

**Transcript of an Oral History Interview in the collection of the
BREVARD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
308 Forrest Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922**

David Jackson: Okay, Mr. Houston. I guess we can start from the beginning. From what I understand your family migrated here from Georgia.

Isaac Houston: Right.

David Jackson: Is that correct?

Isaac Houston: That's right.

David Jackson: South Georgia?

Isaac Houston: Yes. You would call it South Georgia.

David Jackson: You know what county?

Isaac Houston: Yes. [00:00:30] Brooks County.

David Jackson: Brooks County?

Isaac Houston: Yes.

David Jackson: Okay.

Isaac Houston: In fact, they were living in both counties right close together. Brooks County line and Thomas County. Thomasville, Georgia.

David Jackson: Okay, so, let me guess, they came here to work in the citrus industry?

Isaac Houston: Well, they were looking for work. My grandfather just came down looking for work. No particular industry. He just came. They wanted to get away from the farm, from the sharecropping, that kind of a thing.

David Jackson: Sharecropping cotton?

Isaac Houston: Yes. They just wanted to get away from it, just wanted out of it.

David Jackson: So what year did your grandfather come [00:01:00] here?

Isaac Houston: He came to Melbourne in 1928. I believe he came to Merritt Island in '28 but he left a family in Melbourne.

David Jackson: Oh, okay. What kind of work did he do?

Isaac Houston: He was a citrus worker. And he also worked private family.

David Jackson: Okay. Whose groves did he work in? What family?

Isaac Houston: Well, he worked in the T.A Canty grove, which is down in Rockledge, where Rockledge High School is presently located. [00:01:30] Mr. Canty owned acres in there. A lot of acreage. In fact, all that acreage where the school is, that belonged to T.A. Canty.

David Jackson: Oh, okay. How long did he work for them?

Isaac Houston: Oh, I guess about 20, 25 years.

David Jackson: Okay.

Isaac Houston: Maybe longer. Maybe 30 years.

David Jackson: Oh, really?

Isaac Houston: He worked for them quite a while.

David Jackson: Were you born here on Merritt Island?

Isaac Houston: No, I wasn't. I was born in Georgia.

David Jackson: In Georgia? Okay. So when did you come down to Merritt Island?

Isaac Houston: I came to Merritt Island [00:02:00] at three months old. And I've been here ever since.

David Jackson: Ever since?

Isaac Houston: Right.

David Jackson: Where did you go to school here?

Isaac Houston: The local school right here on Merritt Island. The black elementary school. And then I graduated from there in '49, went to Cocoa to the Monroe High School, the first black high school, and graduated from there in '52. 1952.

David Jackson: The black elementary school where was that located?

Isaac Houston: That was located, presently located where ... We have a street right [00:02:30] up here north-- south of where I live. It's north of Lucas where the high school is but on the trail. It's named Sawyer's Avenue now. At that time it didn't have a name. It was just a street in the woods. And of course, it was a nice school. It was a two room school with the blackboards that led up and down. It had cloak rooms, it had a place for a kitchen, it had a stage. It was a really nice building.

And of course, we had nice teachers. [00:03:00] In those days we had PTOs. The teachers did everything. They not only taught you, they helped prepare the lunch for our lunch. So those teachers worked very hard. Of course, with the help of some parents and of course my grandmother who was very instrumental in getting the kitchen started for us to have a cafeteria. Of course, the PTA bought the stove and that kind of stuff. I can remember all those days. It was a really, you know, a nice school. Even though, it was a segregated, two room school.

David Jackson: Okay, so [00:03:30] when you were in attendance there how many students do you think there were going to school at that school at that time?

Isaac Houston: Well, it ranged. They had grades from let me say, first grade through eighth. I would imagine in my little small mind at that time, thinking of quantity, it might have been about 45 students maybe. 40, 45 students all. That would be kindergarten through eighth grade. I said kindergarten. Actually, [00:04:00] kindergarten was not mandatory in those days. 'Cause, I didn't go to kindergarten. I went to school and started the first grade.

Primer they called it at that time, you know, where you learn your ABCs and you learned to write and you formed letters and that kind of a thing. So it wasn't, you didn't have kindergarten but they let you go to school. You were supposed to wait until you were six. But I went to school at five.

David Jackson: So you [00:04:30] grew up in the area where you currently live?

Isaac Houston: Right. Just down the street from here. Right down the street, right down the trail. At the end of the trail ... Well, not the end of the trail but I grew up where the street curves around. It has a curve. There's a big apartment down the right. Then there's a store that's sitting at the forks of the road. I grew up right there. Just across the street from that store.

David Jackson: All right. And this was an all-black area?

Isaac Houston: This was an all-black area at that time. Yes, it was an all-black [00:05:00] area.

David Jackson: Okay. Were there any other black areas on Merritt Island at that time?

Isaac Houston: Not to my know--No, there wasn't. There was a few, I should say, citizens lived way north on the trail. About where the Cape is located now. That property is beginning where the Cape starts up there. There was some, you know, citrus workers living up there, grove workers, and whatever. Their kids [00:05:30] came to school on the school bus.

You know the bus ran. We had one bus that ran and one driver that I remember. Name--the guy that drove the bus was Reverend Lawrence Walton. Of course, if we were good we got a chance to ride the bus, you know, from school on them

even though, I could walk from school. We called him Uncle Lawrence. Everyone called him Uncle Lawrence then.

David Jackson: Okay. So you went to school with the late Ralph Williams?

Isaac Houston: Yes, I did. Ralph Williams and I started school together and we finished school together. We [00:06:00] grew up together. Yes, I sure did. I went to school with Ralph.

David Jackson: What place or institution was the center of the community at that time?

Isaac Houston: Well, the institution that was the center of the community at that time was the church. That was all we had. We had no recreation centers or anything. We had the church and the home. Those were your institutions.

David Jackson: What church did you grow up in?

Isaac Houston: I grew up in oddly enough ... Which churches did I grow up in? Well, I grew up in both the Methodist Church and the Baptist [00:06:30] Church. Well I got my start in the Baptist Church but later on in the years as I finished grade school, in eighth grade, I had taken music. And of course, they did not have a musician. And I was playing for my church, the Baptist Church, which is the church right here by my driveway where you guys came in. Not the one across the street but the one on this side of the street.

I played for that church for a few years as a teenager. And of course, they had church [00:07:00] ... Not oddly enough but they called themselves sister churches. The Methodist Church had church on the first and third Sundays. Those were their Sundays. And my church, the Baptist Church, had church on the second and fourth Sundays, which meant I got to play for both services as I grew up, you know. That's how I got started in the church music.

David Jackson: Okay. What's the name of the Baptist Church again?

Isaac Houston: It's Greater Mount Zion Baptist Church. At that time, it was-- the name of the Baptist [00:07:30] Church at that time was Mount Zion Baptist Church.

David Jackson: The Methodist Church?

Isaac Houston: Mount Olive AME Church.

David Jackson: All right. Did you ever work in the groves growing up?

Isaac Houston: Well, not much. I didn't work in the groves. Not very much. My grandfather, you know, they wanted me in school, they wanted me to get an education. They always talked college. So I didn't know anything else. I didn't get to work much in

the groves. I went to school most of the time. In the summertime, [00:08:00] I got to work a little bit in the groves.

And as I got older, I did construction work on the projects that they were building here. These projects, the old projects. I got a job, which was paying more money. I worked in construction projects until I got in college, when I got ready to go to college.

David Jackson: Okay. Besides your grandfather, did anyone else in your family work in the groves full-time?

Isaac Houston: No, no one else worked in the groves full-time.

David Jackson: Okay.

Isaac Houston: Nobody in my family worked in [00:08:30] the groves.

David Jackson: Did you know Dennis Sawyer?

Isaac Houston: How well did I know Dennis Sawyer? Did I know Dennis Sawyer? Yes, I did. As I was telling Bob, I grew up with Dennis Sawyer. In those days, Dennis Sawyer came here from the Bahamas. He owned practically all of the island, most of the houses that were on the trail. He had a number of houses on the trail. I would imagine about 10. And he owned some property out there by the school on the Sawyer's Avenue where I was.

[00:09:00] He did a lot of farming. He had a horse and buggy. A wagon, we called it at that time. He had a mule named Maude. And Maude used to pull everybody around. And he would get up early in the mornings, go into Cocoa, and of course Maude would not walk across that drawbridge at that time. We had the open ... Like a grate that they go ... She would not walk across that draw. So he had to get out, get in front of the wagon, and walk her across the drawbridge.

[00:09:30] So, he led an interesting life for children. He had a lot of farming and he had a lot of citrus fruit. He had mangoes. He peddled a lot of his vegetables, you know, to the citizens and the local stores in the area. He was quite a gentleman.

David Jackson: He didn't ever deliver ice, did he?

Isaac Houston: No. He didn't deliver ice. And I don't remember the days but he made trips from Cocoa to Merritt Island by boat before [00:10:00] they had a bridge. He used to drive a boat across and people would go to town that way and, you know, get their grocery and ice and everything else. He would bring them back to the island on the boat. That was before the days of bridges.

David Jackson: Bridges. So when you came along the bridge from Merritt Island to Cocoa was that still a wooden structure? Was it a concrete structure?

Isaac Houston: When I came along the bridge from Merritt Island to Cocoa it was a wooden structure. There was no such thing as concrete structure at that [00:10:30] time. It was all wooden. And those old pilings would get old and it was rattling. Sometimes the runners and stringers on the bridge you know would be bumping up. You'd see those nails going up and down. What did they nail those things on the floor with? The joists. I guess you would call them. In the house you would call them the joists.

But I don't know if they put the runners on these joists. They would nail them on. Of course, you would see those things bouncing up and [00:11:00] down. I mean it was a ride. Don't get on there with a wagon with a horse and wagon. The wagon had these iron wheels, you know, and these wooden spokes. It made a lot of noise.

David Jackson: Okay. I have a question here. Do you know who the Clements were?

Isaac Houston: Do I know who the Clements were? Yes, I do. My grandmother worked for them. She was their cook and maid and whatever else you'd call it. She worked for them for years. Mr. Clement was [00:11:30] a great cook himself. And of course, he taught my grandmother a lot of their favorite dishes that she cooked. And of course, she was a very good cook herself.

In the summertime when they would go back north ... In the wintertime, they'd go north and ... No, go north in the summertime. Right. She made jelly for them. She made many, many pints of jelly. She put them in I guess you would call [00:12:00] it cardboard, a paste board, container and use the paraffin wax on it. Of course, she sent jelly everywhere, you know. It was delivered by way of express, you know. The parcel express truck.

David Jackson: It was different flavored jelly?

