thing that stood out to me is before I started playing football when I was young or when he first moved here, he used to take me with him to all the games. I'd go to the practice sessions. Prof Hill was one of course, he'd put on his football attire in full, full uniform for practice. Now, you talk about a guy that could run a football. They would punt the ball on fourth down and he'd catch it. He was very shifty, speedy, and tough. He could run that football and that's the only coach I've ever seen who put on attires and practiced with the football players.

CM:

I've never seen that either.

CP:

I never have.

CM:

You see that in baseball, but you don't see that—

CP:

When he'd take me to the actual football games, if his team did not perform like he thought they should the first half, he would take them under the stands and he had a paddle and I know you don't have that now. I would be under the stands riddling and he'd give them a couple of good squats at half time and you talk a different looking football team in the second half. They didn't lose many games.

CM:

That's a motivational speech there.

CP:

Oh yeah, that was Prof Hill, and I was able to see all of this first hand because he took me there and to wrestling matches and all.

CM:

The wrestling matches you went to, did black schools have the wrestling then?

CP:

No, no, no they were all Anglos, all white. Sledge Adams [?] Arena is what it was called on Texas Avenue, and Prof Hill had me drinking raw eggs and a whole lot of stuff like that.

CM:

The health—what they've got now.

CP:

He said, "I'm going to make a man out of you." I said, "Prof I don't—" I ate raw oysters and that kind of thing. He was an unusual guy, and he is the one, the main one, that encouraged me to go into administration when I was getting ready to go to the University of Colorado. He and Kerring said, "What are you going to major in?" I said, "Well, probably secondary education or elementary education." He said, "Well why don't you think about the administrative end of it

there?" I said, "Well, I will." He said, "When you get up there, talk to him about going into administration." And I did. So he was a real influence on me going into that.

CM:

What did he teach at that time?

CP:

He taught math.

CM:

Okay.

CP:

He taught math.

CM:

Something that I learned today from Mr. Peppers that I didn't know, I remembered when you were assistant principle at Ella Iles, Mr. Peppers had a room that was located by itself over by the gym.

CP:

Yes, he had a separate barracks or whatever you're going to call it.

CM:

He was actually in the building then, you know that door that goes out and he told me that that used to be the shop.

CP:

Yes.

CM:

I guess that's stuff that I just didn't even know.

CP:

He was a very good teacher and Mr. Peppers is a very good person and working with wood work and that kind of thing.

CM:

I didn't know that.

CP:

Oh yeah.

CM:

When I talk to the people I'm learning so much now that I didn't know. And this history that I didn't know, you know, even by being over there. Because Miss Barrow told me about the building, you know, in the middle, the little building. She said that was a home economics. I said, "You know, it does look like it's a house."

CP:

It sure was, and Mrs. Pratt was the homemaking teacher at that time.

CM:

Okay, who was some other teachers?

CP:

Oh, we had Mrs. Struggs, we had Mrs. Cox.

CM:

Mrs. Cox, Mrs. Lewis' sister?

CP:

Lewis, yeah, they both taught there. They were originally from Waco, Texas.

CM:

Waco.

CP:

Yes, and then you had Mrs. Millitan, you had Mrs. Dorothy [inaudible] which you know.

CM:

She was there then?

CP:

Not at that time, I'm just naming.

CM:

You name people that were there when you—yes.

CP:

Of course, Mr. Harold Chatman was there when I was there. Mr. Brown was principal when I was his assistant.

CM:

I'd hate to jump around, but where did you start teaching at?

CP:

I started teaching in Shallowater, Texas, which is located about eleven miles from Lubbock.

CM:

Was there a particular reason that you had to start in Shallowater?

CP:

Yes, because I had been in the military, I had been in service and when I got out in March, it was a bad time to be hired elsewhere. So Mrs. Rossana Harris who passed on years ago now was teaching in Shallowater in a segregated situation. And when I got out of service, she asked if I'd like to come to Shallowater. Well, I needed a job so I said, "Yes ma'am, I sure will." So I commuted, we alternated rides, she'd drive one week and I'd drive the next week. And we did that and I did that for six years in Shallowater, Texas. And then I was hired and I know Mrs. Mae Simmons had a lot to do with it—I was hired in the Lubbock Independent School District in '59. So I came to Lubbock and I didn't have to drive the shuttle in all kinds of weather. So I was glad to get on in Lubbock.

CM:

Well, talking to Mr. Taylor, your neighbor across the street, Mr. Charles Taylor, he explained to me how a lot of the black teachers had to go to other towns; Mr. Charles Johnson, you know, I knew it was Sadberry's son was in [inaudible] for years, but you had to do that to actually get into the system and then he said he was hired into the system by Mr. Carvin, Grover Carvin because of the fact that they needed a male teacher, you know, for the after school programs.

CP:

Yeah, the after school recreation. Now I did the same thing for three years. I operated as a coach of after school recreation, flag football is what it boiled down to. And we used to compete with Wheatley, Martin Elementary, and so forth, flag football. Of course, you had some good athletes back at that time, but when they would go onto Dunbar later on, and some of those same ones that we had of course in elementary school, well like Larry Isaac as an example. All those guys, most of them participated in after school recreation. Of course, they went to junior high and onto high school. You had real good athletes, period, but Texas Tech missed out on a lot of them, like, well we called Little Gentry.

CM:

Yeah, Dennis Gentry.

CP:

Tech wouldn't even talk to him. Mr. Roy Ross who was principal at Dunbar at the time told me, I said, "Well what about him, is he going to Tech?" And he said, "No, they won't even talk to him. They told him he was too small to play college football." And of course, as you have heard and know, he went onto—

CM:

Baylor University and then Chicago Bears.

CP:

He played with the Chicago Bears ten years and he was just as tough as nails, but they said he was too small. And as you already probably know, too, he was coming to play Texas Tech and one game he ran for 185 yards, two touchdowns, and one was called back. So he just killed Texas Tech when they played him each time.

CM:

Well, you mentioned after school, because I was in that program at Wheatley and also Ella Iles, but one thing that we had at Ella Iles, we actually had a girl that played. There was no Proposition IX or whichever it is back then, but we had girls in the neighborhood at that tomboy stage, I guess you call it, could actually play as good as us because I remember one girl, Deborah Harden, she took my marbles every day. She could shoot marbles better than us and there's nothing you can do about it, but just take it, you know?

CP:

Well back in my day, you knew Mrs. Edna Ray Walker, Mary Joe Walker's mother. She was one of the best football players in the country. She could play linebacker and she was just tough like a tomboy. And most people would not realize that because as you know, she was a great musician.

