

## **Neighborhood Histories: Interview with Norman Rhodes**

Kieanna: Hello my name is Kieanna Avery

Marshai: And my name is Marshai Petty

Kieanna: And today is June 26 and we are just interviewing you over the tale of two cities and we would like to thank you for taking time out of your day. We are just going to start off with some basic questions to get you comfortable answering them ok can we start off with what is your name?

Norman: I'm Norman Rhodes

Kieanna: Mr. Norman where were you born and raised?

Norman: I was born in Tiptonville Tennessee, but I was raised in Wynnburg Tennessee

Kieanna: Ok so you were born in Tiptonville did you grow up in Tiptonville any?

Norman: No

Kieanna: Ok

Norman: Well I grew up mostly in Wynnburg my younger years my dad works for TBA and we lived around near Paducah for a period of time there about a year and we lived in Paris Tennessee for a couples years or maybe three, and we always came back to lake county for the

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weekend though, and we always kept a residence here but I attended school near Paducah and I attended school in Paris.

Kieanna: Ok so what always drew you back to Lake County?

Norman: Well its home. We loved Lake county, my dad especially and I don't care where he was, unless he had to work up through the weekend, we came back to Lake county on Friday nights; and we went back to where we lived or where he was working on Sunday night, and it was home and there was eight boys in my dad's family no girls and it was a large family. My mother had five boys and four girls in her family and we had a close-knit family.

Kieanna: Ok

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Kieanna: What did y'all do when you all came back on weekends?

Norman: Well, my dad owned a grocery store also in Wynnburg. He owned Wynnburg Grocery with Harold Lee Rhodes and my dad was Limen Rhodes and I worked at the grocery store on Saturday or if we got back early enough I'd work Friday evenings there and I went to a movie I went to movie my dad would bring to town because I wasn't old enough to drive at the time and I would go to the movie in Tiptonville or I'd go to the movie in Ridgley it's just depends on what they had that I wanted to see.

Kieanna: Whatever happened to that grocery store in Wynnburg?

Norman: Its still standing there it's still on the corner and my dad and Harold Lee sold out of it in

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probably in the late 60's 68 or 69 and my uncle Belvon Rhodes bought it and he operated it a while and then he sold it to Buddy Madden and he operated until he passed away or until he got sick and got out and now I think it's a Reclean washing machine parts and everything now and there.

Kieanna: Ok since you were, I would say the middle, in between the two cities; would you travel more to one than the other?

Norman: Well, of course Tiptonville is a county seed you usually have more businesses in the county seed then you do in a city that doesn't, but as far as entertainment or friends we had friends in both towns and considered

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equal in those days.

Kieanna: Ok do you know of any businesses that were in the other two cities that aren't there now?

Norman: Oh I know there was probably seventy five grocery stores in this county when I was growing up there in Wynnburg there was five. In Wynnburg in there were two small restaurants and café. Café and Restaurant and they had a cotton gin in Wynnburg and they had a saw mill. There which was Roberts and Brother Saw Mill. It was my grandfather's saw mill. It was a pretty busy place back in those days and it was busy. Then you had at one time

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I remember they had a theater in Wynnburg and they also had a drive in. The theater went out in probably in the early fifty's and I remember going to that Theater in Wynnburg but we also had the drive in also operating up until I guess the late eighty's early eighty's and before my time there was a doctor in Wynnburg and they also had a pharmacy there. It was back close to Ms. Blanch Fox home where the doctor lived and he owned a pharmacy back there which is now a vacate lot right now that's pretty well answer that question

Kieanna: In your opinion what do you think caused all these groceries stores and the movie theaters and everything just to go away?

Norman: Well Union City didn't even have a movie theater now. It's different times you got

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a lot more entertainment in a lot of different places than the theaters now you got you have to have population you got to have people and everything that's operate on ??? You got to have a lot more volume to operate down than you did then. Competition is another thing you got to be able to compete to stay in business and you don't have ??? To sold to it cuts back on what you can sell and you can't make enough to keep the business operate that's my opinion and another thing and those days everybody had

what we call a job them down stores they came in they charged their groceries and they paid them to be on the weekends or they paid them or some of them paid by month some of them paid in what we call Jim Whistle term they would charge all year until they harvest their crops

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and then they would pay off when they harvest their crops and you can't operate like that anymore because things more expensive you can go to the grocery store when I say early fifths that's when I first remember all of this and you can buy ten dollars' worth of food five to ten dollars' worth of food have a lot of food there what size family you had how long it blew last but it takes a lot more money to operate now than it did in those days the air conditioner , they ??? Fences into operating business and it just that's just part of it

Kieanna: When you were growing up and coming back to Lake County on the weekends which city is more lively to you?