Isaac Houston: Different flavors. She used guavas but made all kinds. She used orange and made orange marmalade, made guava marmalade. Made the regular jelly. Just a regular [00:12:30] jelly.

David Jackson: Were the guavas raised on Merritt Island?

Isaac Houston: The guavas--She got the guavas off of their property and off of our property. Most everybody in those days had guava trees.

David Jackson: Okay. So the Clements lived here on Merritt Island?

Isaac Houston: Yeah. The Clements lived on South Merritt Island. Do you know where that church, that South Merritt Island Pioneer Church down there?

David Jackson: In Georgiana?

Isaac Houston: In Georgiana. Right. The Clements lived just sort of-- that would be west of that church. [00:13:00] Between that church and the river.

David Jackson: Okay. Where would they go back to up north?

Isaac Houston: To Connecticut and Massachusetts. The New England states where they were from. That's where they would go back to. They would migrate, I say, in the summertime and come down here in the wintertime. You know, come to Florida, to Georgiana.

David Jackson: Did they own the Lapham jelly factory?

Isaac Houston: No. They didn't own the Lapham jelly factory. Strangely. No, the Clements didn't own that jelly factory. [00:13:30] That jelly factory was owned by my neighbor who is two tracts of land north of here. Owned by his grandfather. His name was ... I don't remember his first name but it was Humphrey. And Humphrey is the owner but I didn't know the Laphams. It was originally owned by the Laphams. I didn't know them. When I grew up Mr. Humphrey owned it. He was the owner. It kept the name, the Lapham [00:14:00] Jelly Company, though.

David Jackson: Mr. Humphrey, was he white or black?

Isaac Houston: White. He's white.

David Jackson: Okay. Growing up here, besides church, what other activities were you involved in? Any kind of recreational activities?

Isaac Houston: Well, the only recreation activities I got involved in was when I got to high school. You know we had socials and things at the gym. They had basketball and football. That was my outlet in high school. The churches had programs for us. [00:14:30] You know the schools, being an elementary school, didn't have a lot of after-school activity. We got to that when we go in high school over in ... Junior high, I should say. Eighth, ninth grade on through high school.

David Jackson: Okay. You said the gym. Would that be the Tiger Den in Cocoa? Or some other gym?

Isaac Houston: No. Man, the gym we had when I grew up was an outside enclosed area made out of corrugated tin. They had studs, [00:15:00] they put up studs in the wall. It didn't even have a top. So that was the gym we had. That's the way we played our basketball games. Kept them contained in that.

David Jackson: That was here on Merritt Island?

Isaac Houston: No, that was in Cocoa.

David Jackson: In Cocoa? Would that be on the side of the Monroe High School?

Isaac Houston: That's right. At the back of Monroe High School where the present Moore's Library is located on Blake Street I believe they call it. It used to be Avocado Avenue at that time. That's why I have to think about whether it's Blake or Stone. Right in back of where the Moore's Library, that's where [00:15:30] the big gym was.

Of course, if you know Richard Blake, the principal of Cocoa High School, we called him Tater Blake then. He played a lot of ball. He was tall. We called him Tater Blake and some of us still call him Tater now. Just affectionately a name that we all knew him as. Even though, we knew that wasn't his name.

David Jackson: This would be the newer campus to the south?

Isaac Houston: The newer campus?

David Jackson: Of Monroe.

Isaac Houston: Yeah.

David Jackson: That was built [00:16:00] as Monroe? Correct?

Isaac Houston: Yeah, the new campus was built as Monroe. That's where you have the ... What is it called now? It used to be the food stamp place.

David Jackson: Children and Family Services?

Isaac Houston: Children and Family Services. Yeah. Those kind of agencies were there. But originally that was Monroe High School that was built. That was the first new school that we, as blacks, had in this central area. Central Brevard area.

David Jackson: Okay. All [00:16:30] right. I've heard that your mother had to go to school in Melbourne?

Isaac Houston: Yes. My mother had to go to school in Melbourne because at those days, when she was a kid, they didn't have a high school for blacks. They had a high school for whites but she could not attend. So not only did she go to Melbourne, she went to [Pheasant ? 00:16:47] Academy over in Ocala.

My family believed in education. Of course, my uncle, who was along with her, finished high school and started at college at Bethune Cookman. [00:17:00] Then he got called into service. Of course, he didn't come back to finish.

David Jackson: Your mother, she went to college?

Isaac Houston: No. My mother finished high school. That was it. She didn't go to college.

David Jackson: Where did she work?

Isaac Houston: She worked for ... Well, for many years, for several years, she used to work on the beach for some of the northern people that migrated here in the wintertime. She was a cook. [00:17:30] She mainly cooked. She was always their cook. And of course, she prepared for the parties and all the big holiday festivities they had. She had to do all the cooking. Of course, after that time, she took up a trade, cosmetology in St. Petersburg. Came back and opened up a shop and worked in that for many years. And then after that she went to work for the school board. She was a bus driver. She drove bus for 21 years.

David Jackson: Woah.

Isaac Houston: She wanted to make 25 [00:18:00] but she said her knees wouldn't let her.

David Jackson: Her shop was it here on Merritt Island?

Isaac Houston: Cocoa. She did have a shop on Merritt Island. Presently located where her house is right now off of Schoolhouse Street. Yeah, Schoolhouse Road that's what it is. Right there, right down the street from the fire department on Elm Boulevard. That's right off of Courtney, off of State Road 3. She's right there where the Burger King that's owned by [00:18:30] Landmarks(?).

David Jackson: Oh, all right. The neighborhood you grew up in, well, this neighborhood, it's George Washington Carver Park?

Isaac Houston: The neighborhood that I grew up, yeah, in was George Washington Carver Park. You had a dirt road and you had a lane through the woods. Now the trail was always paved. I can't remember it being anything but being paved. But I can remember days of meeting the ice man in our bare feet. Boy, that sand would be so hot. We'd [00:19:00] be waiting on the ice man to come, you know, to get that ice.

That part of the island is called Washington Park, George Washington Park. Not this part. This is all new up here. This was not developed at that time. The trail was but nothing beyond the trail, you know. Houses on either side. They weren't there.

David Jackson: Okay. You went on to college [00:19:30] at Florida Memorial?

Isaac Houston: Yes, I did. I finished high school in '52, went on to college at Florida Memorial, which is presently located in Miami, Florida. In those days, it was at St. Augustine. I went when it was at St. Augustine. I graduated from college in '56.

During that time I was called to the service but if your grades were up to par, you were B average or better, you [00:20:00] could remain in school so I didn't go to the service. My grades were always good. So I missed that opportunity, which I

think it would have been a good opportunity for me even though I didn't get to go. I stayed out because my grades were great. And so--

I finished in '56 and then I came here. And the very same man that my grandfather worked for for years, T.A. Canty. Just spoke to the superintendent at that time, which was Woody Darden. [00:20:30] and I was hired.

David Jackson: Oh, okay. What did you major in in college?

Isaac Houston: Elementary education and I had a minor in social studies.

David Jackson: Okay. You're currently working at Golf View Elementary School?

Isaac Houston: Yes, I am. I went back to school in '61. In fact, I graduated from Columbia University in '61 with my masters in administration and supervision. I came back and worked as a teacher for two years. And I was hired at Stevenson. That was my first administrative job. [00:21:00] The lady that hired me went on to get her doctorate in Miami.

She said, "You're most qualified." In those days, they were integrated school. I felt pretty good. 'Cause they weren't just blacks in the school. We had blacks and whites. Of course, they bused kids in to integrate the schools. And she asked me would I like to have a job? I said, "Why, sure." And I was hired. The person that called me signed me up and changed my classification. And I've been in the administrative [00:21:30] field ever since.

David Jackson: Okay. When did school integration begin here in Brevard County?

Isaac Houston: '61, '62? I'm not quite sure when integration began. But I think it was '61, '62. Because I had my first job, I got hired over here. In fact, they were taking the best black teachers and putting them in the white schools. And of course they said they [00:22:00] were sending the worst white teachers and putting them in the black schools. That was a saying in those days.

Of course, I got hired over here as a science teacher at a school called Robert Louis Stevenson. It's located at the corner of North Banana River Drive and the B Line. Of course, I worked there until '75 when I was transferred to Audubon. I stayed at Audubon until '95. [00:22:30] 20 years. Left Audubon and went to Golf View where I'm presently located.

David Jackson: Okay. So what year were you hired on at the school board for the very first time?

Isaac Houston: The first time that I was hired on for the school board that was in 1956. As I said I finished college in May, I was hired in August, started to work in September. Of course, between the times I was hired for the school teaching job, I worked on Patrick Air Force Base [00:23:00] then. You know, it's south of 520.

David Jackson: Right.

Isaac Houston: That's where I worked out there. In the cafeteria. I was a breakfast cook out there. Then I was the cook's helper.

David Jackson: How long were you out there at Patrick?

Isaac Houston: I was only out there for about three or four months.

David Jackson: Okay. Well, before you began your career with the school board, did you have any other jobs like during college or when you came home?

Isaac Houston: Well, I had jobs in high school. [00:23:30] In fact, I started in junior high at downtown Cocoa on Delannoy Avenue. I worked at the Rexall Drugstore then. I washed bottles and I typed labels. I cleaned the main store. I was a janitor. On Saturdays, I was not only a janitor, I helped the pharmacists, but I also helped the cook in the kitchen.

And on weekends, on Sundays, I prepared the breakfast at the counter in the store where blacks were not allowed to eat. [00:24:00] But I could prepare the meals there. I did breakfast for them. I cooked. I started cooking in high school. In fact, I made my money to buy my clothes ... When I was in college I worked on the seashores of New Jersey as a cook. I started out as a breakfast cook and I went from a breakfast cook to a regular cook and from a regular cook to I was a chef. I would plan the meals. I helped the people [00:24:30] there cook it.

David Jackson: Was this a resort you worked in in New Jersey?

Isaac Houston: A resort. Yes.

David Jackson: It wasn't Atlantic City, was it?

Isaac Houston: I was close to Atlantic City but I worked in Asbury Park, New Jersey. The resort was in West End, New Jersey. Right in Asbury Park.

David Jackson: Okay. Do you have any stories about Angel City? Or any other neighborhood on Merritt Island?

Isaac Houston: Well, not really. All I have--I don't have any stories about Angel City but I do know some people that lived [00:25:00] in Angel City. Well, there was a family in Angel City that was a very familiar family by the name of the Fletchers Jerome and John. I don't know. But they did a lot of fishing and they caught turtles and you know. They sold fish in our neighborhood. And of course, you know, the black people liked them and we all got along, you know, like black brothers and sisters. We didn't have any problems, you know.