CM:

Yes.

CP:

Played the piano and had very a beautiful singing voice, but I remember when she would tackle just as good as anybody on the planet.

CM:

People just don't realize that because, you know, I remember that stage, I guess about the ninth grade that girls decided, "You know, we don't play that anymore. We're now girls." "You don't want to play?"

CP:

You had some girls that were just as good as the boys.

CM:

And it's a shame that you did not have as much exposure as it is now with the girls.

CP:

Back then girls played basketball, but it was half court.

CM:

Who was the coach back then when the girls were playing basketball when you were there?

CP:

Prof Hill probably.

CM:

Oh, he coached both of them?

CP:

He coached football and basketball. There was no gym. No, it wasn't a gym, neither at Dunbar when I finished in '46. If I'm not mistaken, that gym was probably constructed somewhere around '48. What they did, they played basketball on the ground on just a hard surface and the ground. You had—well, I'll always remember like Tom Morgan who passed on some years ago. He had the two hand set shot, and when it was played it wasn't indoors and if it was windy, which it was sometimes, you had to gauge how to shoot the ball based on the velocity of the wind. And of course they did it. Well, my brother played basketball, had several of that played [inaudible], Joe Graves. You had a lot of good athletes back then and the reason they were so good was because they were playing on the hard surface ground. It really wasn't like playing on the hard floor indoors.

CM:

You know, even when I came up, we'd clean up a lot and then we played basketball. And then you have time, got a sticker, and you had to take the sticker out of your hand, you know. Okay, when they played basketball, of course they were outside, was there—did they play against other teams from around here?

CP:

Oh yeah, but you didn't have bleachers. No bleachers, you just stood and watched the game, you know, we didn't have all the fancy stuff that they have now; these high technology scoreboards and all this kind of thing.

CM:

When you played football, was it at Dunbar Field or did you play right there by Dunbar?

CP:

Well, I'll tell you where we played. It was out in—I think it was Avenue X?

CM:

Yes, Chapman.

CP:

Chapman Field, that's where we played.

CM:

Okay.

CP:

Now the same thing with the track; I ran track and a lot of people did. We practiced, like I was running the 880, and you didn't have pavement around the current Ella Iles School, so you just ran around in that sand.

CM:

Wow.

CP:

And by the time you got on the track was at Chapman Field.

CM:

And you were still able to excel in that even when you came from those conditions.

CP:

Because if you could run on unpaved roads, it felt real good when you got on a regular track field.

CM:

Let me ask you a question, since you were raised in the community over there, something that's always peaked my interest, I actually saw a picture of it the other day, looking at Dunbar, is the theater that was located on East Twenty-Fourth. Did you ever go to that theater?

CP:

On Twenty-Fourth, Avenue F on Fir?

CM:

Yes.

CP:

Oh yes.

CM:

Okay, tell me about that theater. What was the name of it? Well tell me about the theater. I heard it was a pretty nice theater.

CP:

Well, it was a nice theater, and it was somewhere to go, it provided kind of a social atmosphere for people that lived in that area. And we also had the Ritz Theater down on Avenue A.

CM:

Yes, at about Seventeenth or Sixteenth. Were those Afro-American owned?

CP:

Yeah, those were the two ones that we could attend. Now, you could go to the other, but you had to go upstairs.

CM:

In the balcony—the Lindsey.

CP:

Yeah, you couldn't sit down with them in the foyer. You had to go upstairs. And back then, well, in order to get into a movie at that time, it was during the war years in the forties, if you had like a gallon can of nails or if you had magazines and that kind of thing, that would get you in, instead of paying money.

CM:

Okay, because they needed those materials.

CP:

They needed them for the war years. So you could gather up your stuff and go onto the movie, and you could stay at the movie as long as you wanted to. We'd see western movies in particular, we'd see two of them a couple of times while you were in there. We'd normally go on a Saturday because during the week—your parents wouldn't let you go during the week because you had to school, do your when you got home from school and get your lesson out and so forth. So we was just glad whenever Saturday came and we'd already have gathered our bucket of nails or magazines or whatever it took to get in and go on in. The Anglos bother you, you could go on in go on upstairs because you couldn't sit downstairs because it was completely segregated. You had separate drinking fountains. Well, everything was separate.

CM:

Now, the community you came up in, you were self-sufficient because you had stores, and you had almost everything in the community.

CP:

Right.

CM:

Did you notice segregation back then other than the fact that you were separated?

CP:

Well, not really because the only contact we had with the Anglos, we used to shoot marbles against the Anglos and they'd go on home when we got through and we'd go home. Well, we just thought that was the way of life. You didn't realize that it was possibly when you were real young that it was segregated—you thought that was the way the world worked that you didn't go home with them at night, so you'd see them maybe during the day and then they'd go their separate ways, and we didn't have any fights or anything of that nature.

CM:

And you know, prior to Civil Rights of '64, you know, I got a little bit of that, and I was the same way. I didn't notice anything. The first time I noticed, really, segregation, I was in East Texas in Paris with my mother. That's the first time. I'd never noticed it here because I thought it was a way of life.

CP:

Well that's what I said, your mother is from Paris and my wife is from down in that same area. We just said, "Well, that's the way it's supposed to be." It was separate when we went downtown, well I shined shoes when I was back in high school at Dunbar because my dad was a person shining shoes down at a Collier's Barbershop down on Texas Avenue.

CM:

So you made money shining shoes at Dunbar?

CP:

Oh yes.

CM:

Man, that's good.

CP:

Well back then you got, you know, pretty good tips because you could buy a lot with the money you got then. You know, they'd give you like a quarter tip. Now the ones that gave you the most tip were the farmers who had on cowboy boots. It took you longer to shine those and they might tip you fifty or seventy-five cents.

CM:

Were you in a barbershop?

CP:

Yes, Collier's Barbershop.

CM:

Where was that located at?

CP:

That was down on Texas Avenue on about Tenth or Eleventh Street. And that was the guy's name that owned it, that Anglo guy. My dad was the one that was hired there to shine shoes. Again, you got good tips. You might wind up with four or five dollars-worth of tips in one day, but back then you could take four or five dollars and do a lot of things with it. You could purchase a whole lot of things as compared to now.

CM:

That's amazing, wow. Even at that age. I noticed that—well let's talk about Dunbar again. As you went through Dunbar, at what point did you decide—did your parents talk about college all the time?

CP:

Oh yes.

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CM:

They did, okay.

