
Interviewer: Hello. My name is Brittany Looney.

Interviewer: I'm Kimberly Lemus.

Interviewer: And on behalf of Crossroads to Freedom and the Center for Transforming Communities, we'd like to thank you for sharing your story with us today. And we're going to begin with a few basic biographical questions.

Interviewer: What is your name?

Interviewee: George Martin.

Interviewer: What year were you born?

Interviewee: 1944.

Interviewer: And where were you born and raised?

Interviewee: I was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, stayed there for two years, and then we moved to Memphis, Tennessee.

Interviewer: And what is your current occupation?

Interviewee: Retired.

Interviewer: And where were you retired from?

Interviewee: I retired from Cake Gourmet, and prior to that, I worked at RCA.

Interviewer: Okay. And what was your home life like?

Interviewee: Pardon?

Interviewer: What was your home life like?

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Interviewee: Home –

Interviewer: Home life.

Interviewee: Great.

Interviewer: Were there any type of activities that you did while you were growing up that –

Interviewee: Thinking back, I went to Treadwell for 12 years, and we had a lot of family activities. It was going to basketball games. It was a little bit different than it is now, but everybody was – all activities were family-oriented. In other words, the parents were there as well as the children, and it was just a great atmosphere.

Interviewer: And this is all at Treadwell, correct?

Interviewee: Right, right.

Interviewer: And you went there for 12 years. Could you give us a run through of what those 12 years were like at Treadwell?

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Interviewee: Just enjoyable. Everybody seemed to get along, and of course, during that time in the '50s and early '60s, gangs, drugs, alcohol, you know, were unheard of. As the old story goes, if you got a whipping at school, you got more than one at home. And everybody had respect for their parents, for the teachers, a lot of church activities. That was a big part of us growing up.

Interviewer: And what type of church activities did you participate in?

Interviewee: For example, on Sunday night, we had MYL, Methodist Youth Fellowship. We would have a meal. We would go to church, and then after church in the summer time, we would go play miniature golf. In the wintertime, we might go bowling.

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But there was always some activity after church.

Interviewer: And what church did you attend?

Interviewee: Highland Heights United Methodist Church.

Interviewer: And how long have you been a member of the church?

Interviewee: Oh, boy. It's the only church I remember, and I'm 69 years old. So 60 plus years.

Interviewer: And what year did you graduate from Treadwell?

Interviewee: 1962.

Interviewer: And this was after Brown V. Board of Education. So were there any type of race relations that were going on in the school?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: No, not at all.

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Was there any talk of integration during the time at Treadwell?

Interviewee: I don't recall any. It was, I guess, just I want to say a way of life that, you know, the whites went to one school, and the blacks went to another one.

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And it was besides that, it was by districts. So...

Interviewer: What do you mean by districts?

Interviewee: Well, for example, I grew up on Malcolm, and there's an intersection, Malcolm and Princeton. The people that lived on the north side of Princeton went to Treadwell. The people that lived on the south side of Princeton went to East High School, and it was just pretty much cut and dried that where you lived would determine where you'd go to school.

Interviewer: Are you at all now in – are you at all now involved in the Highland Heights Corners community?

Interviewee: Yes, I am.

Interviewer: And what type of things do you participate in now?

Interviewee: We had I guess the biggest project was we had a dental van, and it's the dental van is staffed –

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- and owned and operated by Bellevue Baptist Church, but anybody can sign up to have it come to their neighborhood. We were fortunate to have them come here, and let's say in three days, we saw 44 patients, and the work they performed, retail value, was \$12,400.00. So it was just a blessing for the neighborhood to be

able to offer free dental care. And I was told it is the only completely free dental care in the city.

Interviewer: And what is the criteria for people who are trying to get this dental care?

Interviewee: They have to not have current dental insurance. They have to be on some type of –

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- government assistance, and they had to live in our zip code. Our zip code, we have like for our food pantry here at church, we have three zip codes, 38122, 38108, and 3812. And we took applications from those zip codes for the dental van.

Interviewer: And they have to bring proof of residency and proof of –

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: Okay. And what type of procedures do – is it just basic cleaning and –

Interviewee: They did fillings, and I believe they did extractions. I apologize, I can't remember about the actual cleaning. I don't think they did. Yeah.

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I know one individual who is in our neighborhood had five teeth pulled. But you know, people that are homeless, that are – have very low income that can't get dental care, if you think about having a toothache and having it for months and months and not being able to afford even aspirin or Tylenol for the pain, it was great that they would let us – they would come here.

Interviewer: What are the ranges of income do you serve?

Interviewee: For our – I could give you an example. For our food pantry, a single –

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- individual qualifies if they make less than \$11,000.00 a year. And there's a table that Myfa gives us that depending on the

number of dependents, that changes your qualification. And that's for the food pantry.

Interviewer: How many years has this dental thing been active?

Interviewee: I think it's been active for quite a while, but two years ago was the first time that we were able to get it at Highland Heights United Methodist Church. But let's say six months after that, the AME Church at the corner of Holmes and Summer was also able to get it. So anybody in the city can apply with Bellevue Baptist to get on their list for that van to come to their neighborhood.

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Interviewer: Is there – are there any other types of services that you're involved in that there are I guess directly connected to the church that you're involved in?

Interviewee: I'm involved with the food pantry on Monday mornings from 9:30 to 11:00 every Monday morning. We have a food pantry, and I'm part of the screeners that we fill out a little questionnaire for the applicant. Then if they qualify, they're able to go to the next room downstairs and get a sack of groceries. Then at 12:00 every Monday, we offer a free meal to anyone –

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- in the community. It's no restrictions whatsoever, and I might add that we also have from 11:00 to 12:00, there's a bible study that is offered to anyone without any restrictions.