Of course, in fact, Henry Minneboo [00:25:30] grew up on Angel City. And he is one of my best friends right now. In fact, he was my son's coach for several years when they played Little League. Of course, my son also worked with him when he worked for the county down at Viera.

David Jackson: Okay.

Isaac Houston: He was one of their communications persons down there. My son was. He started that station there. What is [00:26:00] it? 90? What is--? What is the county station?

David Jackson: Okay. Space Coast Government TV?

Isaac Houston: Yes, that's right.

David Jackson: All right.

Isaac Houston: You got it.

David Jackson: All right.

Isaac Houston: Space Coast Government TV is right.

David Jackson: Let's see. Can you tell us about pod schools?

Isaac Houston: Can I tell you about pod schools? A little bit. When I got hired over at Stevenson ... We called it open plan. That's what it was. [00:26:30] They called it pods. They called it, as I said, open plan. What else did they call it? Pod school and something else they called it. Right now I can't think of the name.

But anyway, my first experience with a pod school was at Stevenson when I got hired over here. We had a big open pod. When we started there they were trying to complete the school by September. And of course, by September school had started and the building was finished but there was no furniture. The carpet was being laid. So we sat on [00:27:00] the floor and had school on the floor on the carpet.

The teachers had an office and had their desk and things but there weren't any kids chairs, desks, so we all sat on the floor. I had a top language arts group in the mornings, which is basically the fourth grade. Some of them are actually third graders but they were that advanced. In the afternoon, I taught grades four, five, and six science every day. And of course, I [00:27:30] was not getting the ... I had so many students in one class. I was not getting to see them. It would be like a week and a half getting round to all my classes.

So I convinced the principal everyone was ... I said, "I'm not a specialist." Every elementary teacher should have had the same amount of science I had. I

convinced her let every teacher teach his or her science. That way it would foster the achievement [00:28:00] of the kids. You know, they weren't being seen often enough. That would enhance the academic level by seeing them more often. Consequently, they would make better grades and we would be a better school. That's what happened.

David Jackson: You mentioned Woodrow Darden who was school superintendent at the time.

Isaac Houston: Woody Darden. Yes.

David Jackson: Did you interview with him?

Isaac Houston: I know very little about Woody Darden. Yes, I interviewed with him. He was a friend of Thomas A. Canty, the guy that I was telling [00:28:30] you about, who owned all that property down there in Rockledge now. Even where I think where Walmart is located. That store. He owned a lot of property. I mean, acres. Acres.

David Jackson: Okay. Did you ever work for NASA while teaching school?

Isaac Houston: I sure did. I worked for NASA while teaching school. Yes, I did work for NASA while teaching school. In fact, my first job with NASA was when my son was born. My wife and I married in '64 and he was born in [00:29:00] '66. And during the summers that's when I started working for NASA. I worked for NASA about four different summers. I was a backup man for the administrators in the NASA building. Of course, I did a lot of overtime.

I was working for NASA, working for the school board, and I was minister of music director at my church. So I had a handful needless to say. And I enjoyed every minute of all of it.

David Jackson: Okay. [00:29:30] You said it was around '61, '62 they started integration of the public schools?

Isaac Houston: Yes. Yeah. '60, '61, in the early '60s, I should say. Anywhere between '60 and '65. That's when the schools in Brevard County began to be integrated. Of course, that's when they started transferring teachers. Of course, we all had to prepare for integration by taking a ... They had [00:30:00] maybe like maybe about six weeks of training to get prepared for integration. Sensitivity training they called it. That's what it was. Of course, you know, that's the blacks and the whites ... You weren't forced to do it. If you wanted to do it, you could. Of course, we had a lot of people taking it because they were getting ready for integration. And it worked.

David Jackson: Were there a lot of problems with integration?

Isaac Houston: Well, [00:30:30] there were problems when it first—when it started originally. It must have been in either '59 or '60. In fact, Dr. Wells, Reverend Wells in Cocoa,

and Dr. Johnson, and I'm trying to see what other kids ... Their kids were the first ones. And Hugh Brockington, Dr. Brockington, who was my minister at that time.

Their children started integrating the first school where I am now. That was Golf View was one of the schools of the elite. [00:31:00] Of course, it was considered an elite school at that time. Of course, to get in those schools these kids were all very bright anyway. They had a few problems, you know. There were a few problems downtown in the drug stores integrating in the movie. Eventually they all came around, you know. They didn't have any bad problems, I should say. But they had some problems but they were resolved eventually.

David Jackson: You said the movies? Would that be the [00:31:30] Old State Theater?

Isaac Houston: The State Theater downtown.

David Jackson: Where Cocoa Village Playhouse is?

Isaac Houston: Playhouse now. Yes. We sat in ... In the movie downtown Cocoa they called and said, "You know, the blacks have to sit up in the buzzard roost," That's what we called it. Of course, you had to smell the stink bathrooms. And of course, I have white friends now that tell me, "I wish we could have. We wanted to sit upstairs. We didn't want to sit downstairs where you're walking off the street." It wasn't bad. [00:32:00] But you had to go around to the side. Of course, you paid the same money anybody else paid. Of course, we didn't mind upstairs. We just didn't like smelling those horrible bathrooms. They were terrible.

David Jackson: Were the bathrooms upstairs?

Isaac Houston: Yes, the bathrooms were upstairs.

David Jackson: Okay. All right. Was the white bathrooms upstairs as well?

Isaac Houston: No, just the black bathrooms.

David Jackson: Okay. All right. They just weren't well-cleaned?

Isaac Houston: In those days, they were called colored. Not black.

David Jackson: All right.

Isaac Houston: Colored. I can't get used to saying colored because I just never [00:32:30] did like that word anyway. Personally, I didn't like the word colored. I've always said black.

David Jackson: So they probably weren't kept up real well?

Isaac Houston: No, they weren't kept up. They didn't hire any janitors to clean them. They cleaned the ones downstairs, 'cause you know. Ours didn't get cleaned.

David Jackson: How much did it cost to go to the movies back then when you were in high school?

Isaac Houston: When I started going to the movies it only cost nine cents. As a kid. You could have a quarter and get popcorn and [00:33:00] have a good time and go back home for a quarter.

David Jackson: Was downtown Cocoa busy at that time?

Isaac Houston: Very busy. I would think it was more productive then than it is now. It was growing, you know? Everything was up and running downtown. It was really busy downtown Cocoa in those days, you know. They were steadily advancing and progressing. Expanding but not like now. [00:33:30] I guess they're trying to keep it a little quaint village now, you know. Everything is moving out of town. Outside in the shopping malls and what have you.

David Jackson: Right. Were there any packinghouses down there at that time?

Isaac Houston: Yes. There were packinghouses down there in those days. They had citrus packinghouses. I can recall one by the name of Nevins. Nevins Fruit Company. There was another one. Oh, the Porcher House. They had one. You know where the Porcher House is?

David Jackson: Right. Yes.

Isaac Houston: They had a packinghouse [00:34:00] too. There were two packinghouses downtown Cocoa in those days. Citrus packinghouses. They packed fruit. People worked in them. They shipped fruit, you know for gifts. It was polished and beautiful and all kinds of things. They also did oranges for juice.

David Jackson: I asked you earlier about Dennis Sawyer. Is he related to Theron Sawyer? The late Theron Sawyer?

Isaac Houston: Dennis Sawyer, yes, he's [00:34:30] related to the late Theron Sawyer. Theron Sawyer was also one of my best friends, you know. We grew up together. He was a bit older than we were but he was Rudy Stone's age. We were younger. Ralph and I. Ralph Williams, the late Ralph Williams and I were younger.

Quite a bit. Yeah, in fact, that was his grandfather. Left him quite a bit of property and houses. And of course, he also left his daughter and sons and grandchildren, [00:35:00] you know, other than Theron Sawyer, let them ... Of course, I think most of them have sold that property now. In fact, the property were Opa Morris now lives ... You know Opa?

David Jackson: Yes, yes. I do.

Isaac Houston: Right up the street. That was the Sawyer's property. Where that church is. Mount Olive AME Church. That was Sawyer's property. In fact, part of where Lucas Terrace is that was Sawyer's property. Where the school was that I went, that was Sawyer's property. Dennis Sawyer owned about half of the island we said then, you know. [00:35:30] And he came here from the Bahamas.

David Jackson: Okay. Did you know Mr. Harry T. Moore?

Isaac Houston: Did I know Harry T. Moore? Yes, I did. Harry T. Moore was a man among men. I can remember. He was a principal, he was a schoolteacher, and he was an insurance man, a writer. And he was an educator. And he came to our house and collected insurance.

A lot of times he would have tea, coffee, what have you, you know. A little [00:36:00] brunch. Whatever. Sit down and have just fellowship with my family. I didn't know his wife that well. I knew of her. I knew her. But she didn't get around like he was. She was also a schoolteacher so, but-- Being an insurance writer he got to visit a lot of our homes. And of course, he was a really brilliant man.

David Jackson: Yeah. He taught school in Mims?

Isaac Houston: In Mims. Right. In Mims. In those days we said ... Right next to [00:36:30] ... What did we call that area there up there above Mims? It's referred to as redneck country.

David Jackson: Scottsmoor?

Isaac Houston: Scottsmoor. Thank you. I couldn't think of it. That's what happens when you get aged. You get older. You can't think of things like you want to. I'm getting up there now. I'm 66 years old. Sometimes I don't remember as well as I'd like to recall things as quickly as I'd like to. But he taught up there in Scottsmoor. [00:37:00] And of course, that was undesirable country as far as we were concerned as black folk.

David Jackson: What was the reaction among blacks in Brevard County to his death?

Isaac Houston: Oh, we were all devastated. It was like a period of mourning for black folk here. People just actually lost it. A lot of them. Couldn't contain themselves. It was horrible. It was [00:37:30] the worst thing we'd ever experienced. And of course, we think about it now. We shudder to think that we had people in Brevard County that would do something like that. It left a very, very sad note. A very, very sad note on the minds and hearts of all the blacks.

David Jackson: Besides Mr. Moore, when you were growing up who else in [00:38:00] the black community would you have considered a leader? Or did the community consider as one of their leaders?

Isaac Houston: Well, when I grew up ...

David Jackson: In addition to Harry Moore.

Isaac Houston: In addition to Harry Moore? I'm trying to think. Well, Dennis Sawyer was always one of our leaders. He was a great leader for the blacks. As you say, Harry T. Moore.