CP:

Oh yes, my mother in particular, and Dad, they both wanted us to get an education, and they saw that we went to school. In fact, I never missed a day in school for illness or whatever. I went right on through because we knew back then in those days, you either wound up mostly in the minority situation as a teacher or as a preacher.

CM:

So you were restricted, pretty much, to those professions?

CP:

Well, yes because that's where the job opportunities were. And so you did something that you thought you maybe could reach and get an education. Teachers were very well respected at that time, just like ministers were. So you said, "I want to be here." The only other things that were available, you would always probably think about was being a fireman or a policeman. Boy, we were scared of the police naturally back then, you respected police. If you saw a policeman, you'd walk an extra block or two out of the way to keep from meeting him.

CM:

Well, you know you mentioned that teachers were respected. I guess I knew it because I used to see it in the annuals, but all our teachers, most of my teachers until I got to about junior; they were all from historically black universities. The Houston-Tillotsons or the Samuel Houstons or the Jarvis Christians or the Prairie Views or the Bishops, the Wileys; they all came from there.

CP:

Well, because when I finished, Tech wasn't available. None of the Anglo schools were available. So if you wanted to go to college, when I finished, you had to go at least three hundred and something miles from home. Of course, well like my brother went to Prairie View and I went to Austin to Samuel Houston.

CM:

How did you get down there?

CP:

Well, I rode the train the first time and then past that, I'd ride the bus. Again, the good thing I always said about going to a completely black institution, you had caring instructors, and you had a nice pupil/teacher ratio. You weren't sitting in a class of a hundred and something students. You had smaller class sizes, and the people knew you by name, and you weren't just a number.

CM:

I was here when they integrated; I was in school when they integrated. And of course, we needed integration, but one of the travesties that happened when they integrated, they took our teachers from where we were, the people that lived in the community. One of the problems I had in school, I was pretty good in school, but I always suffered from a few little statements there, "He will not shut up, he's always clowning, or he's always talking." And my mother would make that statement, "I'll take care of that."

CP:

Sure enough. That's right.

CM:

But see, that's what always got me, and I was afraid I was scared to death whenever PTA came up, I was like, Oh god. "Is Justine coming?" Because they knew your mother by first name. I'd be waiting and I said, "Oh God, what did I do?" My grades were okay, but that social—I can't remember what it was that I got the C in, I got the lower grade. Back then Hs and Is or whatever, I'd get an I or a U in that, and man, that was enough to get a—that's like an F because I would not shut up. I clowning, and that just—

CP:

I'll tell you what; it wasn't a lot of clowning back when I went to school. In fact, when I was in school all the way through, you didn't have a lot of choices. You did exactly what teachers asked you to do. We didn't even think about why, "Why is this?" And Mrs. Lusk, Mildred Lusk, in particular, would not take no for an answer. In fact, she would tell us when we got ready to be dismissed from her classroom. She called everybody, she said, "You little people, let me tell you this, when you get home this afternoon," said, "The very first thing you want to do and need to do, whatever chores your parents have for you to do, whether it's emptying trash, et cetera, you do it." She said, "Then the next thing you do is you get Mrs. Mildred Lusk's lesson." She said, "Don't come in here tomorrow morning or whenever and tell me, 'I don't have it.'" She said, "Now, if you have time after getting my lesson, then you can get the other lessons for the other teachers, but you've got to have my lesson when you come into class. So don't come in and say, 'I don't have it.'" And you knew she meant it.

CM:

See, that's excellent. I really like that because I knew that they'd tell. They'd call, they saw your mother or your dad at Legion or they saw them at the store or at church or they lived next door or passing by. They knew them and that kind of deal.

CP:

Well yes, it took the whole neighborhood to rear you. Your mother and daddy, your daddy was very active as you know, in organizations and in particularly the lodge and so forth. You just didn't get out of hand in the community, the Gambles [?], in other words, you know the ones I don't need to mention. If you got into any kind trouble, that's what you would do. Walk across that end and tell your mother and dad, and you knew what was going to happen and it did.

CM:

And to my parents, if an adult said you did it, you did it.

CP:

That's right.

CM:

That's the way they looked at it. Adults said you did it, you did it.

CP:

It wasn't any question about it. Whatever the adults said then was word. That was the word and it was true.

CM:

Where you grew up at 2002 Date, behind you was the USO.

CP:

Right.

CM:

To later become the community center. Now was—down the street from you, was the Pleasure Garden there?

CP:

Yes, the Pleasure Garden and Mr. D. C. Farah was the one that owned it and you could either dance or skate.

CM:

Okay, a roller rink?

CP:

A roller rink. We had a lot of fun because it wasn't anything that you had to try to go across town to—which you couldn't anyway, but we'd just go down there. Again, that was on the weekend,

and when you went, my mother would say, "Now y'all can go down there, but you be home by ten o'clock." Now, most kids don't leave home until ten to go out.

CM:

That's true.

CP:

And you didn't press the issue. You got home. I always got home a little before ten, like a quarter to ten, but you'd had already had the fun at the Pleasure Garden. You could buy cokes and try to learn to skate and socialize.

CM:

Recreation.

CP:

A recreation thing and that was something that we enjoyed because it was right in our area and you didn't have to even try to go anywhere else.

CM:

And once again it was a black owned business.

CP:

Right, of course, Mr. Neil owned the place, as you know, too.

CM:

Down on Railroad Avenue.

CP:

Railroad Avenue, yeah. You could eat there whatever, you know, and then you had Mr. King, that ran King's place. He had a restaurant. In other words, you had black businesses. That's when Queen City had some business and all, but I didn't go up there much. I only went one or two times, and on the weekends sometimes they'd get the shooting and so forth, so it convinced me as a first visitor to—I didn't go back out there. But they did have [inaudible] and so forth. They had some business places up there.

CM:

Now I know there was a street beside your parents' house, Twenty-First Street that went beside that. And there was a house behind the house you grew up in, but it faced the street. Is that correct?

CP:
Yeah.

CM:
Okay, who lived there?

CP:
I don't remember the lady's name, but I know where you're talking about.

CM:
Okay, of course I remember your mother still has the sidewalk or the bricks. You know, you could see it, it was still there even then. And I must comment about your mom. One of the things I was looking at the other day is, I noticed there's no bees in the neighborhood, and I thought about it and I said, "You know, you look at Mrs. Priestley, Mrs. McQueeney, Mrs. Crocket; they all worked those yards." Your mother had a garden well into her nineties.

CM:
Yes, because she was ninety-three when she passed on, almost ninety-four. And she spent a whole lot of time in the yard when the weather permitted. As you know, she had beautiful flowers down the alley, out on the side, and all across the front.

