

ZEPHYRHILLS ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Edward Holt

Recorded December 4, 2018

Steve [Spina]: Hi. Thanks for coming to meet with us. Tell me where were you born.

Edward: I was born in a really small town in Georgia called Newton. It had one stop sign, and that was all.

Steve: And when did you come to Zephyrhills?

Edward: Now, we moved from Georgia to Dade City when I was three. We moved from Dade City to Lumberton [between Dade City and Zephyrhills] when I was about seven, in second grade.

Steve: Did your dad work for the railroad? Is that what brought your family to this area?

Edward: My grandmother met my grandfather in Dade City and they got married. She had my mother. My mother went back when my grandfather and grandmother divorced. So my mother went back to Georgia with her mother, then after she and my father divorced, we came to Dade City to stay with her father. That's how I came to Dade city.

Steve: Okay. So you said that in the early years you went to school in Dade City at Moore Academy?

Edward: Yes.

Steve: Tell me a little bit about Ms. Bessie, your teacher.

Edward: Her name was Bessie Barefield. That's all I remember about her. She seemed huge. She was well-known in school and well-known everywhere. We had a little small school there. They had a gym-type building across the street. I remember it had walls but no top, so it was kind of distinctive. She made an impression on all the kids.

Steve: How did she introduce herself to you? That was interesting.

Edward: Yes. She said, "My name is big, bad Bessie Barefield, and I will baptize your back with blisters." You remembered that. You didn't cross her at all.

Steve: So she had discipline in that classroom?

Edward: Yes. Yes.

Steve: And this was a segregated school?

Edward: Yes. All schools were segregated at that time.

Steve: Okay. And this is the late fifties?

Edward: Yes. Late fifties.

Steve: Okay. You had talked a little bit with me about the railroad and the situation with the section cars. Tell me a little bit about that.

Edward: Many of the blacks that came here, came here with the railroad company, and they didn't have any housing for blacks. The railroad ran, at that time, through Zephyrhills, and they had certain railroad cars that were parked, and blacks stayed in those. Then, later on down the line, they built some small houses near where Village Inn is now, and they stayed there.

Steve: And there was a park there. What else was there?

Edward: It was. There was a wishing well there and a cab stand there. I think Zephyrhills had the water faucet there, because, at that time, Zephyrhills would give away free water. You would bring your own container and get free water there.

Steve: So we've always been known for our water, even back in the day. That's where the whole thing started.

Edward: "The City of Pure Water." At that time, nobody thought it would be worthwhile to to buy water because you're living in Zephyrhills. Why buy water from Zephyrhills when you live in Zephyrhills?

Steve: Right. So in third grade you went to Moore Elementary?

Edward: Yes. That's where Moore-Mickens is now. At one time they were two separate schools. At Moore Elementary, the principal was Mr. Goodwin. And you had Mickens High School. "Mickens" was O.K. Mickens—I remember his name because it's kind of distinctive. "O.K. Mickens." They were two separate buildings, and after you finished the fifth grade, you moved on until you finished the sixth grade. You moved to the high school then, except that I came to Zephyrhills in seventh grade as opposed to going to Mickens High School.

Steve: Okay. And you said that, in Zephyrhills at that time, the high school was seventh to twelfth grade?

Edward: Yes. You had an elementary school to the side there and you had high school, seventh through twelfth.

Steve: And you were one of the first groups that integrated Zephyrhills High School?

Edward: I think there were thirteen of us, and I was one of the first groups there. I think it was 1965 or 1966. Somewhere in there.

Steve: Alright. And you said that initially integration was voluntary.

Edward: Yes. For the first five years, it was voluntary, and the last year—I guess the beginning of the school year in 1970—it was mandatory. You go to the nearest school. At one point, a bus would pick us up here and take us to Dade City to go to school.

Steve: Right. So, until you were in high school, it was mandatory segregation?

Edward: Also in high school, people here had to walk from school, because you had to be more than two miles away to get picked up by the bus. Everybody here walked to school every day.

Steve: Tell me what you did after high school.

Edward: After high school, I went to the University of South Florida [U.S.F.] and majored in engineering. During that time, you had the [military] draft. I had a low draft number and my brother convinced me to go into the Army. I volunteered to go into the Army as opposed to being drafted. I went in and stayed 22 years. Then I came back to here.

Steve: When did you think about applying to the Zephyrhills Police Department for a position?

Edward: After I'd been in the Army about three years, I was considering getting out and I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I got an application from City Hall, which I guess was where City Hall is now. I went to apply for a position as a police officer, and I remember that the police chief wouldn't take my application. I was thinking, I'm not a dumb guy and I spent three years in the military. I was kind of surprised by that.