I'm trying to think. There was another family by the name of Turnbells. They lived further up the trail. Mrs. [00:38:30] Turnbull. She was also a principal, a teacher, what have you. She was one of our black leaders in the community at that time. She and Dennis Sawyer were the main ones that ... Of course, on Cocoa side we had the Moores, Melissa Moore, the Fords, and the ... I can't think of them. My brother-in-law's people. The Speeds. The Speeds. [00:39:00] Those were community leaders.

David Jackson: Did you know Miss Melissa Moore?

Isaac Houston: Yes, I did. Yes, I did. In fact, she was one of the founding members of Mount Moriah AME Church on Stone Street. I'm trying to call it Magnolia. I can't get that out of my brain.

David Jackson: Right. Let's see. How did you meet your wife?

Isaac Houston: Now, that's [00:39:30] odd. That's strange. Well, it's unique, I should say. It's not odd and strange. It's always a long story that I'd have to tell. I have to cut it short. But it's always interesting to most people when they ask me, "How did you meet your wife?"

Well, I met my wife through her father. Who is deceased-- He died last March I believe it was. Last April, March, it was March. But anyway, he was over here working. He was a minister. My wife has 11 brothers and sisters. [00:40:00] There were 12 of them. And of course, he came over during the part-time ... He was a minister but he also was a construction worker. He was a carpenter.

And he came over looking for work. He was working. He had work. When we met him he had work. He was trying to find somewhere to live. And of course, I was living with my grandmother and grandfather because we had, you know, three bedrooms. Big house, you know. Pretty good size house. Because they agreed to let him live there. [00:40:30] He wanted a nice place. He said, "I want a place where I can take a nice shower. Eat if I want to or fix my dinner." What have you.

So well, my grandmother told him, "You will certainly have to fix your dinner because I won't be cooking for you if you stay." And of course, they were waiting on me to come home from school to agree to let him stay. And I told him, "Sure, it's fine with me, you know. If that's what you want." Of course, a lot of times he

didn't cook. She cooked for most of us. She made dinner for him, which he [00:41:00] was very thankful.

You know, being a minister he would go home on weekends to his church. Some Sunday afternoons he would come back over this way and bring his family to the beach. And he brought his children and his wife to the beach. And of course, my grandparents were in Georgia at that time. And of course, they came out of the house. They had come to our church. That morning they came to my church. I was not the minister of music. I was on program. I sang. I had a solo that [00:41:30] morning.

So the minister of music had me do that solo. That was just Theron Sawyer. He was the late Theron Sawyer. And of course, my wife said I sang, she and her sisters they brought a friend with them. Their neighbor. A very close friend of theirs. They were trying to figure which one was I in the choir. "Who's Ike? Whatever his name is." I don't know what they called me at that time. They were trying to figure out which guy was the Houston guy.

Of [00:42:00] course, I think she figured it out anyway. Anyways, after church they came by home. And of course, not everybody there but me we didn't have dinner prepared. I was preparing dinner but I hadn't finished. They went on to the beach and they went back home. And of course, they came back by the house before they left.

That's how I got to talking with the girls. And of course, my wife was just another one of the girls to me at that time. She very carefully gave [00:42:30] me their address and their box number. Said, "This is our post office box number." We get mail at home. And the phone number and everything. That's how we met.

And she went home. Of course, I took my family over there for Christmas. Then she took me around and showed me around for Christmas and we went over. And my grandfather and grandmother. And that's how we got started. I talked to her. She talked to me. She was in college. [00:43:00] I had finished college and was teaching. And of course, we didn't propose at that time. But you know, I would write her and she would write me. Sometimes we'd telephone each other. And that's how we started dating.

We started dating I would say December of '63. And we married in June of '64. She went back to school. I told her father he wouldn't have to worry about her finishing school. If it [00:43:30] was okay, I would send her to school. He said, "Sure. It's fine."

David Jackson: Where was she going to school?

Isaac Houston: She went to Bethune Cookman in Daytona. She's a graduate of Cookman. She had a baby and went back to school and finished in '69. She did her intern at Tropical Elementary where she works now. She has been there 31 years.

David Jackson: Woah.

Isaac Houston: That's her only job. She came in good time. When she went to that school it was like a lily white school but they integrated. [00:44:00] I think they had four or five teachers when she went there. Three or four. 'Cause she's the only black there now. She enjoys every minute of it, though.

David Jackson: That's good. So where was her home?

Isaac Houston: Her home that was Eustis, Florida.

David Jackson: Lake County?

Isaac Houston: Lake County. Right. That's where she grew up. She is originally from Kingstree, South Carolina. She came around here, I think she said, she was in sixth grade I believe. Fifth or sixth grade.

David Jackson: All right. So you were born in Georgia.

Isaac Houston: I was born in Georgia.

David Jackson: Thomasville?

Isaac Houston: Well, out in the country [00:44:30] from Thomasville. I was born in Brooks County.

David Jackson: Brooks County, Georgia.

Isaac Houston: Brooks County, Georgia where I was born. Right close to Thomas County.

David Jackson: All right. Does that border the Florida/Georgia state line?

Isaac Houston: Excuse me?

David Jackson: Is that bordering on the Florida/Georgia state line? Brooks County?

Isaac Houston: No, I don't think so. No. It's among the South Georgia towns there. I don't know that much about Georgia to be perfectly honest about it.

David Jackson: Were you married here in Brevard County?

Isaac Houston: I was married in Lake County.

David Jackson: [00:45:00] Lake County? Okay.

Isaac Houston: We got married in her yard. We had a yard wedding. They had a beautiful setup. The lawn was pretty. We had a beautiful wedding. It's called a garden wedding. Beautiful. Simply gorgeous.

David Jackson: So tell us about your son and grandson.

Isaac Houston: My son and grandson? Well, my son he grew up locally on Merritt Island. Of course, he went to integrated schools all of his life. You know, he was always the only one in his class. [00:45:30] His mother and I both teaching ... Well, when he went to preschool he could read. You know, he was ahead of the other kids at that time. And of course, he finished high school in '84.

He played ball. He played Little League and he played Babe Ruth. He played outside. And he played basketball in junior high. And he thought he could walk on the campus in college and play baseball. He was a great baseball player. He didn't. But he forgot about the idea [00:46:00] when he got to Florida State. Of course, he graduated from Florida State in '88.

He went into TV. He was a communications major. Of course, he worked for Florida Power. They hired him as a lineman or assistant lineman. Of course, they moved him to Miami. He worked for Florida Power until they started downsizing and he got laid off because he didn't have enough seniority. Then he went back into TV. He worked [00:46:30] channel 65. He worked 65 and he worked for the Golf channel. He worked for channel 2. And now he's with 13.

Of course, when he came back from Miami working at the Golf channel in Orlando. And of course, he married a girl from Miami who had two children. They had one together, which is CJ. My grandbaby. You might have seen him here earlier. He's about 30 months [00:47:00] old I believe. Not quite 30. He's two and a half. Maybe he is a little bit past 30. He's not quite three is what I'm trying to say. Of course, right now he's with channel 13. He's a videographer for them.

David Jackson: What's his name?

Isaac Houston: Cedric. Isaac Cedric Houston. His son is Isaac Cedric Houston Junior. He wanted a junior. I didn't want a junior. My name is Isaac James. His is Isaac Cedric. So that's where he is right now.

David Jackson: Okay. [00:47:30] One last question. Having grown up here on the island do you refer to it as Merritt Island or Merritt's Island?

Isaac Houston: That's interesting. Having grown up here on the island how do I refer to my city? It's not an incorporation. I say my city, my town. It's funny. It's very odd that you would ask that question because we always said that people that grew up in Cocoa always called [00:48:00] this Merritt's Island. Merritt's. They put an S on the Merritt's. And of course, we all refer to it as Merritt Island.

We think it's so funny. It's kinda-- we chuckle when people say Merritt's Island because it's really Merritt. I've never known anything but Merritt. Of course, a lot of the older citizens from the Cocoa area refer to Merritt Island and Melbourne and Titusville, Mims, Palm Bay. They all refer to it as Merritt's Island. They always

have to catch themselves. [00:48:30] You know, they think twice and they repeat it and say Merritt Island. But we have always said Merritt Island. We just chuckle when somebody says Merritt's Island because it sounds so funny to us.

David Jackson: Growing up did you have any white friends?

Isaac Houston: Yes, I did have some white friends as I grew up in a segregated society, you know. I grew up with the Murdocks. I guess because they had a grocery store right down near 520. Of course, [00:49:00] my parents and grandparents went to that grocery store. And most of the black people went to that grocery store. And a lot of black people in those days had accounts with Mr. Murdock. Prior to Murdock running the place, the Brams ran it. Of course, I also grew up with my neighbor's son ... They had the boy that I told you about.

David Jackson: Humphreys.

Isaac Houston: Well, I grew up with his ... Neil is over there now, which is the third generation. I grew up with Neil's father, which was Neil Senior. Of course, our families [00:49:30] were friends. We got along fine. I mean, there was no problem.

As I said, the Futches off of Angel City we all grew up together. They fished and came in our neighborhoods and played with us. Then they sold us fish and seafood, whatever they caught in those days that was edible. We bought it. They gave you some also. They didn't sell you all them. They gave you some. And of course, we played. We just played together. [00:50:00] I didn't know Henry Minneboo because he was much younger. He came on much younger. He's a lot younger than I am.

David Jackson: Henry Minneboo grew up in Angel City?

Isaac Houston: Yes, he did. He lived and he went to Gainesville College, you know. We had quite a few black friends. Those families understood each other but no other families seemed to ... You know, of course, they got black balled for having black friends. It [00:50:30] was that kind of a thing, you know. They weren't supposed to have black friends. Then of course they were ostracized by their white counterparts.

David Jackson: You mentioned the Murdocks. Are there any Murdocks left in this area that you know of?

Isaac Houston: I don't know of anybody being left. The old lady died. She was down in Rockledge. They were on River Road. And of course, Peewee, which was the father, he died of throat cancer many, many years ago. [00:51:00] Of course, Mrs. Murdock I think she's passed away since then. She lived many, many years longer than he. I don't know where the children are now, you know. The ones that would be my age. I haven't seen any in years. But we really got along fine. You know, played together and we fought together and everything else. Like children will always do, have always done.

David Jackson: [00:51:30] Harry T. Moore died in a bombing of his house in Mims in 1951.

Isaac Houston: Yes, he did. I don't know how many-- stick of dynamite.

David Jackson: Stick of dynamite?

Isaac Houston: Sticks of dynamite they put under his house, you know. I think it was like Christmas Eve he died, you know. It was ignited and blew up and killed him instantly. His wife I think lived a day or two. Harriet. Then she died shortly afterwards. But as I said, that was the saddest moment in the black people's lives in this area. [00:52:00] To think that that happened and nobody could find out who did it. That was the thing, you know. We didn't feel vindicated because they weren't able to detect who did it.