CM:
See, there's nothing there anymore because that whole little area right there were flowers.

CP:
That's right.

CM:
We grew up with flowers, and they all had gardens because they all could garden.

CP:
That's right. They spent a lot of times in the yard and you could tell it. By the way, reverting back to your mother as an aide, not only was she a top aide, she was a very good cook. She used to tell me, she'd say, "Mr. Priestley", she said, "I know they're going to bring some food for certain occasions." So I'd say, "Yes, ma'am." She said, "Well I'm going to bring some real food," over to Bozeman when she worked over there. And what she called real food was what we call soul food today.

CM:

And you know, she could cook almost anything because I remember we had lamb, we'd have liver, you know, you name it, ox tail. She could cook any of that.

CP:

She was bringing what we now call soul food.

CM:

Yes, that's true. Thank you very much. I was explaining to a young person because at the phone company we had a stove. They said, "Why a stove?" I said, "Because people that worked all night had to cook." I said, "There was no fast food."

CP:

That's right.

CM:

So you had to know how to cook.

CP:

Oh yeah, she brought some delicious food.

CM:

Let's fast forward to when you went to college, okay? Your parents always wanted you to go to college. How did you pick Huston-Tillotson?

CP:

Well, it was Samuel Houston at that time. My brother, Roger, was in Prairie View. And Prairie View, of course, it wasn't in a major city as you know.

CM:

Yes.

CP:

And I said, "Well I'd wanted to go to a school that was located in the city." Well, I had read a little bit about Sam Houston and some other schools. I said, Well it's a school, it doesn't have a real large enrollment and it's located in Austin, Texas, and it's a lot of opportunities in Austin as far as social affairs, et cetera. I selected that, and my parents went along with it. Now, some of the teachers didn't want me to go to Austin, said, Well first of all, I was barely sixteen when I finished Dunbar.

CM:

That's right, I forgot you started at five.

CP:

They said, "Well, this boy is too young to go to school. He needs to go to Prairie View where he won't have the opportunity to start drinking alcohol and this kind of thing." As you know, I still don't drink today. So I went to Austin, I wanted to go Austin and I did.

CM:

You had the self-discipline.

CP:

Yeah, you know I never did do anything anyway. I used to box some as you know. I wasn't going to get into any trouble.

CM:

Well I didn't know you boxed, tell us about that.

CP:

Oh yes, I boxed back in high school, in fact, when Prof Hill stayed with us when he came out of the Seabees, I bloodied his nose, Prof Hill. I did some boxing here locally. It got where I couldn't hardly get any boxing matches here in Lubbock. But I went in service and I did just one or two matches in the service. I was in the military for two years.

CM:

Were you drafted?

CP:

Oh yes.

CM:

Oh okay, and that's a common deal that a lot of people have. I'm thinking Mr. Taylor said you all went into the service.

CP:

Yes, well I was in artillery and stationed at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for two years from '51 through '3.

CM:

Which is still an artillery base.

CP:

Right, yeah, and it was about eighty thousand soldiers there when I was there at Lawton, Oklahoma, and I spent two years in service. The only time I left Lawton was to go to Camp Bullis down near San Antonio.

CM:

Okay.

CP:

It was CBR school, chemical, biological, and radiological warfare.

CM:

Oh okay.

CP:

They sent me to school down there for close to a month and I taught it the last six or seven months at Fort Sill, and that involved gasses if you had been sent across seas, how to properly use a gas mask and that kind of thing, so I taught that for seven years—I mean seven months before I got out of the service at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

CM:

How do you feel about the military? My experience—of course my dad was in the military—but my experience has always been, I think it's real good for a lot of people because I saw people straightened out. They come out, they like it, they find a niche in there, they actually like it.

CP:

Well, now I'll tell you one thing about the army or the military, in which I was in an artillery, they told you went to do something, how to do it, and when to do it.

CM:

Which for today's kids is maybe good.

CP:

And I wish some of these kids that's walking around now could spend some time, even though it's not like it is when I was in there now, but they would teach them good, sound discipline and how to do what people who have authority ask you to do.

CM:

Yes.

CP:

Because again, you didn't have a choice. They told you exactly how to do it, when to do it, and how to do it. And so if you didn't, you'd wind up in what we called the stockade.

CM:

In jail.

CP:

In jail or whatever. Some of these young people that's here in the city of Lubbock and across the nation, it would be my wish that they could spend two or three months even in the military where they could learn to—well, in other words, when you have authority, you do it.

CM:

And I agree with you, sir, because in my house with my dad and mom, there was never a misunderstanding of who ran the house and no meant no. I asked to do something, "No." And I didn't say, "Why not?" They didn't give an explanation. The word was no, end of the deal, and there was never a misunderstanding about who ran this house.

CP:

That's right, and that was the same thing with teachers.

CM:

That's right.

CP:

You didn't even think about it, if they told you to do something, that was it.

CM:

Exactly.

CP:

You didn't even discuss it with your brother, your cousins. In other words, you'd just say, "Well, I can't do it. They said I can't go."

CM:

Exactly, and that's what I did. Sometimes my mother would say, "Well, we'll see." And I'd go tell the guys, "Well, I can't go." "Well, what'd she say?" "We'll see." "What's that mean?" "That translated means no and don't bother me anymore. I don't feel like saying no."

CP:

Well that's true, when we'd go to church, you didn't have a choice, you had to go to school and church. D. C. Fare, Junior, and myself, and Roger—

CM:

Who lived down the street from you.

CP:

And Junior and so on. Well, Junior didn't go to our church but D.C. Fare and myself, and Roger, and some others. Now church hadn't even started, and we'd just be saying in a low tone of voice talking because church hadn't started. And Mother or Daddy would just look over there. They didn't say a word, they'd just look, and that was it. They didn't put their hands up or anything, they just looked.

CM:

Now, you went to Mount Vernon.

CP:

That's right.

CM:

And I remember at one time Mount Vernon was in the middle of that block.

CP:

Right.

CM:

Rather than being on the corner where it is now. I remember the night it actually burned.

CP:

Yeah, it was in the middle of the block and when we first started at Mount Vernon, though, it was on Birch Avenue.

CM:

Oh really?

CP:

Mr. Fare had some apartments and so it started off in the apartments of his.

CM:

Birch and what street, what cross street?

CP:

Oh, I'm trying to think. It had to be around Twenty-First or somewhere around that area.

CM:

Okay.

CP:

And it was—we had church in there and I could barely remember we used to go there for church, and like you said, you remembered when the church burned.