Norman: Well they were both crowd they streets were covered on Saturdays

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and you couldn't hardly walk down the church street in Tiptonville downtown, you couldn't hardly walk down main street in Ridgley downtown it was I mean it was just everybody was working and you had people on the streets or the sidewalks selling popcorn you had some people actually be selling hamburgers on the streets and the population we had more population those days a lot we probable double what we are now and those days or maybe even triple and you had the railroad you know it was busy those days and you had a lot of people working and like the saw mills they also early fifths we had the Korean War my mother work at the saw mills she kept books there in Wynnburg and with the Korean War going there were using a lot of wood I guess for ammo boxes or whatever the government buying and they had a little

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spiral line and at Wynnburg they would load the lumber and carry out every day and they had the perk went all the way through it was little cut off there and they had a ??? little house there in the ??? stadium and stay there in the winter time he keep a little fire in there and he'd push it back and forth. We had our depot in Wynnburg in those days actually time in my time we didn't have a pastored train service here that I remember it probably fazed in the forty's but the depot was there until it was burned in the early sixty's.

Kieanna: Ok so mentioned that once the farmers harvested their crops that they could then pay back the stores.

Norman: They did in a lot of cases yeah.

Kieanna: Ok how do you feel about the farmers now?

Norman: Well I made my living off of farmers in Lake county

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I owned Rhodes's auto parts for about forty years and at least eighty percent was directly or indirectly

related to farm. They were good to me I tried to supply them with what they needed with what they needed and if I could get them what they wanted and I knew where to get it. I saw board stuff, but I really did automotive but

Kieanna: Ok at what point in time in your life did you actually settle down in Lake county?

Norman: Well when I graduated from high school I went to UT Martin for two years and then I got married I married my wife in Jackson TN and we moved to Memphis and that would have we got married in 1960 February twenty-seventh nineteen-sixty

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-seven and shortly after that I worked in construction we first got married in Memphis and then I worked for the post office for two years and then I got on the Memphis police department in October sixth nineteen eighty nine I worked seven years there, but I always wanted to come back home and it seemed like plenty of opportunity when we came home my wife liked my friends and their wives and my friends she liked them we moved back in and opened a business. I was always trying to find something to make a living in Lake County and we moved back and Lake county was good to us. I raised two children here we moved in March of nineteen seventy.

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six and I opened a business I think May the twentieth nineteen seventy six. I had it under construction I borrowed the money from, actually my supplier in Memphis loaned me the money and we sold our house in Memphis and the profit I had there I took that and put it in the business for down payment and that's up to date almost. I just sold my business in February first of this year.

Kieanna: Ok whenever you moved back to Lake County, was your, I guess you can say auto part, was it your only occupant that you had?

Norman: Yep. that's it when I first moved back that was all it was.

Kieanna: Did you ever have another job here?

Norman: Yea I was chief duty for Paul David Jones and that was probable a

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year in a half and Brain Avery was chief of police in Tiptonville and he went to the highway patrol and there was loaded over there for chief of police and my wife had some health issue and I went over there and able to get insurance a lot of you know hospitalization insurance, and that was really the basic deal we were having. We were having a little trouble trying to pay the health insurance and everything.

Kieanna: Do you see anything differences now with the way that I guess you can say the whole police department works when it was whenever you was part of it?

Norman: It haven't been that long it just been like, let's see twenty-twelve, October twenty-twelve that I left, so it hadn't really been that long. It's not a lot of difference, not right now. I don't think so. This police department and sheriff department really, they serve this community well

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in my opinion and they have a good relationship with the people here. and you know it's, I think they do good job and you kind of walk on a chalk line especially if you got a business trying and trying to do all this.

Kieanna: What was the whenever you were working with the police department did you ever had to travel to Ridgley more than Tiptonville?

Norman: I did sheriff office when I was with the sheriff office and now Lake County is a unique place because you don't have a lot of officers and especially in the evening shift and midnight you have a lot of people working something happens we all have mutual agreement that we help each other and it's verbal and it's

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also like a contract and if they need us we'll go we'll help Ridgley if Tiptonville needed help to sheriff office help us or Ridgley will come help us and the sheriff office help Ridgley you know we all have to work together caused its limited sources here resources.

Kieanna: So what I'm getting is that

Norman: I go back and forth did I go to Ridgley more than Tiptonville it was pretty equal sometimes you would have a hot night Ridgley you have to go down I mean that's the terminology we used Ridgley was hot tonight you know they might have a lot of disturbances or you may have a party and you know some people get out of hand or you know they don't mean to or I don't think they intentionally mean do it's pretty close what the police services.

Kieanna: Ok

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what I'm getting is that you don't believe that's there any separation between Tiptonville and Ridgley?

Norman: In the law enforcement?