David Jackson: Did it generate any kind of activism in terms of the Civil Rights movement here locally?

Isaac Houston: Yes, it did. I would think so. It did. People became very hostile, you know. They organized the NAACP [00:52:30] and of course they became very active, you know. A lot of people that were in the backgrounds they came out front because they were just bitter because of what happened. In those days, the law enforcement agency, organization at that time we think could have found out who it was but they didn't. We think they just sort of pulled the wool over our eyes. They thought they were. We realized they didn't try to find [00:53:00] them like they said they were.

Of course, recently, not too long ago, they had some people, some guy in the paper I believe supposedly knew something about it. Had worked with the group, the Klansmen, or somebody when it happened. 'Cause I don't recall what happened to him. What they ever do to him? It was, as I said, it made black people very, very bitter about [00:53:30] things-- racial issues.

David Jackson: The media at that time did they give any kind of reasons or explanation for it?

Isaac Houston: You know, as a teenager I don't remember any explanations being given, any reasons. Nothing. Just snuffed his life out. They gave no reasons to us. The media didn't indicate ...

David Jackson: No suspects?

Isaac Houston: No, no. No suspects. They never had any suspects until, as I said, recently they had suspected [00:54:00] somebody scheming with a scheme. But that died by the wayside. Nothing ever happened to that.

David Jackson: Mr. Dennis Sawyer was, I would assume, a self-employed businessman. Correct?

Isaac Houston: Mr. Dennis Sawyer? Yes, he was self-employed. I never knew him to work a day in his life for anybody else but himself.

David Jackson: Okay. What other business owners were there here in this area? Black business owners on Merritt Island or Cocoa or anywhere [00:54:30] else that you knew of?

Isaac Houston: Just some small time grocery stores, you know, had some people. I knew a few black ... Barber shops were black-owned. And grocery stores. That was the extent of black business as I can recall, you know. Anybody black having a business in those days I just don't recall anybody, you know. As a child, I can't remember. Just a [00:55:00] few grocery stores. That was the extent of black businesses in those days.

David Jackson: You said you mentioned you worked at the Rexall drugstore.

Isaac Houston: Yes, I did.

David Jackson: On Delannoy and downtown Cocoa? They had a lunch counter. You could eat there?

Isaac Houston: Yeah, they had a fountain. You know, a soda fountain. You get sodas and ice cream. 'Cause at that same fountain you could get breakfast there, you could get lunch, dinner. That was a big thing, you know. A lot of the city employees would come there [00:55:30] to have dinner, a lot of your business people, during the lunch hour. So it was a drugstore, a soda fountain, a lunch counter. You name it.

David Jackson: So at that time in downtown Cocoa were there a lot of blacks working?

Isaac Houston: Downtown Cocoa?

David Jackson: Downtown, working downtown, in any kind of activity?

Isaac Houston: Not really. I don't recall. No. I don't recall [00:56:00] any blacks. You—they always had guys that shined shoes and of course some worked in the theater. One or two worked in the theater. Of course, the most work that blacks did downtown was in the citrus packinghouses. That was Nevin's and I said Porcher had one also, a packinghouse.

David Jackson: Besides Cocoa and Merritt Island growing up [00:56:30] did you visit anywhere else? Travel?

Isaac Houston: Growing up?

David Jackson: Growing up.

Isaac Houston: Beside Cocoa and Merritt Island? Oh, yes. I did. I went to Georgia many times. I went to Valdosta and I went to Thomasville. I visited Tallahassee. In fact, I went

to school in Tallahassee for a year. My grandfather went back to Georgia and spent a year on the farm. We had the experience of farm life, you know, which we thoroughly enjoyed my brother and I. Of course, he's [00:57:00] deceased now. My deceased brother. He died a couple of years ago.

But I went places like New Jersey, Maryland, New York, Philadelphia, Miami, St. Petersburg, Tampa, Orlando, Brooksville, you know... Places in Florida. West Palm Beach. My grandfather was always on the go. [00:57:30] You know he always had a car so we did a lot of traveling. In fact, my grandmother had almost a new car given to her by the Clements. Gave her a Model A Ford. I can remember the leather seats and everything inside of it. Had a rumble seat in the back you'd turn up. It was really a nice car. We traveled a lot in that car also.

David Jackson: You mentioned the beach earlier. [00:58:00] What section of the beach ... This is Cocoa Beach, correct?

Isaac Houston: Yeah, Cocoa Beach.

David Jackson: Okay. What section of the beach was I guess reserved or relegated for the blacks at that time? It wasn't integrated, right? It was segregated as well? The beach.

Isaac Houston: Yeah, well, everything was segregated. There wasn't much beach for anybody in those days.

David Jackson: Oh, really? Okay.

Isaac Houston: There was a single lane, two lanes, but a single road going to Cocoa Beach. And there was one service station [00:58:30] between Merritt Island and Cocoa Beach. That was right there where the Bishops are. That's near A1A now.

And there was not much activity on the beach. If you went on the beach you just went where the blacks were, if they were there. You didn't go where the whites were. They didn't have a specific or particular areas reserved for blacks or whites. You just went to the beach.

Of course, growing up in a segregated community and dealing with black people only you went to where your group [00:59:00] was. You didn't go where the white folks were. They didn't come where the black folks were. And in those days we did have picnics and things on the beach. Cookouts in those days. It was all segregated.

David Jackson: Growing up when you would visit up north I guess at that time as a child could you notice a dramatic difference in terms of how blacks were treated here, growing up at home, versus New Jersey?

Isaac Houston: [00:59:30] Yeah, I can notice that, you know. That was very visible. It's very noticeable, you know. The kids were allowed to do things that we couldn't do

here. We looked at the kids ... I can recall the adults could say things to the whites that we couldn't say here. We didn't dare say here. Of course, you heard nobody calling anybody any names anyway, you know. They seemed to have [01:00:00] gotten along fine, you know.

They seemed to have been happier up there than the people in the South. In those days, it appeared that way to me. I don't know if that was a good observation or not. But I seemed to think so as I look back on my childhood days. Just certain things you didn't do in the South that you could do up north as a black. And nobody said anything.

David Jackson: Did you ever see or encounter any violence towards blacks growing [01:00:30] up here locally?

Isaac Houston: You know what? I don't recall. Because I think my grandparents kind of sheltered us, kept us out of that kind of thing. I don't ever recall any violence among the blacks and the whites. I don't. You could read about it and you heard about it but I never saw any of it as a child growing up.

David Jackson: Growing up did you want to be a teacher? Did you want to get in the field of [01:01:00] education?

Isaac Houston: Growing up I didn't necessarily want to be a teacher. I knew I had to go to college. And of course, as I worked around town Cocoa and got to know a few white girls and boys I found out that they could get jobs downtown Cocoa and didn't have to go to school. Like work in the bank, in the lawyer's office, you know. As I said, maybe a dry goods store. Things like that. [01:01:30] A hardware shop store. I knew friends that had friends of their friends or their families doing those kinds of things.

Well, I didn't want to be a teacher but I knew I couldn't work at a job downtown Cocoa because in order to get a job in the bank I had to go to college. My white counterparts didn't. So I went to school. I ended up being a schoolteacher because my parents always stressed education. So I guess that's why [01:02:00] I went into teaching.

And of course, when I went into teaching my first experience into my internship after going to college for four years ... I called them home and told them, I said, "Teaching is not for me. I want no parts of it." I said, "I'm sorry. I just spent all your money sending me to school but I don't want to teach." I mean I was very adamant about it. They said, "Well, maybe give it a day or two. Try it again. It might get better."

And at my second day of internship it [01:02:30] was a little bit better. My third day it was a little bit better. Fourth day it got better. By the time I had been in it about two weeks, man, it was nothing any better than teaching. I enjoyed it

thoroughly. The kids they enjoyed it. My, we called them critic teachers in those days, enjoyed what I had done.

Then I got in with my critic teachers in those days because I was afraid of that lady. I was just afraid of her because they say she's tough. [01:03:00] I didn't go in there dragging my feet. I knew I had to work. And of course, she found out that I could type. She was doing a project for her masters in those days. I could type pretty speedily. So I typed her thesis, you know. The final copy.

And of course, needless to say I had it made with my kids and my critic teacher and I did a very good job. I did my internship in seventh and eighth grade. I had a combination of them. Of course, [01:03:30] four or five years later they all were seniors. Three or four years later they came down to play us basketball. They saw me and, boy, they just about had a fit. You would have thought I was King. They were riding me up high, you know. Carrying me. That's how much they thought about me and remembered me. Of course, I loved them too. They gave me a nice send-off when I finished. Very nice send-off.

And so I just enjoyed doing it. I thought I would [01:04:00] never teach. Never teach. But as I said, when they started integration the best teachers started integrating first. I got sent. And I was asked did I want to take a job by a white man in a white school that was going to be integrated. And I said sure. I said, "Kids are basically the same. I don't care what color they are." They are basically all the same. They have the same needs. So there's no such thing as teaching a white kid. I just teach children. Or a black kid.

[01:04:30] My wife says the same thing because she's never had that many blacks in her school. She has more blacks in Sunday school than she has in her academic day school. But we all find that teaching for kids is just teaching. You teach everybody the same. You don't teach races or nationalities. You teach children.

David Jackson: Were there any problems with violence during the integration period [01:05:00] in the schools here?

Isaac Houston: I don't recall. Not in the elementary schools. I think the high schools had some violence, you know. Really brutal violence amongst students. But we didn't experience that in the elementary schools. The elementary children didn't. They fall out and play and fight just like children do normally at home like siblings do. They might be fighting this minute, the next minute they're loving each other up and having a good time. So--

[01:05:30] You know, I didn't see a problem with it. Didn't anything surprise me from either group should I say. They all, you know, basically did the same thing. As I said, they all had the same needs. And they all was there for one purpose. That was to get an education.

David Jackson: When were the schools fully integrated here in Brevard County?

Isaac Houston: [01:06:00] Well, I would say in the last half of the '60s, you know. '65 to '70 everything. They were fully integrated then. Everything was running very smoothly, you know. Of course, the teachers had more problems than the kids. I mean a lot of the white teachers had problems adjusting to the black administrators. Of course, they gave them a hard time and vice versa [01:06:30] Put the shoe on the other foot. The white administrator and the black staff.

But they had more problems with the black administrators with the white staff. That was the biggest problem. Kids didn't have any problems, you know. But the adults, of course, it was like, "You're black so you don't tell me what to do. You're not going to be my boss." [01:07:00] That's the way it was. Of course, until recently, that's been happening, you know. I think people are finally ...