CM:

Yes, I do.

CP:

Let's see, we had church down from your house in what we called the barracks then, we had church in there for probably a year or two.

CM:

Oh, I didn't know that.

CP:

Yeah, because the church had burned and then they had to construct it, but yeah, we had church in there.

CM:

Oh okay, I didn't realize that. And of course, your church has lot of what I call teachers there because I believe Mr. Roberts; did he go there, Mr. Roberts?

CP:

Oh yeah.

CM:

Okay, Mr. Braxton went there, you and your wife went there, Mrs. Edmund, and Ray Walker. So it's steeped in education.

CP:

Mrs. Rocky Moore.

CM:
Okay.

CP:
She was there. Mrs. Milleton; yeah we had a lot of teachers.

CM:
That's amazing.

CP:
Mr. Chapman. In other words there were a lot of them.

CM:
All right, let me progress here. You finish college. What year did you finish college?

CP:
In '50, 1950.

CM:
In 1950, okay. Who were some of the other people—Mr. Roberts, I think, at one time was down there with you, too, Roy Roberts.

CP:
Yeah, he finished in '49, if I'm not mistaken, about a year before I did.

CM:
And Mr. D. C. Fare was down there?

CP:
Right, and Mr. Sadberry, well we called him Snookie.

CM:
Yes, right.

CP:
He was there.

CM:
Is his name Charles?

CP:

Yes.

CM:

I never knew. I always heard Snookie and I never knew his name. I figured he might be a junior.

CP:

Yeah, there was probably a few down there, Lydon Johnson, he didn't finish. Walter Johnson, which you knew both of them.

CM:

Yeah, and Ms. Johnson's sons and Gene, Lawrence Guyton.

CP:

Yeah, he was there at the same time I was. Lloyd Greene, which you didn't know, he was from Slaton, Texas.

CM:

Okay.

CP:

He went to school here. I'm trying to think of some other guys, Edward Milos.

CM:

Okay.

CP:

I don't know if you knew him.

CM:

I didn't know him.

CP:

You didn't know him.

CM:

So it sounds like you—let me ask you, financially, who paid for your schooling?

CP:

Well basically my mother and daddy, but I didn't have a scholarship. I worked in the cafeteria for one year, and I played in the band one year with Mr. Roy Robinson.

CM:

I didn't know you were a musician.

CP:

I played clarinet.

CM:

So you played football and you had a music background, too. You don't normally see that anymore too much.

CP:

I know, yeah, I sure did.

CM:

So that brings us to your kids, for instance, your daughters, three daughters. They all played in the band.

CP:

Right, because two of them, they direct.

CM:

Yes.

CP:

As you know, Sheila, my baby daughter lives in Pflugerville, that's a suburb of Austin. My oldest daughter lives in Austin, and the middle daughter, Tanya and her husband and family and daughter live in Atlanta, Georgia. They've been in Atlanta, Georgia, for four years. So we've got two in the Austin area and one in Atlanta.

CM:

You came back, you started teaching in Shallowater, then you got into the Lubbock school system?

CP:

Right.

CM:

Okay, approximately how many years—because when I encountered you in school at Ella Iles, you were assistant principle.

CP:

Right.

CM:

I'm thinking that had to be '64, '65.

CP:

Yeah, because I was an assistant transfer from '62 to '65.

CM:

Oh okay, and then after that where did you go, sir?

CP:

Well, I was principle of Ella Iles up through '65 through '68, for three years. See, I had taught three years at Ella Iles, too. I taught sixth grade, so I was at Ella Iles a total of nine years, three years of teaching the sixth grade, three as assistant principle, and three as principle. Then they transferred me to Bozeman Elementary. Of course, you know why they transferred me.

CM:

Because the integration of the school.

CP:

Oh yeah, because a lot of the students from the Ella Iles area had moved into the Bozeman area. So they transferred me over in '68.

CM:

Well now, speaking of Ella Iles—speaking of Bozeman Elementary School, that had to be new to you because now you have a mixture of kids.

CP:

Right, and that's one reason they said they sent me, of course I know the basic reason why they sent me.

CM:

Yes.

CP:

They said, "We think you'll do well with the integrated schools." So I was the first crossover, what they called at that time, crossover principal.

CM:

The experiment.

CP:

Yes, and what happened is I hated to go because I had gotten used to the student body, the teachers, the community people at Ella Iles. What really got me was they transferred five of my teachers. When I got the call from the—

CM:

Who were the teachers that they transferred?

CP:

Oh, Mrs. Rockavoe was one, Gracey Taylor, Charlie Taylor's wife. Mrs. Birdie Hall.

CM:

Yeah, Mr. Sydney Hall's wife.

CP:

Boy, it's been a long time ago. That was three of them they I know.

CM:

Okay.

CP:

In other words, they transferred five teachers and then when the assistant superintendent got through talking, I said, "Well, you're taking some of my great teachers. You're tearing up Ella Iles" and so forth. And he said, "Now, we'll like to discuss a principal-ship change." I said, "A principal-ship change?" He said, "Yes, sir, we'd like to send you to Bozeman Elementary." I said, "Now, Dr. Hill, you mean you're taking five of my teachers and talk about taking me, too?" He said, "Yeah, we think it would be good for you." In fact, he said Mr. Williams who was superintendent at the time—

CM:

Matt Williams?

CP:

Yes. Said, "Matt Williams thinks it would be a good move for you."

CM:

So there was no incentive financially for you to go because it's a lateral move.

CP:

It's just a lateral move.

CM:

Okay.

CP:

And he said, "Well, I'll tell you what you do." He said, "You think about it overnight and let me know the first thing in the morning." I said, "Well, I would like to get a good night sleep so just consider it done. I know by contract I'm bound to go wherever y'all want me to go." I said, "Well, Lord have mercy." I said, "I just Ella Iles, so to speak." I said, "You know, to go to Bozeman, I don't mind going." I said, "But first of all, my wife works at Bozeman Elementary and y'all said we're not supposed to have a kin people in the same position." He said, "We've already considered that and taken care of that. We're going to transfer your wife out to Carlson Haynes Elementary."

CM:

Which is out of the community, and then you've got to drive to get to Haynes.

CP:

Yeah, so I said, "Is that right?" He said, "Yes, so you think about it tonight." I said, "I'm not going to think about it tonight." I said, "I'd like to sleep tonight." So I had allow five teachers and then myself. They moved me over to Bozeman Elementary.

CM:

When you got over there, was there anybody—well, I think Mr. Taylor was over there when you first got there, right?