Kieanna: Or just in general

Norman: Not to me it's not I mean I we went both ways we went to Ridgley or we went to Tiptonville that brought a lot things merchants in Ridgley and I mean like appliances and or what in those days big ticket items today you wouldn't think it's a big ticket in those days it were big tickets item and he also brought appliances in Tiptonville. We didn't go out the county to buy much of anything you can buy anything you wanted here. You can buy a suit of clothes and you got probably as good of quality equal price as you would in Dyersburg or Union City. Now if you needed something extra special you might go to Memphis to get it or something like that because say that you're

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daughter getting married and you have a wedding dress or something it was no, you know, they didn't have that kind of special to here in those days but you would go Memphis or Jackson to probably buy would a special item like that.

Kieanna: Ok so when you were, I guess you can say, here on the weekend, did you ever see any rivalry between the two cities?

Norman: Rivalry yea. There were rivalry between them and but they always rivalry. You got that in Dyer County between ??? And Dyersburg and you got rivalry between Union City and say different schools say like high schools is what revolved around that.

Kieanna: Can you elaborate on what exactly the rivalries were over? What you believe that they were over?

Norman: Well it was sports and it seem like sports started and you know and they and

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really I didn't experience that so I didn't I could go either place and not having any problems and it was some guys that had troubled with they would live here and try date a girl in Ridgley or somebody in Ridgley try and date a girl up here I'm sure that instance that they give problem, but I really wasn't aware of it now he went to place like that where we had problems sometimes.

Kieanna: Yes sir. You're saying that's there really not any separation between the two cities correct?

Norman: Well, it was rivalry every sports and competition whose better in lot them but when they consolidated these schools in nineteen-sixty-fourth or nineteen-sixty-three I was in the first graduated class of Lake County high school and we started our

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senior year late because the school wasn't really complete. It was like maybe couple weeks to a month later and then we, Ridgley, did not want the school to be in Tiptonville. They wanted it to be in Wynnburg because it was central located between the two cities but actually Tiptonville is basically center of the county. That was the excuse that was used. You know. I, Ridgley was dead set against it because they were losing. They felt like they were losing an identity. You lose your high school, you lose your identity and that's true. And I can understand their point, but I had, I had already, I had friends in both towns riding around with people in both towns so I didn't think I had any problems with it. The students didn't have any problem. It was mostly the older people.

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Kieanna: Ok. Why do you think that they did not put the high school in Wynnburg?

Norman: Well, the excuse they used was "Tiptonville was the center of the county".

Kieanna: But, in your opinion, what do you think it was?

Norman: Well, I think they thought that this was County seed and they felt like it ought to be here and that's what they did. Like I said I was in the eleventh grade and I was aware of the political maneuvering and all of that, but I wasn't aware of the back room discussions on it, you know. I really can't answer that.

Kieanna: Ok. So do you believe that there is still, I guess you can say a rivalry between that two cities or separation between them?

Norman: I think its way down. I don't think it's bad as it used to be, but I... you asked me a few minutes ago about "why I think that they have more here?" Some of the reasons we had more here to start with, and

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probably still, is that Real Foot Lake is here and it brings a lot of people in. See I owned an auto parts business. Like I said, I sold more than I thought that I would. I sold a lot of more things to tourist, fishermen, hunters and things like that. Also, in the early days, Tiptonville is on the Mississippi River. Down here at the end where Johnny Woodson's shop is, that was the bank of the Mississippi River in those days. I've seen pictures of river boats tied up down there at that area and that was money and that was trade and commerce. That probably got the ball rolling in the early time there more than, maybe recent times.

Kieanna: Ok. So would you say that now of days, that Tiptonville or Ridgley are

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as close as they were when you were, I guess you can say, growing up or living here?

Norman: I think they're closer. I think the young people, when I was young, young people we didn't have a lot of problem and not a least my friends, but the older people were the ones trying to keep it out.

Kieanna: Why do you think they had a problem with Tiptonville and Ridgeley being so close together or connected?

Norman: I think it goes back to high school and losing their identity and it's was completion. There was completion between everybody and if you're in business and say you've got a ??? you have a completer that's the same business you're in, you want to try to get all the business you can and he does

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Too and so you're competing with one another and you've got to have a better product if there some way you can do it, and the towns were competing against each other. They wanted factors and they would compete in those days we didn't have factors here but we had garment factors here and we had canning in both Ridgeley and Tiptonville. They would compete against each other because they needed it.

Kieanna: Ok Mr. Norman we don't have any more questions for you but do you have anyone thing to speak on that we didn't?

Norman: I just want to say were all in the little pond together Tiptonville, Ridgeley and everybody in this whole county and we need to try to work together and make this a better place for everybody.

Kieanna: Ok I just thank you for taking time out of your day to come and we appreciate

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you.

Norman: It's been my pleasure.