Steve: So they just flat-out said "no"?

Edward: He told me that he wouldn't take it. It wasn't like he could have taken it and put it off to the side there. He flat-out told me that he wouldn't take it.

Steve: So then you decided that your best option was to—

Edward: —stay in the service. I just stayed the rest of my time there.

Steve: Okay. What was it like growing up in Zephyrhills? What are some of your memories as a child?

Edward: First of all, I was poor and I didn't realize that I was poor. I was raised in Lumberton more than here. I didn't start associating with people here until I was a teenager, and then...boys meeting girls and so forth. The thing was, you never mixed with whites here.

It was never a thing here. Now, there were a few people that I knew from school, but we would never meet [outside of school]. You talked about Ken Young. We played football together. After football season was over, we never had any contact. Or Rick Moore. He was in my class. Same thing. Never had any contact after that.

Steve: So, in high school, even though there was integration, the social climate hadn't really changed. It took a while for that to happen.

Edward: Right. There was a problem we had...Well, I thought about it later on. I did very well in school, and we had a counselor there—I was planning on going to college. I had very good grade—and she was trying to encourage me to be a farmer. That just bothered me. I was in Beta Club, had a 3.5 grade point average, so forth, so on, and she wanted me to take all of these agricultural class. I just resisted that. She discouraged me from taking the college preparatory classes. I don't remember the lady's name, but she was a younger lady.

Steve: But you defied that and you went to U.S.F. anyway.

Edward: Yes. Yes I did. I had a scholarship to U.S.F., believe it or not.

Steve: And then you finished later? After the Army?

Edward: Yes. After I got out of the Army, I came back to work at the prison here and I used my G.I. Bill benefits and went back to get my bachelor's. Then I started working on a master's.

Steve: So, after you retired from the Army, you moved back home?

Edward: Yes.

Steve: And then you went to work at the Zephyrhills Correctional Institution? Okay. And what was that institution like when you were growing up? It wasn't a prison.

Edward: Yes, as a corrections officer.

Steve: Okay. And what was that institution like when you were growing up? It wasn't a prison.

Edward: Well, when I was growing up, there were only about 100 inmates out there, and it was a work release. I think it was. The prisons worked throughout the county doing various jobs. They didn't have a fence around it either at that point, so it was a very relaxed atmosphere. We had one of the prisoners come to our class and talk to us about the arrangement for them: working and not being paid, and so forth.

Steve: Now, the county jails. Did they have prison gangs or gangs?

Edward: In prison or in county jail? Because I worked at the county jail, too.

Steve: Either one. Did they have chain gangs, I guess, back then?

Edward: No, I don't think so. I don't think they had chain gangs here. I thought you might've been talking about regular street gangs. I don't think we had chain gangs here.

Steve: We talked a little bit earlier about the different pockets of black communities in the area. Can you tell me a little bit more about that? That was kind of interesting. Like in Richland and different places.

Edward: There was a guy here—I think his name was Byne Hill—who had a sawmill, and he had a pocket of blacks at the sawmill down there. I'm not sure what that road is. Where [Highway] 301 and [State Road] 39 split, there's a road. There used to be a bar down that road, and the sawmill was there. Maybe Tucker [Road]? You've got some motorcycle people down there now, but you had a pocket of blacks there. This was known as Krusen Quarters, this area here. You had blacks here. You had some blacks up around the train station, up there in the cars, a small community there. You had a community maybe a quarter mile down the railroad track on the left. I'm trying to pick a name for that street down there. There used to be a junk yard down there. You had a group of blacks there. You had blacks in Lumberton, and you had blacks near where Rigby's Auto Parts is [Lynbrook Dr. and Forbes Rd., northeast of town] and that's about it, I think.

Steve: How many black people do you think were in the whole area back when you were growing up?

Edward: First of all, everybody pretty much knew everybody. Everybody black knew everybody else black, and the kids, and the mother, father, so forth. So, my guess is you had maybe 200.

Steve: Tell me about your church life. I'm sure your mom was involved in the church.

Edward: Sure. Yeah. She was involved in a church in Dade City. That's where I grew up, and she would go there to St. John—St. Paul, rather. I get them confused—St. Paul, right on 7th Street near where the probation office is, right across the street from that. That's where we'd go every Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Sunday at noon time—three times a day on Sundays. My mother stayed active in the church for all of her life.

Steve: What kind of unity did the church bring to the community?