CP:

Well, I was about to say, I knew Mr. Taylor that was there, my wife had been there course, and that's how I knew that. And then they had one or two Anglo teachers that I knew there. I knew the principal, Mr. Mears. In other words, I didn't know the rest of the staff. Now, what you don't know is that they assigned me to summer school, so I had summer school also during that

summer that I was moved. So I had to familiarize myself by name recognition with the staff that I was going to be principal of when school started.

CM:

How long did you stay at Bozeman?

CP:

Eighteen years.

CM:

And that's where you retired?

CP:

That's where I retired from.

CM:

And I must say, you were pretty successful over there at Bozeman?

CP:

Well, I had a good record, but well, I got a lot of things done over there, but it took a long time to get them done because over on the east side of Lubbock, and I think you pretty well know it took long to get things than when you were across town.

CM:

Exactly, and one of the things I looked at, well first at Dunbar, took chemistry my senior year from Mrs. Charles Izenda. Well, we had the experiments, but we didn't have all the materials to do the experiments and then we had the books that were used. They were passed down, we had those, too.

CP:

Well it's just like in football. I played football for two years, but we had uniforms from Lubbock High.

CM:

Wow.

CP:

Which were black and gold, maroon and white, as you know, are the colors at Dunbar.

CM:

So you actually had the maroon and white colors back then, but you had the black and gold uniforms?

CP:

We got hand me down uniforms from Lubbock High when they wore them out. You can look at some of the annuals back in like '45 and '6. We were sitting there in Lubbock High football uniforms with knees worn out and so forth. You didn't have things that were very fitting to you. Your shoulder pads were too large. You didn't worry about size; you just put on what you had from Lubbock High School and played football. Now, Mr. Roy Roberts, was band director as you know, for a long time and principal, too. And he changed the course of those uniforms when he became the band director because they had uniforms that weren't maroon and white. He went along with Mr. Struggs to the central office and told them that he was not going to put his band on the football field or any other occasion unless they had Dunbar uniforms and Dunbar colors, and they did it. So things changed gradually, and you had to have—well, we had to just keep at the work. Let me give you one example, and I'll stop talking about that. When I was at Bozeman, the heat in our building was not evenly distributed. Some rooms were colder than others; thermostats didn't work properly in some. And I sent in a stack of work orders to get it done. They'd come out and do a little catch up job and go on back. We had one parent, Mrs. Prothro [?]. Her husband was a policeman, and she worked down a long time at the city offices. This just goes to show you, and I had lady that was the president from the Bayless area, Anglo naturally. And she said, "Mr. Priestley, it's cold in some of the rooms, cold in some of them." I said, "Yes ma'am, I know." She said, "Have you done anything about it?" I said, "Well, yes, I've sending in work orders and they'll come out and do something.." She said, "Well who do I need to call?" I said, "If you'll come onto the office, I'll dial the number." Well, she was the PTA president, but she had two students of hers at Bozeman also. And she got on the telephone and she said, and I won't call names, but she talked to some of the people at the central office that I'd given her the names of. And she said, "I want to ask you a question first." And I was sitting right there listening because she was in my office. She said, "Is it warm at the central office?" And evidently, they told her it was. She said, "Well, it's not warm at Bozeman Elementary." She said, "I'm calling, first of all, as the PTA president. I want something done about it." She said, "But I have two students at Bozeman, and I don't think the students at Bozeman need to be cold in some rooms and too hot in others." Well I was listening, and so she said, "So I want something done about it, and I don't want it to take all day." And Mr. Morton, I'll tell you, in about twenty or thirty minutes, half the maintenance division was out at Bozeman Elementary saying, "Did you call in?" I said, "No, I didn't call in." They said, "Mr. Irons jumped all over us." And I said, "Well, it wasn't me that called, one of the parents called, the PTA president who was a parent, she called them." They said, "Well we knew something happened" because, boy, they put in a \$55,000 heating unit. If your mother were living, she could tell you, they put in a whole new heating system, one Anglo call. And I had a stack of orders, and Mr. Irons came out

and he said he didn't realize all that was going on. He looked at the work order, he said it should have been done a long time ago. I said, "Yes, Mr. Irons, I know. I've been sending these." "I see you have." So that goes to show you what was happening back in those days.

CM:

Well yeah, that's true. Let me ask you a question, it's something I forgot and I want to go back to this. You mentioned you played in the band. Who was the band director back when you were in Dunbar?

CP:

Mr. Cleveland and Carmichael. Cleveland first, he had finished from Prairie View, and he resigned or whatever, then we had a guy named Mr. Carmichael. Mr. Carmichael had been in the military and he was very strict. So you either played it right or you didn't be in his band.

CM:

Did y'all perform? Well, you played football so you couldn't.

CP:

Well, yes, but I played solo Val Champan, which you may not have known, you knew his brother Herald Chapman. Val Chapman and I were in the band together along with Herald. I played over at Lubbock High School along with Val Chapman played a solo and I played a solo at Lubbock High School. That was a way back when, but we played, sure did.

CM:

So with all your schooling, you not only played football, but you had to learn music and learn the solo, and that's a lot to do, that's a lot on your shoulders, being a year younger than everybody, too.

CP:

Yes, I was young. I was barely sixteen.

CM:

That's amazing. Let me progress back to—who were some of your teachers that you had at Bozeman?

CP:

Oh, I had a lot. I probably had over two hundred teachers during the eighteen years I was there. I had Mrs. Quinney.

CM:

Edith Quinney, a graduate of Dunbar?

CP:

I had Mrs. Morgan, I don't know if you remember her.

CM:

I don't know her.

CP:

I had Mrs. Henderson.

CM:

Oh, Ruby Henderson, yes.

CP:

I had Mr. Charles Perry.

CM:

My cousin.

CP:

That's right, sure is. I had him. I was just trying to think.

CM:

Wasn't Mrs. Patterson over there at one time?

CP:

Yes, now she was counselor.

CM:

Okay.

CP:

She was there.

CM:

Mr. T. J. Patterson's wife, Mrs. Barbara Patterson.

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CP:

She was there. I'm trying to think of all of them, but that's some of them that were there.

CM:

How did you adjust? You know, you go into a situation, it's obviously different because it's no longer segregated and you've got all nationalities. Were you apprehensive a little bit about that?