Interviewer: And what percentage of the church would you say is involved in these types of services who is helping?

Interviewee: I can't tell you what percent, but there'll be let's say four or five on Monday mornings, really more than that. Say ten percent on Mondays that help with the food pantry. But then there are other activities. There's first works, which during the school year meets on Tuesday and Thursday nights.

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And there's bible studies, and the United Methodist Women are involved in quite a few other activities.

Interviewer: And are – were these – are these services just recent developments, like maybe in the last 10, 15 years, or were there things like this available to people in the community growing up?

Interviewee: The ones that I've spoken about, like the dental van and the community lunch at noon on Monday is within the past ten years. And part of the dental van was strictly a – well, strictly came about with the shalom or the corners of Highland Heights.

Interviewer: So you would say all –

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- people in all of the organizations as part of the Shalom zone, they participate in these dental drive, food drive things of that sort, or is it just this church?

Interviewee: This church has its own food pantry if that's what you mean, but when you say – we went to training for Shalom, which is what the corners came from. And from the Shalom, we had a community project was one of our goals, and the dental van was our first project, if that makes sense. The Shalom within our church members that do things with the church and with the community. And then as an offshoot from that, some of the church members help on the projects.

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Interviewer: Could you tell us a little bit more about your – you did go to college. Correct?

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: And what school did you attend?

Interviewee: Well, it was Memphis State when I was there, but it was the University of Memphis.

Interviewer: And what year did you attend university – well, Memphis State at the time?

Interviewee: From '62 to January of '67.

Interviewer: Could you describe what your college life was like at the time?

Interviewee: Again, it was a great experience. I was fortunate enough to be a member of the KA fraternity, and I know there's a lot of people that have negative thoughts –

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- about fraternity, but when I look back in – it was a good experience because as friends, we would encourage other – or each one would encourage ourselves and others to study when we knew we needed to study, and then have casual time. It was just a group of caring guys trying to get through school. We had guys that were – fathers were millionaires, and we had guys that didn't know where the money for food the following week would come from, but we all seemed to make it. I look back, that was the good times. The '60s were really great. And we still get together. As a matter of fact, last year, I got to go to –

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- Nashville and visit some of my fraternity brothers I hadn't seen in 50 years. So that was great, and we also last year celebrated our 50th class reunion with people I went to school with at Treadwell. An interesting note, when I tell people this, it kind of raises an eyebrow, but the – I've been out of Treadwell 50 years. To this day, there's guys that get together once a month for dinner to rehash old times. That's how close a friendship and how long it's lasted. I think that's pretty impressive.

Interviewer: And would you give credit to the Highland Heights community or Treadwell for how –

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- I guess close you and your colleagues have been or peers have been over the years?

Interviewee: Yes. You say the Highland – the neighborhood and the church.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: It was just a great, great community.

Interviewer: And all of you – everyone in the community all went to church, all went to school together.

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: So you've known these people since you were little.

Interviewee: Since kindergarten.

Interviewer: Kindergarten.

Interviewee: Yeah, some of them.

Interviewer: Back to your time at the University of Memphis. Was it integrated at the time that you were going there?

Interviewee: The – let's see, I started in '62. I believe '63. I can't recall the exact time.

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But it was starting to be.

Interviewer: And could you compare what really happened or what people thought happened as opposed to what happened at, you know, other schools like the surrounding schools were being integrated and –

Interviewee: Yeah. I don't recall anything negative about it. It was just, you know, like another step in life.

Interviewer: And some people describe it as maybe a quiet integration. Is that how you would –

Interviewee: Yeah, that's a good way to say it. It was a – like I say, just another day.

Interviewer: And what was your reaction to the progress that your school was making?

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Interviewee: Yeah, didn't bother me.

Interviewer: Are there any other stories that you would – or things that you would like to share about your experience at Treadwell, University of Memphis, and the Highland Heights United Methodist Church or the Highland Heights Community altogether?

Interviewee: One short point. I think I'd say ten years ago, I went to a joint class reunion, and at the class reunions, we always – teachers are invited to come just as recognition. If they want to give a talk, that's fine. And Coach McClane who was the basketball coach when I was there, and I don't know if LA Perry and Penny Hardaway were under Coach McClane, but anyway, he was very strict –

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- with his players, but he gave a quick talk in comparing the present with the past. And he emphasized for about ten minutes how when we were in school, the family values were up foremost. I mean I can remember my mother picking us up at school at 3:00, and we could drive to East High School, get out, get in line for basketball tickets, and never once do I recall one student making fun of another because that student was with his parents.

It was wherever you went, your parents were welcome. It was just a family outing almost. You think back, and if we could get parents more involved with their children –

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- and for the parents to have time – I know a lot of parents worked two jobs, and it's difficult for them to be at home when their children get home from school. I just look back, and I'm very thankful and blessed that my parents were able to be part of it.

Interviewer: Do you think that's the – or one of the, I guess, problems with the youth in this community today, that they don't have – I don't want to say active parents, but that they're not always available to be active in their child's life.

Interviewee: Right, and I wouldn't say it's always the parents' fault. I mean it's not the parents' fault because if they work two jobs, it's a difficult situation. I don't have the answer, but family values are very important.

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Interviewer: And I would like to thank you for sharing your story with us today.

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