Edward: At one point, it was a center of everything here. The church was the center of all of the activities. Almost everything revolved around church. Various group sports, Boy Scouts—we had a Boy Scout troop here at one point. Everything just revolved around the church and the members of the church.

Steve: Now, the Boy Scout troop: was that based in the church?

Edward: Yes. The church in Lumberton.

Steve: Okay. So, that was segregated also?

Edward: I'm not sure if you've heard of a guy named John Mathis.

Steve: Yes.

Edward: He was our scout leader. He was afraid of cats, too, but that's a different thing.

Steve: He was what?

Edward: Afraid of cats.

Steve: Oh, was he?

Edward: Deathly afraid of cats. He taught us a lot of stuff there, he and a guy by the name of Dan Thomas. They were our scout leaders.

Steve: Okay. Did your children grow up around the world? Where did your children grow up?

Edward: Both my kids were born in this area here. One was born in Dade City and one was born in Lakeland. The first time we went anywhere, we went to North Carolina when they were young. Then we went to the Chicago area when they were still young, because I distinctly remember my son coming home from school and telling me, "There's another black kid in school besides me!" And that was outside of Chicago. We also went to Italy. Where else...

Steve: Germany?

Edward: I went to Germany by myself for two years. If you take your family, it's three years, but if you go by yourself, it's only two. I was in a place where there were only four American families, two of which had German wives. The school was 200 miles away. The kids had leave to go to school all week, then come back on the weekends. And, like I said, there were only two other American wives, and I thought, if I bring my wife over here...She's young—twenty-five years old. No TV now: all the TV shows were in German, all of the radio stations in German. Everything German. All of the stores, German. So I left my family here.

Steve: Tell how you met your wife here.

Edward: We went to school together.

Steve: Okay. And she's Frankie [Mackenzie]'s cousin?

Edward: She's Frankie's first cousin. We dated in high school and got married two years later.

Steve: And then you had the two children?

Edward: Yes.

Steve: All right. Well, that's good. What is your impression of Zephyrhills today?

Edward: It's changed. Maybe it's because I'm getting older and getting more mellow or whatever, but during the sixties and seventies, it was a different atmosphere. Everything was more confrontational at that time. Now, not so much. I enjoy Zephyrhills now. It was just two separate communities when I was growing up. Two completely different communities, and you didn't understand each other. You lived separate lives. If I went to school with someone, we would never interact after school. Only at school.

Steve: That was during times of change and the civil rights movement.

Edward: Yes.

Steve: And you've seen it evolve, until now it's just kind of one [community]?

Edward: Yes.

Production: You were on a good point about your friend, who you played football with, and how, once that was over, you kind of went your separate ways.

Edward: Yes. Rick Moore was a pretty good friend of mine. After school, he went his way, I went my way. I think he went into the service.

Steve: He went to U.S.F. He went straight to school.

Edward: I think he went into the service.

Steve: I think he went to work for D.O.T. [Department of Transportation]. I don't think he went into the service. So, at that time, it got to a point where you could mix and cooperate in school?

Edward: Yeah, but not outside.

Steve: But the society was still separate?

Edward: Now, there's one guy I knew fairly well. I'm not sure if you knew him—the Chaunceys?

Steve: Yes.

Edward: You had the Chanceys and the Chaunceys, two separate families. They're related, but they pronounce their names differently now. There's a guy named Keathel [Chauncey], though: we stayed pretty good friends. We're still pretty good friends now. [My friendships with] most of these guys revolved around being on the football team together. Keathel, Ken Young, Rick Moore.

Steve: So, sports was a building block for change?

Edward: At that time, we had supposedly the first winning team in something like 20 years in Zephyrhills. You had a lot of blacks on that team, and we had a small team. I think we had 22 people come out for football. Two quit, so we had a 20-man team. Everybody played all the time. You didn't get a break. You played the full game: offense, defense, kickoff return, all of that.

Steve: So, you were in high school in the late sixties and early seventies?

Edward: Yes, I graduated in 1971 from Zephyrhills High School.

Steve: That was at the height of change, really.

Edward: Yes. And I think we had the largest graduating class in history at that time. We graduated 104. I think we had eight blacks in that class. After that, the schools had completely integrated, so we had more blacks there. You went to your nearest school—Zephyrhills for us.

Production: Did kind of a joint community form around the sports team?

Edward: We had a black coach. Melvin Dennard. He was a line coach. And you had Bob Alwood—he was the head coach—and Coach Lamar Stevens, who was a kind of tall guy. He was the backfield coach. All of them were really good friends. We had a very close relationship at school, but after school, that was it.

Steve: And Krusen Field is where you played your games. The high school didn't have a football field.