CP:

No, and I'll tell you what, when I first was assigned there, you know, you think about it because I didn't know myself. I didn't know the teachers that were there, and they had transferred my wife, and I knew about two or three teachers, that was all. And so the only thing I was concerned about was how they would feel about me, the Anglos in particular. Now, let me give you another example. My wife had been there for two or three years, and they loved her. And when I was putting out teacher supplies and textbooks and so forth, previous to the start of school, I had one parent and her last name was Pruitt, P-r-u-i-t-t. Mrs. Pruitt came up, and she was an Anglo parent, and she said, "I'd like to talk to you for a minute." And I was just sweating. I said, "Yes ma'am?" She said, "I'm Mrs. Pruitt and I have a daughter here and we loved your wife, but I think you're not going to work out here." I said, "Why is that?" She said, "I think you're going to be prejudiced." I said, "No ma'am, I'm colorblind when it comes to that." I said, "I'm glad y'all love my wife." I said, "But I haven't had the opportunity to do anything here. I'm just getting ready to open school." She said, "Well I don't think you're going to work out here." You know, where'd that come from? So after she left, I was telling Mrs. Snell who was my secretary, at the time about, she said, "I wonder why would she think that?" I said, "I don't know." Now, what I'd like to tell you, after about the first month and a half of school, that same parent came back and gave me high praise. She said, "You know, you worked out." Now, when we had students that were bussed into Bozeman from four different schools from across town. You would think I was in court when they first came over, and I presented our programs and what we had at Bozeman, the things we do and so forth. They would come to the office after the general session in the cafeteria and they'd have their notepads, and there would be three or four parents, Anglo parents, and they would just ask me, I mean all kinds of questions. And then when they would get through they said, "You know, I think you know what you're doing." They said, "We think we're going to have a good year. It seems like you know what's going on." I said, "Well, I certainly hope so." So we had parents later that'd come in and say that this was the first school that they had been in where the principal and the teachers were telling the truth and took the time to talk to the parents, and so they gave us high praise. And you probably had some of that in the job where you worked.

CM:

Yes sir, definitely.

CP:

They didn't think at first you knew what you were doing.

CM:

Exactly and you're always tested, so you have to know. And one of the things that you have, especially in a situation of being Afro-American, you've got to be the best because they're going to put you in a situation. They're not going to take somebody that's low average. They want the best, and then they're still not going to scrutinize you and look at you and evaluate everything you do. That's the reason I said, I'm appreciative of all the people coming in from the historically black universities. That's the way before the Notre Dames and the Texas Techs and the West Texas States. When we had the black universities coming in, and they were the ones that instilled in us, you know, they were like our parents.

CP:

Yeah, that's right. I had another black, Mr. Carley, you didn't know him. He moved eventually to California. I had several black teachers over the years and they did a good job.

CM:

That's commendable, the situation that you went into at the time you went into and to last eighteen years over there.

CP:

Well, yes, and I didn't have a lot of turn over for eighteen years. Most of them enjoyed what they did and—well, let me mention this, too, when it comes to the assignment of teachers. Now, at first when we first started off as principals back in those days, you didn't have a choice as a principal as to who was assigned to your school once they were hired. And finally they got where they let us as principals, if you chose to do so, go to the central office, look through the folders, and interview teachers, take them to your building if you wanted to, and so forth. And I always took the time to go to the central office to look through applicants' folders to see who would fit what we were doing at Bozeman. So you selected a teacher based on what you had seen, and you had interviewed the teacher, then it was your problem if it didn't work out. But I liked it because you had a chance. Because before that, when you looked up, a teacher was showing up at your building that you had never seen, you hadn't seen her folder, you didn't even know her. So you had to work with them whether you wanted to or not.

CM:

You had the chance to pick your own team.

CP:

So you got a chance to pick your teachers, recommend them to the personnel office. If they knew of anything that why that person shouldn't be hired, the folder wasn't available anyway. So I was very glad when they started that, like a lot of us were. Now, some transfers wouldn't take the time to go out and look through folders, they'd say, well send them, but I didn't because I wanted to ask some questions, I wanted them to come in and see the building and what kind of programs we had, and where I could interview them and then I could recommend them. Because out of those eighteen years, I only had about two or three teachers that said they would rather not work in an integrated situation.

CM:

So there were other problems there if they didn't want to do that then.

CP:

Well, they might have been great teachers. They had good folders, but they just weren't ready to teach in a situation where you had black students or Latin Americans.

CM:

Explain to me how it works because I'm not really certain—I've heard what it is—did you do the evaluations on the teachers, too, after they got over there and were teaching?

CP:

Oh yes.

CM:

Oh okay, so see, I think now, and you may correct me when I'm wrong, they have somebody that actually comes in and looks at the teachers now.

CP:

Well, what they have, what they use to call it when I was working was an instructional specialist.

CM:

Okay.

CP:

Like Mrs. Eva Samples was mine. She would evaluate teachers also, but basically, I was the one that evaluated teachers and then we had to collaborate together what she had done. I didn't care what she had done, and she didn't care what I had done. They called it at that time, an instructional specialist, what Mrs. Samples was. She had several schools that she would go to. But I was basically in it myself.

CM:

Well now, the next question is, did you develop teachers also over there?

CP:

Yes, we had.

CM:

Okay, so you had that chore of developing and evaluating.

CP:

Yes, because what we had at that time they called it the PO Base Program, and that's where Texas Tech came in. They would provide student teachers in different schools and we were one of them. I got some real good teachers from that situation because they did their student teachers, almost all of my master teachers. In probably three or four cases I got some real good teachers from that program, and some moved up after they got in the program. Again, you have to evaluate and then the teacher would evaluate them also that had them in the student teaching program. As a principal, you had to spend a lot of time—you didn't sit in the office all day, I'll put it that way, you had to go to rooms and see what was going on.

CM:

Now, was this pre-test—I know we had tests, but it wasn't so structured to teach towards the tests.

CP:

No, not back then. Teachers developed the tests and so forth, and now, from what I can understand because I'm not in the system anymore, everything is based on the tests.

CM:

And speaking from having a daughter in one with the tests and coming up through the one without the tests, the one without the test was a lot better because the kids now, I've been with different people that can take a test, but not know anything. You know, I mean, they can score a hundred on a test every time you give it to them, I guess through memorization. But if you tell them to figure this out—to cook, it's like cooking, I can tell you the ingredients in it, I can put them together, but I can't get that hands-on do something. So I thought it was a lot better then because we actually knew how to do stuff.

CP:

Yes, and you had teachers cooperated with each other a lot better, too.

CM:

Okay, yes.

CP:

Anytime you start, as far as I'm concerned, start tying evaluation into the teacher evaluation, you've got a problem, I think.

CM:

Well, I agree with you. You're the expert in that field, and I can see that because there are always ways to cheat. And you may not be cheating, but there are ways to teach to a particular deal.