It's finally hit home, you know, that you're going to have black and white administrators in this world as long as there's a world. Because you're going to go backwards, you retrogress, but you're also going to progress too. By the same token you're going to progress. Sometimes it takes retrogression to get progression.

David Jackson: [01:07:30] When you were growing up was there any organized athletic leagues for the black children here?

Isaac Houston: No, there wasn't. Not when I grew up. No, that wasn't heard of. There wasn't. That came along when my son came up. When I grew up there was no organized nothing for blacks. You know, nothing but the NAACP and that was for adults. You know, nothing for children. The only thing you had organized was [01:08:00] church leagues, you know. The kids played ball and stuff in the churches and the conventions and things. It was supervised and organized. But as far as your community having an organized ball league? No, that wasn't heard of for blacks.

David Jackson: You had like a sandlot baseball?

Isaac Houston: That's exactly right. Sandlot baseball. Same thing with football and anything else we wanted to do. [01:08:30] I was just talking with Ralph Williams, the deceased, God rest his soul, but we used to talk about these kids got all these toys. We made our toys. We ran through the woods and made our slingshots and made our guns. And that's how we played. Cops and robbers and cowboys. We made everything we had to play with.

David Jackson: A lot more imagination.

Isaac Houston: A bicycle was like a luxury to us. These kids get bicycles before they can walk almost.

David Jackson: [01:09:00] So—but...There were periods I guess growing up every so often you would play with the whites here locally?

Isaac Houston: Organized leagues?

David Jackson: Well, your pickup games you said you would have. Was that just strictly with the blacks?

Isaac Houston: That was strictly with the blacks. We didn't do any organized play with the whites.

David Jackson: Oh, okay.

Isaac Houston: When I said friends I meant we just played together, you know. We ate together. But we didn't have any organized leagues [01:09:30] together back in those days. I don't recall anybody having any in those days. Black or white.

David Jackson: Just pickup games?

Isaac Houston: Yeah, when I grew up.

David Jackson: But the pickup games were with whites as well sometimes?

Isaac Houston: Not in my day. No. It was strictly black. It was all segregated. If you had black friends you didn't dare play with them. You would not want them playing with you. They wouldn't want you. In fact, as I said, the whites [01:10:00] would be ridiculed. They would be ostracized by their groups if they did that. Of course, some of them didn't care anyway. They did what they wanted to do with blacks. Blacks have always done it too. A few of us have always done what we wanted to do regardless of who it hurt, whoever got upset. It didn't matter.

David Jackson: So it sounds like the contact as a child when you say play it was more the exception but [01:10:30] not the rule? In order to get along you would not have any contact?

Isaac Houston: Exactly. In order to get along with your white counterparts you didn't have a lot of contact. Even though you played together and you even ate together. But you just didn't have that kind of contact.

David Jackson: Did the separation, segregation, did it get worse as you got older? Was there more peer pressure as you got [01:11:00] older? Or once you started as a little fellow would you continue on pretty much with the same type of attitude? Or did it get worse in terms of peer pressure? Trying not to have contact.

Isaac Houston: As I got older did it get worse? You mean the integration, segregation problem?

David Jackson: Yeah, the ostracizing of ...

Isaac Houston: Yeah, it got worse. Yeah, it did. It got worse, you know. It always gets worse before it would get better. It got worse [01:11:30] as I grew up. As I said, I went to school and come back it began to get better and it got better and better. Of

course, finally you had integration no problems. We got more problems now than we had a few years ago, you know. About 10 years ago we didn't have the problems we have now with the races in school. It's kind of going backwards right now. But I think everything will work out right, though. You got to go through a revolution [01:12:00] here. You've got to make a change.

David Jackson: Right. You graduated from Monroe High School in 1952?

Isaac Houston: Exactly.

David Jackson: How many people were in your graduating class?

Isaac Houston: If I recall there were about 22 or 23.

David Jackson: Wow.

Isaac Houston: That was a big class. And of course, needless to say, a lot of those classmates once in a while we get together, have deceased. Passed on, you know. At least a half a dozen or more since I've finished high school. They're already dead, you know, and gone. [01:12:30] For various and sundry reasons. But that was a large class 23, you know. I think it was 21 or 23. Something like that. That was called a big class in those days. It was strictly segregated school you know, all the way.

David Jackson: So when you were in high school at Monroe the school further to the north, which is now the Harry T. Moore Center on Blake, [01:13:00] what activity was going on then? Was this still a school, operating school, at that time?

Isaac Houston: Yes, you know, when they built the Monroe High School there were so many students we still had classes at the Moore's Library. The old Moore's ... We still had. That was my first job. I worked down in the old school. We were transported every day down to the cafeteria by bus. They'd pick us up and take us to lunch and bring us back.

We had double sessions we had so many children. Double sessions. [01:13:30] I not only worked as an elementary teacher. I worked as a senior high and high school teacher. I had English and math classes. Several. Once in a while I taught music in high school. Plus I was doing my own job in elementary school, what I was hired for. But you work wherever they put you. You did what they asked you to do as a teacher.

And of course, we always had graduation exercises [01:14:00] for our kids. And of course, the teachers got to wear their robes and their hoods from their schools, you know. It was always a big time. Graduation was a big time for everybody. Not just for students. The teachers were kinda excited also for the festivities of the graduation. The class night and the, whatever, and the baccalaureate and the commencement. They were all looked upon as, you know, being very, very

[01:14:30] festive occasions. They were enjoyed by all. I looked forward to it. The kids did too. As I said, the teachers were just as excited.

David Jackson: It seems as if a lot of the activities were either church-centered or school-centered.

Isaac Houston: Right. You mean when I grew up?

David Jackson: When you grew up.

Isaac Houston: Right. All your activities were either church-centered or school-centered. You had no organized nothing [01:15:00] outside of school or church.

David Jackson: I've read about the Orange Jubilee that they had in Cocoa and that there was a black baby parade.

Isaac Houston: Yes. There was. I don't know about babies but younger children.

David Jackson: Younger children?

Isaac Houston: Right. I can remember I had a tricycle [01:15:30] that was bought for me. It was really what I call a really strong, heavy tricycle. It was a beautiful tricycle. It had the stream bars on it and everything. Of course, every year I was in the jubilee. It was mainly blacks. I mean, you dressed in costumes. Various things from nature, various kinds of animals, or people. They dressed you as that. You went and that's where you went in the parade. [01:16:00] They took pictures and the media came out. It was a big occasion. It was really nice. I was always in the Orange Jubilee that I could remember.

David Jackson: Did it go Florida Avenue or Brevard Avenue?

Isaac Houston: It went Brevard Avenue mainly. Downtown Cocoa.

David Jackson: I heard there were ... Was there two separate parades? A black parade and a white parade?

Isaac Houston: Oh, yes. They had two separate parades.

David Jackson: Someone was telling me the [01:16:30] whites actually thought the black parade was more popular. To them. That's what I've heard. I don't know what your take on it was.

Isaac Houston: You heard correct. It apparently got more publicity. You had more people to watch it. You heard about it more. It really was. As I can remember from a child, we got more publicity. I mean people seemed to have enjoyed our parade. In those days, you didn't get put in the media that much. But we were in the papers.

They took pictures. People [01:17:00] took pictures all in the street as you, you know, marched by. They followed you.

It was just a nice, big, festive occasion as I said. It was very popular, you know. It was popular among the people. Not just black or white people. It was a popular parade. I don't know that it was more popular than the white parade. But we got an awful lot of publicity.

David Jackson: That would be what? January or February?

Isaac Houston: [01:17:30] As I recall, yes. During that time of the year.

David Jackson: Okay.

Isaac Houston: Yeah, January, February time of the year.

David Jackson: When you were growing up was May Day a big event here?

Isaac Houston: When I grew up May Day was not a big event in my life. No, it wasn't. May Day became a big event when I was teaching, when I taught. I mean, it was something to look forward to, it was something that they wanted you to do in schools. Everybody [01:18:00] did it, everybody prepared something, everybody participated, you know. It was a big day when I was teaching. But as I grew up I hardly knew May Day from Jay Day or any other day so to speak. We knew it was May Day but nobody celebrated May Day when I was going to school. Not during those times.

David Jackson: I've heard that your grandfather bought you a motorcycle?

Isaac Houston: Yes. He bought me, we called it in those days, a scooter. A motor scooter. [01:18:30] It had two seats on it, you know.

David Jackson: That was for you to get to work?

Isaac Houston: That was for me to get to work and school. Yeah, bought me a cushion. I can always remember. It was a green one with a big red seat on it. Boy, I used to ride that thing. Right across that bridge in the wintertime. Course it had a thing on it. A windshield, a shield reflector in front of it. It was nice. It was strictly for business. We had to go to work and school.

David Jackson: When did you [01:19:00] get your first car?

Isaac Houston: I got my first car when I got my first job teaching. Of course, my grandfather he taught us to drive early. I didn't take driver's education. I learned to drive when I was about 10 or 12 years old, you know. Been driving ever since. All of us. None of us took driver's ed. My mom and my uncle used to drive the school bus for the county. Of course, my granddaddy did also. [01:19:30] So we've been driving.

Always had cars most of our lives. In fact, probably one of the first black families on the island to have a car.

David Jackson: Oh, really?

Isaac Houston: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

David Jackson: What kind of car did your grandfather drive?

Isaac Houston: He always drove the Model A Fords. When I went to school and come back he bought a Pontiac with the big wide strip on the back of the thing. I could remember a long tail end sticking off. That trunk was long. It had a long nose. It had that engine on [01:20:00] the radiator. You know, for the top of the radiator. On the grille. That was a nice car. It was a beautiful car. It had leather seats in it. I remember that.

David Jackson: It's a '55, '56?

Isaac Houston: '55. I think it was '55.

David Jackson: Pretty much I guess this area was you would say it was a rural area.

Isaac Houston: Yes, this area.

David Jackson: Lot of agriculture.

Isaac Houston: This area was a [01:20:30] rural area. It was mainly citrus fruit, you know. There was some gardening and truck farming but mostly citrus was the main ... And fishing were the main industries when I came up. The main industries that's what they had, you know. As I grew up as a child. The Cape wasn't heard of. And of course, Patrick Air Force Base didn't come along until I was in college, high school, college. Industry was, as I said, citrus fruit. [01:21:00] Everybody worked in the citrus groves, you know. If you were a common laborer. If you had a skill you did something else most likely.

David Jackson: Most of the blacks in Washington Park were they natives or were they sort of a mixture from other parts of the South?