Edward: When I went there, we didn't have a gym either. The gym that they recently tore down was built while I was in school. We came down here and practiced most times. Sometimes we practiced at the school there, but most time we came to here to practice and we played all our games there [at Krusen Field].

Steve: Do you remember Mr. Stewart—Ray Stewart?

Edward: Raymond B. Stewart. He was my principal, and his son was in my class. I played football with him.

Steve: How did he handle the integration? Was he helpful to that?

Edward: I don't remember much about him at all, other than who he was and he was a principal. I didn't have any interactions with him. There were a couple of teachers that I remember distinctly. You had Mr. Davis—can't think of his first name. He was a principal out there.

Steve: Jim Davis?

Edward: Yes. He was kind of forceful—we'll put it that way—and I remember another guy, Mr. Krenshaw. I distinctly remember him. He was a math teacher, a very smart guy. I

considered him racist. He had a water fountain by his classroom and he didn't want blacks drinking out of that water fountain. That was in the late sixties.

Steve: It took some people longer than others to adapt.

Edward: He was a really smart guy. He had a son in school, too. He was just very different. One of the problems I had during school was this: I was the only black in class. I took different courses than most people did. That put me in a different group of people, so I was extremely quiet. I didn't mingle with anybody in the class. The only place I mingled was football, but I took different classes than [any of the football players]. I was the only black in the whole class.

Steve: So, that was an uneasy feeling? It took a while for adjustment?

Edward: Yes.

Steve: You said that, of 104 students, there were only eight blacks.

Edward: Yeah, that graduated.

Steve: Right. So that is a much smaller [group].

Edward: I took different classes than most of my black friends did, so I was the only one in class.

Steve: What was your first year at U.S.F. like, then? Because you were a large minority there, too.

Edward: Well, first of all, there was a program in the late sixties called Upward Bound. Low-income kids that were pretty smart would go to this program, a federally funded program, and would live at U.S.F. over the summer and take classes. It was in preparation for your next year of classes, and they exposed you to the college environment. We got tours of all of the biggest colleges in Florida. I started after my ninth grade year, so I went the summer after ninth grade, tenth grade, junior year and in senior year, you start college. So, when I graduated in May, I started college in June, so I was going to school continuously for all of those years.

Steve: Was gaining acceptance at U.S.F. easier than in high school?

Edward: I had pretty good grades. I did very well on a test called the Florida Placement Test—or something like that. I can't think of it—and with my test scores, I had no problem getting into any school that I wanted to get into.

Steve: How many blacks were at U.S.F. at that time?

Edward: In summer school with Upward Bound, you probably had 300 or 400 kids. Now, when I went on to college there—because I knew the college and everything—we had maybe 500 students on the whole campus.

Steve: Did the black and white students interact then?

Edward: I didn't stay on campus. I commuted every day. That was one of my downfalls there, too.

Steve: I lived on campus, and I was there in 1971—the same year you were—and I remember it was very separate. A division, I guess, of blacks and whites. I don't think I realized at that time that they had just integrated everything. I didn't understand how the whole thing worked. It took me a while to realize why we were still kind of separate.

Edward: When I was there in the summertime, Upward Bound was primarily black—although you did have some whites there, too—and you all socialized there. But when I went to college there, like I said, I commuted everyday, so I didn't have the friendships out there that I had before. All of us in Upward Bound spread out over the country, going to various schools, and that was one of the intentions of this program: to get everybody to go to college. I will say that 95 percent of us went to college. It exposed us to a lot of reading books. They gave away free paperbacks. They had a library full of paperbacks. Any book you wanted to get, you were free to keep it.

Steve: It was probably to make up for the separate and unequal school system that you had in the county system while growing up.

Edward: I didn't do much library reading as I was growing up. I just started doing a lot of reading until I went to college, but I don't remember ever going to the library other than the school library, and I'm not sure whether I couldn't or I just didn't want to. I'm not sure, but it was different.

Steve: Maybe both.

Edward: Maybe both, yes. I think the library was where it is now back in those days. I didn't ever go to that library until after I got out of the army.

Production: I'm 26 years old, so it's really hard for me to imagine a world where things are so separate. What do I need to know about that time, as someone who wasn't even sort of alive in that time? What stories or information would you give me so that I can understand what that time was like?

Edward: The main thing is how distinct the two different races were. They very rarely intermingled. Most kids my age, other than in football, never socially mixed with anybody outside of their race, and that was, I guess, socially required, because we didn't do it.

Steve: How did you think about that? I mean, it was just normal for you.