CP:

You know as well as I do what has happened across the country in Houston, Atlanta, and so forth.

CM:

Yes sir.

CP:

Anytime a teacher is threatened with test results being tied to her evaluation, a lot of times they have to do whatever it takes.

CM:

And you lose something along with when we lost the community taking care of the kids is that, "Well, I'm just here, and I'm trying to get a pay check. I don't really have a vested interest in you. I don't care—when you walk out of this class, that's the last I see of you, so I don't really care."

CP:

You're right. It's like computers, I think computers are great, but like you said, a kid can work a computer, but if you do fractions, what I call basic math or whatever, they don't know.

CM:

I've got a good example to tell you. My daughter, Natasha, when she came home—she was like in the first grade or something or she went to Kindergarten—I said, "What time is it?" And she said, "Oh, it's 3:15." I said, "Man, she can tell time." But then all of a sudden I thought about it, she's looking at a digital clock. So I'm thinking, Well she can't really tell time, she's just looking at three and fifteen.

CP:

It's amazing what computers can do. I don't think it's—and in fact seemingly, they are going more for computers now, technology. In other words, they are gradually doing away with textbooks.

CM:

I heard that, where they don't have to take textbooks home. I'm thinking, We had spelling words every week, we had something to do. And then I remember a long time ago I could actually take a pencil and a piece of paper and figure something out. Well now, I punch it up, my watch or something. You know, "Well do I carry the one?"

CP:

Well that's what I mean. I think it's too much use of technology in a certain sense.

CM:

Exactly, I always laugh at the people that came through Mary and Mac because whenever some of my friends say they came through Mary and Mac I said, "Let me look at your knuckles." Well I joked that Mrs. Graves had the rule. I said, "Let me see your knuckles."

CP:

Yeah, Mrs. Pratt would do the same thing. When you were taking handwriting, if you didn't put those circles right or slates and so forth, cracked across with that metal part on the ruler.

CM:

I do that now when I see, I tell like Charles, "I know you went to Mary and Mac. That's not from Boston, that's not from Boston."

CP:

Yeah, Mrs. Pratt did the same thing.

CM:

Mrs. Pratt. Also, another person that was over there when you were assistant principal and principal at Ella Iles was Mrs. Claribel Smith. She had been around quite a long time.

CM:

Mrs. Pratt. Also, another person that was over there when you were assistant principal or principal was Mrs. Claribel Smith. She had been around quite a long time.

CP:

Yeah, she was from Waco. You know, she passed away years ago. too.

CM:

I know she went back to Waco.

CP:

Yeah, she went blind.

CM:

Oh, I didn't know that.

CP:

Yeah, she went blind for whatever reason. I don't know if it's glaucoma or what, but she was there. We had a lot of good teachers. A lot of them—like I said, everybody knew everybody. They knew your parents and you just didn't get in a whole lot of trouble. If you did, we took care of it and that was it.

CM:

And the last thing I wanted was to get into trouble with school because y'all took care of it. And then if they made that phone call to the house, so see I trying to always, hey, take care of this, what do I need to do, what do you need to do? I'll take the paddling, because if you made the phone call to the house—

CP:

You got another.

CM:

Exactly.

CP:

Well of course, Gibson my wife and myself attended an induction at Tech, and that's, of course, what Gibson was talking about when he was receiving his award. He was saying the same thing basically that then parents would tell you, "You take care at eight o'clock in the morning, but I'm going to take care of it tonight."

CM:

Exactly. They didn't play around. If an adult said you did it, you did it. It's simple as that.

CP:

That was a real nice—it would last and it lasted three hours, but Larry Isaac, and what you saw in the paper was being honored, inducted and so forth. It was real nice. Well, Kenneth Wallace, a lot of them, were there from the '68 championship team.

CM:

I saw Walter Abel's picture.

CP:

So it was probably about fifteen or eighteen of them that showed up. It was real nice.

CM:

One last thing, back to when you played football, what position were you on the football team?

CP:

I played right tackle and right guard.

CM:

So you're probably amazed now that you got eighteen year old kids coming out, 305 pounds, and six foot five.

CP:

Oh yes, because when I was playing football I was weighing about 165 and 170. Ed Madio at that time was our largest person on our football team. You hear them from other cities say, "Dunbar's got a great big guy." And I think he was weighing around 200 pounds.

CM:

Yeah.

CP:

And back then that was huge.

CM:

I played basketball in junior high and we had one guy that wore like a fourteen. Well, they had the special order his shoes, now all kids have got fourteen and fifteen. It's not the same anymore.

CP:

No, everything worked out good when you think about what happened years ago and how teachers were able to still give us a good education with what they had to work with.

CM:

Right, now the teachers—I know your parents promoted college, how about the teachers over there?

CP:

Same thing, they wanted you to go to school and get an education and don't stop here, in other words. Well, Mrs. Lusk, and I keep referring to her because she would always say, "You build a ladder by which you climb, one rung at a time." And she said, "You reach for the stars." Like I said, Mrs. Lusk was a person who pushed you and I think if you ever had her—

CM:

Yeah, she was the librarian, but she was there, yes.

CP:

Yeah, well she, to me, we didn't know what a library was until Mrs. Lusk came along.

CM:

So did she organize the library over there?

CP:

Oh yeah, sure did. She worked that as a long time and then as you know she was transferred across to Coronado.

CM:

It's kind of funny; I've heard people, Anglos, actually talking. "Well Mrs. Lusk was—" You know.

CP:

Yeah, she spent quite a few years at Coronado in the library out there. She knew her field, I can tell you that.

CM:

Yes, yes she did. I still remember her shushing me in the library.

CP:

Oh yeah, whenever we changed classes and passed from one classroom to the other, when it got about thirty or forty feet from Mrs. Lusk's room, you could hear a pin drop.

CM:

Yeah, she was the same way when I was in school. Of course, Mrs. Sadberry was over there as the counselor when I was there and Mr. Thomas was there my freshman year, you know, math.

CP:

I had math under him.

CM:

Did you really?

CP:

Algebra.

CM:

Well, Mr. Priestley, I think we're going to go ahead and close it off. I do want to come back and talk to you and your wife together.

CP:

Okay.

CM:

But since we've talked quite a bit and I'm going to go ahead and close this off, but I want to thank you for everything and your service to the Lubbock Public School System and to the community.

CP:

Well I appreciate the opportunity.

CM:

I hadn't finished sir, I'm just in the early stages so I will talk to you. Thank you very much, sir.

CP:

You're certainly welcome.

End of Recording

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