Isaac Houston: Most of the blacks in Washington Park they were not natives. They were a mixture. Everybody was leaving the sharecroppers. Leavin' the farm. [01:21:30] In those days, we called it you were working for the white man so what did they call that? Slavery time actually. We called that slavery, living in slavery.

So everybody came down here to get away from slavery and sharecropping and that kind of stuff. I mean, from the South. They came here, migrated here, just to get some work. A lot of people ran away down there. I can remember. They ran away ...you know. The father or somebody would run away. Mainly the father

would just take off and leave and get the hang [01:22:00] of the job. Then he would send for his family.

He was afraid to go back for his family because they might keep him and not let him get back. For some reason, he may get put in jail or something so they don't go back there. They send for them. Send for the families. They come down by train, bus, what have you. I can remember a lot of that when I was coming along. A lot of my people came here like that, you know. Some of the older ones really came by. They slipped [01:22:30] away. My grandfather slipped away. He just left. Of course, if you owed the white man you didn't go back until you had money to pay him. You know what I mean. You'll pay him off so you could go back home when you were ready.

David Jackson: Did you get the impression from your grandfather, even though he was still in the South, it was still segregated, did you get the impression from him that it was a better life for him here than it was in Georgia?

Isaac Houston: Definitely. Yes, I got from my grandfather [01:23:00] it was a better life for him here than it was in Georgia. 'Cause he had nothing to return to in Georgia but farming. Nothing else. Of course, he was determined not to farm the rest of his life, meaning not to raise his children on the farm. He didn't want us to do sharecropping like they had to do when they were coming along.

So he wanted a better life for his entire family. That's why he just got out, heard about the East Coast, and that's what he said. He came down here. They heard about it. There was work down here for black people. [01:23:30] Colored people in those days. I can't get that in the brain. I hate to say that even now. You say it often. I always say black. I just had a thing about it I guess. That's why I don't say colored today. I always say black.

He wanted a better life for his family so that's why he migrated to the East Coast. And of course, he left my grandmom and her family in Eau Gallie because he came down here seeking [01:24:00] a job. When he got a job they moved down the next year. Of course, he would go back and forth to Eau Gallie from Merritt Island to Cocoa.

David Jackson: Were you raised in your grandfather's house here on Merritt Island?

Isaac Houston: Yes, I was. I sure did. I was. Yes, I was raised in my grandfather's house.

David Jackson: Is it still standing?

Isaac Houston: Yes. It's still standing. It's in need of repair but they're living in it. About the third or fourth generation I guess living in it now. It's in [01:24:30] probate. The property. My mom and her sister owned it. My mama is still living. She's 85. My aunt died this past Christmas, I think three years ago, three Christmases ago I believe it was. She passed away on Christmas Eve. Of course, they had it together.

Since she's died she had an executive ... Her daughter was her executive on the executive's will. The daughter has died with cancer. Things are in limbo right now on that [01:25:00] property.

David Jackson: Is your mother still in the house?

Isaac Houston: No, my mother she's in her own house. She lives over on Schoolhouse Road right near Woody Simpson's recreation. Right across in front of that. Right down the street from the fire department. In fact, her house is right at the end of that street. You come down it and you can run into it almost.

David Jackson: But your grandfather's house is still standing? It's a wood frame structure?

Isaac Houston: It's still standing on ... Let me give you the name of that street. It's a frame structure with ... It has aluminum siding [01:25:30] on it. What do you call that street? It's not Houston. There's a Houston Lane. It's right off the trail. The street runs off the trail. For the love of me, I can't recall the name of the street where it's on. My mom lives on Schoolhouse Road.

Hill Street. It's called Hill Street. I knew it would come. In fact, it's the first house. The apartment is the first house. The first structure, the big apartment, [01:26:00] and then the next property there is my grandfather's house. It's the family house.

David Jackson: That was built in 1928? Or '29?

Isaac Houston: It was built in '29. '29 when it was built.

David Jackson: Your grandmother how long did she live in Eau Gallie?

Isaac Houston: My grandmother stayed in Eau Gallie ... Oh they didn't stay a year. Maybe I guess a few months.

David Jackson: So you don't have any memories of Eau Gallie at all?

Isaac Houston: No, no. Not today now. I was [01:26:30] always there. Eau Gallie was Eau Gallie then. Now it's part of Melbourne. Eau Gallie was kind of like Merritt Island. It was country. It was very out. I say country. It was rural. It was in a rural area. The train did come through there. Of course, the train didn't come through here. This was still a rural area.

We had a big sawmill down here on Merritt Island called the Fortenberry Sawmill. They built a Fortenberry subdivision where that sawmill was in those days. We use to like to go to-- I can remember [01:27:00] we took field trips there in school to watch them bring the trees in and cut them up, you know. Beginning to make the lumber. You know, how the process started. And that was interesting. I can always remember that. In those days, that was one thing I can remember about school, you know. That was one of my field trips.

David Jackson: The Fortenberry Sawmill would that be on or near Fortenberry Road?

Isaac Houston: That's it. Where Fortenberry Road, yeah, [01:27:30] that went by the mill. That's right. There's a subdivision off of North Banana River Drive. It's called the Fortenberry subdivision.

David Jackson: Okay. Did you take a lot of field trips growing up?

Isaac Houston: No, not that many.

David Jackson: Not that many?

Isaac Houston: Our field trips you walked to most of them.

David Jackson: Okay.

Isaac Houston: You know, you went through the woods and you'd gather flowers and berries and things like that. Those were the kind of trips you had, you know. [01:28:00] It was educational. It was educational. Things of nature. Plants and animals, you know. When I look back I learned something.

David Jackson: Growing up in your particular grade how many children would be in your grade or class?

Isaac Houston: Growing up in my grade I can remember there were like three different [01:28:30] families in my grade. There were the Houstons, the MacDonalds, the Ralph Williamses, and perhaps the Sawyers. And that was the extent of the children in my class, which was about maybe a dozen. Something like that, you know. A dozen kids probably.

They were all being taught in the one room. Well, not one room. We had first grade through third grade in one [01:29:00] room. They also had seventh and eighth grade social studies in that room. But in the other room we had four, five, and six, you know. They were separate. They were taught in the other room. And of course, I can remember the teacher and the principal at that time, you know, exchanging classes.

I gather they were teaching their specialties, you know. One could teach science and maybe had more expertise in science and the other one had more expertise in history, social studies. But they all taught [01:29:30] their language arts and math. Everybody taught that, you know. Each of the teachers taught that. As I said, in fact, when I started back teaching ... back when I started teaching, when I came back to Cocoa from school ...

'Cause I was gone a few years. I was here because when I'd come home I'd pack to come home and I'd repack to go to New Jersey to go to work. And of course, [01:30:00] when I came back to Monroe High School I taught with my first grade

teacher. And my principal was still living. My first principal, my grade school principal died I would say like less than 10 years ago. Like five, six years ago. Rosa Leonard. She was 90 something years old. Close to 100 they said.

Of course, my other teacher that I taught with at Monroe High School, [01:30:30] Mrs. Childs, she was my first grade teacher. I taught in the same grade with her. In fact, we were team partners over at ... It's McNair School now. That was Poinsett. Poinsett was an outgrowth of Monroe High School, the black high school. That's how Poinsett got started.

Naomi Ford was teaching in the Monroe High School when they made that school the elementary school, built McNair, and then Naomi Ford got transferred as a principal there. She was our first principal there. Of course, she's now retired. [01:31:00] She's 90. I think 91 or 92 years old. She lives on Fiske Boulevard. She's in the nineties. Might be older than that. But she's still living.

But it was strange. It was kind of odd. You finished school and your teacher that taught you, you come back, and it's like the third or fourth generation, and you work with your teacher as a teacher. Of course, you always have a lot of respect for those people because I don't think I would have [01:31:30] made it through college had it not been for that good first grade teacher I had, you know. That's where I got my start. Taught me a lot.

And of course, as Ralph Williams junior used to say ... He was always a fanatic at math and I was a fanatic in science and language arts. And of course, you didn't get your math by lunchtime you had to miss recess. Of course, he would always help me with math and I would always help him with his English. 'Cause he couldn't get the English and I had a problem getting the math. We [01:32:00] worked it out. We went onto school. He learned English and I learned math. Needless to say, we had to learn.

David Jackson: You said going to New Jersey and traveling. Train travel was a big part of life then. In terms of traveling. Pretty much going out of state was trains? Or would you drive in your grandfather's car?

Isaac Houston: We drove. We drove. We drove the bus. And we rode the train. Then from the train ... [01:32:30] When I graduated, when I finished college, and I started flying to school ... I would finish school you know ... School would close here in the county, say like today, Friday, and you've got to be at graduate school on Monday. So you had to fly to get there.

During my high school days we either drove the car or rode the train. Very seldom we took the bus. We always [01:33:00] rode the train or drove the car. I went on the bus a few times too but it took too long on the bus. You'd be worn out by the time you got to New Jersey on the bus.

David Jackson: Right. Where'd you catch the bus at?

Isaac Houston: I caught the bus, believe it or not, in Cocoa. Right here on ... Is that Forrest Avenue where the Kershaw Insurance ... The street that runs in the building ... That was the first bus station I remember. Florida Avenue. Then they moved it to where the present bus station is now. [01:33:30] I caught the bus there ... No, I didn't catch the bus there. I met people there.

My wife caught the bus there but I didn't. I caught the bus down there. My wife caught the bus down there on Forrest Avenue also. When we married she used to catch the bus. Either she'd catch the bus and go back to school on the weekends or I'd take her in the car.

David Jackson: That was located where the Kershaw Insurance building is?

Isaac Houston: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

David Jackson: Okay. And the train? Where was the train station?

Isaac Houston: The train was right there where that track on Poinsett and US1.

David Jackson: Oh, the current ... FEC current station?

Isaac Houston: Yeah. They built [01:34:00] that new station and never used it. We caught the train at the old station.

David Jackson: Where was the old station located?

Isaac Houston: Right there.

David Jackson: Oh, same place?

Isaac Houston: Right same place. They tore it down and put a new one.

David Jackson: Oh, tore it down and put a new one. Okay.

Isaac Houston: No one ever uses the new one.

David Jackson: Okay. When you went off to college in St. Augustine would you take the train to St. Augustine?

Isaac Houston: Well, my first trip to college my grandparents took me up in the car. They took me up and [01:34:30] got me squared away. I got started with school. And every time when I came home I came home on the bus. I drove the bus on my college days. Local college days in St. Augustine I rode the bus.