Edward: I never thought about it one word. It never crossed my mind one way or the other. During the late sixties, a lot of blacks got involved with the Black Power movement and so forth. A lot of people were really enthused about that, and we all had our national black heroes. Most people don't realize how some people were looked upon back in

those days. Martin Luther King, when I was growing up, was not a great guy. Eldridge Cleaver, Muhammed Ali...I can't think of guys' names now. You had Richard Pryor. Certain people that were influential.

Steve: Right. They broke barriers. Those were the people that garnered your attention.

Edward: Most people today think of Martin Luther King as a really influential guy. Maybe he was, nationally, but we didn't think much of him at all. We thought he was more of a sellout than anything else.

Steve: Oh, okay. You were more interested in kind of pushing faster or harder.

Edward: There are certain things that I remember doing. I remember the courthouse/City Hall. They had a Ku Klux Klan meeting there. I was a junior or senior in high school. You had the police station in the building. You had some jail cells there and a big auditorium where they had the meeting. And me and my buddies, we went there and talked to the police guy and said, "We're going to the meeting there," and we went off to the meeting. Four black teenagers.

Steve: What happened there?

Edward: Nothing, because the police were across the hallway, so we didn't have a problem. Now, many of the places most people went to were all segregated. Right across from the school there, you had Ethel's Bar. Blacks didn't go inside at all. They had a bowling alley there. Blacks didn't bowl. Me and my buddy went there to bowl. I'd never bowled in my life. I was throwing the ball everywhere—gutterballs everywhere! That was the first time they'd had anybody black inside. But normally, before we did anything like that, we'd tell the police that we were going to go do these things.

Steve: Was your mother a little concerned about some of those activities?

Edward: No, she wasn't. First of all, she encouraged us to go integrate schools. My seventh grade year, it was optional, and my mother gave all of her kids the option of going to Zephyrhills or going to school in Dade City. Some of my brothers went to Dade City; some of us went to Zephyrhills.

Steve: What did your mother do for a living?

Edward: Initially, she was a maid. Then, later on down the line, she was a factory worker. She had seven kids. All of us are pretty successful.

Steve: She raised them herself because your dad didn't come down with her.

Edward: She's depended on her father in Dade City a lot.

Steve: What was your mother's name?

Edward: Mary Lee Holt. Walker was her maiden name. I'm not sure if you knew this, but O.K. Mickens, principal in Dade City, had a house there at the corner of Martin Luther King—it wasn't called that then—and Eighth Street? Eighth Street. My grandfather had a store right beside that house. That's where we spent a lot of time.

Steve: What do you think about Martin Luther King today?

Edward: At that time, I considered non-violence not the way to go. Today, it makes more sense because I'm older. Violence would not have been a good thing. I did a lot of reading about things. W.E.B. Dubois was one of my influential people from the past, as opposed to Booker T. Washington—[their approach was] drastically different, and that's how I saw Martin Luther King as opposed to—I can't think of the guy's name now. Malcolm X, Malcolm X. I went to his hometown, by the way, right there in Georgia.

Steve: We have a tendency, I think, in the majority community, of lumping thinking: “minorities all think the same about different things,” and that's just not the case.

Edward: Older people thought Martin Luther King was the better leader, whereas younger people thought Malcolm X was. Now, see, a lot of us during that time got into reading more aggressive books about things, and I formed different opinions than my mother or older people in the neighborhood.

Steve: Just approach. How do you push for change? There are different ideas.

Edward: And, see, many of the people that I grew up with—older people—didn't read very well at all, and they weren't exposed to a lot of things. As I came up, I went to school out there and was exposed to all these different ideas. I saw things differently than the older people did. Many older people were more subservient to society than we were at that time.

Steve: It was dangerous.

Edward: Yes. I never had any problem with being afraid of anything, because I'm from here. I grew up in Lumberton. I've been around guns all my life. I got my first gun when I was in sixth grade. I had guns, so I wasn't intimidated by that aspect at all.

Steve: Just different times.

Edward: Just different times. Like, I tell people, I had a gun. It's like, my Christmas present for sixth grade was a shotgun, and people are just amazed. I never did anything negative with it, but just the idea of having one.

Steve: You probably used it to hunt for food.

Edward: We did a lot of hunting. I still have it, believe it or not. I've still got the same shotgun at the house.

Production: Introduce yourself and maybe say what year you were born and what year you moved to Zephyrhills or to this area.

Edward: My name is Edward Holt. I was born in 1953 in Georgia. We moved to Dade City in 1955. I moved to Lumberton, which is sort of Zephyrhills in about 1959.

END