The only time I drove was when I went to college. You know, going up for school to begin school or when the semester of school would close for the summer, you know. Then I would come home in the car. Otherwise, when I got to come home

was on the bus. That's the way it was throughout my college career. [01:35:00] I didn't do any driving back and forth. Even though I had a license and could drive, was driving. I drove at school.

In fact, I used to drive one of the professors around. In fact, she was a Seventh Day Adventist and she lived over in Starks and used to make lots of trips to Gainesville. Of course, I used to chauffeur her there and back. And of course I was glad to go because I got to go to a restaurant and eat. I loved to eat in those days. I [01:35:30] was the chauffeur and I got to eat. Of course, I was also in her classes too. A couple of her classes. It was quite an experience, you know. But I enjoyed all of my college life.

David Jackson: In college were all your summer jobs in New Jersey?

Isaac Houston: All of my summer jobs during college time they were in New Jersey. Right. During doing my undergraduate was in New Jersey. Now when I went to graduate school [01:36:00] at Columbia I worked in the men's faculty club for food. Dick Blake and I did. We went to graduate school together. You know, the principal of Cocoa High.

Yeah, Blake and I went to school together. Of course, needless to say, Blake couldn't type either. I had to type his papers for him. He hunt and pecked and took him a while. We went to graduate school three years together. He started the year before I did. So he graduated before I did. One year.

He started with [01:36:30] the Austells, which was one of my grade school teachers. Her husband ran cab. He was a cook. In fact, he used to cook up in Poughkeepsie. I think it as Poughkeepsie, New York where he would go. Of course, they used to drive up and ride the train. A lot of times we'd ride the train together. And of course, he'd go on up to his place to Poughkeepsie and we'd stop in New York City going to school over at Columbia.

David Jackson: This is Mr. Austell?

Isaac Houston: Yeah, Mr. Austell.

David Jackson: Was he married to Miss Willie Ruth Austell?

Isaac Houston: That's right. We called him Jack Austell.

David Jackson: [01:37:00] He's deceased now?

Isaac Houston: Yeah. He's deceased. Been deceased quite a while.

David Jackson: How did you like New York when you were in grad school?

Isaac Houston: Loved it. 'Cause I loved all of the cultural resources they had there. I just loved that city. I'd like to go there and visit all of the educational facilities, you know, that they have there. All of the history that they have there, you know. They have so much history there. All the art.

David Jackson: A long way from Brevard County.

Isaac Houston: Yes, my lord. A very long [01:37:30] ways from Brevard County when it comes to cultural resources.

David Jackson: Have you been back to New York recently?

Isaac Houston: No, I haven't been to New York now I guess in about maybe 10 years. Haven't been there. Well, I did go for a family reunion but then I ran in, ran out. A few days.

David Jackson: Would you—your childhood---say you had a good childhood growing ... Did you enjoy growing up here? Once [01:38:00] you went to grad school at Columbia, New York City, at that point in your life, looking back on your childhood here on Merritt Island would you say you had a good childhood?

Isaac Houston: Would I say I had a good childhood? Yes, I would say. Looking back on it now. As a child, I always thought I had a good childhood, you know. Looking back on it it was even better than I thought now when I look back. I didn't have to work. I worked on my own. They didn't tell me, "You have to work", you have to do this or that. All they wanted me [01:38:30] to do was go to school and get an education.

I worked on my own because I wanted some of the finer things in life. And of course, very early when I finished college I got out of school and I tried to give some of it back to my grandma and grandad. I remodeled their house, I redid their kitchen. I added a new bathroom. I bought them their first television. They would go to the neighbors and watch TV, you know, so I bought them their [01:39:00] first television.

The first big fan they ever had in the house to cool the house. As I said, I remodeled the kitchen. Redid the bathroom. Redid the house. In two years I did all that and bought a brand new car and had a savings account. Had a bank account. I went to school the second year started out for my masters.

David Jackson: If you don't mind me asking, what kind of car did you have? You first car.

Isaac Houston: My first car was a brand new Swept-Wing Dodge. [01:39:30] It had the torque flight transmission. Supposing you could set a glass of water on top of the dashboard and it would not spill. You could turn the corners and it wouldn't spill. Had two long antennas on the back. It was red and white. And it had the seats

were partly red leather. Then the inner parts of the seat was black and white. It was a beautiful car.

David Jackson: What year was it?

Isaac Houston: It was a '57.

David Jackson: '57?

Isaac Houston: Yeah.

David Jackson: [01:40:00] Do you miss anything about your childhood in terms of the country atmosphere as opposed to Brevard County the way it is now? The growth they've had.

Isaac Houston: No, I don't miss anything, you know. The growth that we had was good growth. It was, you know, progress. I don't miss that part of my life. I mean, I liked my childhood but I think this is better. I mean [01:40:30] I wouldn't mind, I wouldn't mind living my childhood again. I still think this is a better life, you know, now to live in society as it is now. If I were a child again, you know.

I still like my childhood. I cherish it. It was quite an experience for me. When I look back on it, I've learned so many things. Today you sort of compare, you always compare, and what happened when I came along, and what's happening now. I say, "Man, you know, I think [01:41:00] I prefer now." I don't want to go back there in those days. Even though, I thought I had a great childhood. I did.

David Jackson: Well, thank you, Mr. Houston. I appreciate your time and allowing us to use your home and take up your Sunday like this.

Isaac Houston: I'd like to thank you, you know, for having enough confidence in me to come back to my home, to get this tape. You know, I think it's an experience. It was quite an experience for my grandchildren [01:41:30] to watch. Even though my son is in television they don't get to see a whole lot of this. So I do appreciate you guys for thinking enough of me to come back to film me in my home.

David Jackson: Thank you again. We appreciate it.

Isaac Houston: You're welcome.

Lauritz Kjerulff: Your wife mentioned something about your uncle had a shoe store.

Isaac Houston: Yes, he sure did. Downtown. I forgot about that. Yeah, that was one of the businesses here. 'Cause that was after he left Chicago and [01:42:00] came home. He had the shoe store here.

David Jackson: Was he also originally from Georgia?

Isaac Houston: Yes. He was originally from Georgia. He sure was. He's the one that went to Cookman a year. He had one year of college and then he went into the service. Very intelligent, smart young man. Of course, my grandfather was very smart. He only went to fourth grade. He helped me do trigonometry problems in high school. He could tell you how to get the answer and, boy, that would be the answer. And I could always tell the teacher I arrived at it. I gave her his logic and it was always right. [01:42:30] So he was a very smart man, you know.

David Jackson: What was your grandfather's name?

Isaac Houston: Abraham Houston.

David Jackson: Your uncle who owned the ...

Isaac Houston: My uncle owned the shoe store. His name was William Abraham.

David Jackson: Okay. His shoe store was in downtown Cocoa?

Isaac Houston: Downtown Cocoa. It was on Delannoy Avenue. On the corner there near Taylor Park. It used to be the old library. It's now the ...

David Jackson: Cocoa Civic Center.

Isaac Houston: Cocoa Civic Center. Right. It's right across, diagonally [01:43:00] across, from that where the shoe shop was across from the civic auditorium.

David Jackson: So it's the two story wood frame building with the pitched roof?

Isaac Houston: That's right. You got it. That's where the shoe shop was.

David Jackson: What was the name of his shoe shop?

Isaac Houston: I don't recall, you know. I don't recall.

David Jackson: How long did he have it? Do you remember?

Isaac Houston: He had it I guess four or five years.

David Jackson: Wow.

Isaac Houston: I don't recall the name of the shop. I can't ...

David Jackson: Was this in the '40s or '50s?

Isaac Houston: It [01:43:30] had something to do with his name Houston. It was in the '50s.

David Jackson: In the '50s?

Isaac Houston: Oh, yeah.

David Jackson: Okay.

Isaac Houston: Matter of fact, near the '60s. 'Cause he had been to Chicago and stayed a lot of his life up there.

David Jackson: Did he own a shoe store in Chicago?

Isaac Houston: No, he didn't own a shoe store there.

David Jackson: All right.

Lauritz Kjerulff: Your great-grandfather?

Isaac Houston: My great-grandfather was from [01:44:00] Georgia. He's from Georgia. He came down here ... I don't know. They had some storm down here during the years he came down. He went to Miami. He settled in Miami. And of course, he did not bring my great-grandmother. She stayed in Georgia. There was a big storm down here. Was the storm of '26, was it? I don't know. I can't recall.

[01:44:30] But there was a storm down here. A very, very bad hurricane. He was supposedly killed in that storm. Nobody had heard anything about him since that time. And my grandfather offered him ... He said, "I don't know what happened to papa. I guess he got killed." He may not have been killed. We just didn't know. He said he didn't like to work that much anyway. So he said he was [01:45:00] not a very good provider for his family when I think about him saying that.

They still loved him, you know. He always wondered what happened to his dad. Did he get killed in that storm or not? He heard that he was killed in that. It was a storm in the '20s. A bad storm down here. We weren't down here then. But I don't know if it was the storm of '26. It seemed like to me it was '26 but it could have been another time. I can't recall. But he hadn't [01:45:30] been seen since he left Georgia. Put it that way.

David Jackson: How many children did he have? Your great-grandfather.

Isaac Houston: Let's see, he had my dad, he had four boys and a daughter.

David Jackson: How many children did your grandfather have?

Isaac Houston: He had just three. Two girls and a boy.

David Jackson: How long has he been deceased? Your grandfather.

Isaac Houston: He deceased [01:46:00] in December. I was just telling my son the other day and my grandson. He died in '85 in December. He died on the 13th. Remember when

I said the 13th ... On a Friday. Friday the 13th. My grandson didn't know what I was talking about. I had to tell him why we say Friday the 13th. I said he died that morning.

And of course, we knew he wasn't going to make it because the doctor it was just a matter of time he told him. He always told us [01:46:30] about him having a heart problem that he would eventually drown in his own fluids and he would be gone and that's just what happened. I went to work and I came and they called and I said, "Yeah, he's gone, I'm sure." They said, "Yeah. He's gone."

My wife called me I think. I didn't hurry to go home because he lived so long. He was like 96 years old almost. So, we missed him but we were thankful he lived that long. And he didn't get sick until about two months before he died. Something like that. Maybe a couple [01:47:00] of months, you know. He didn't get really down where he couldn't go.

David Jackson: Right. So, the uncle who owned the shoe store was not the uncle who drove the bus?

Isaac Houston: Yes, he was.

David Jackson: Oh, same uncle?

Isaac Houston: Yeah, he drove the bus as a kid. He and my mom. They were in high school when they drove the bus. And they drove the bus for Papa. Papa was my grandfather. They called him "Papa." They drove the bus in Papa's place. When Papa couldn't drive the bus they drove the bus. They'd make the runs.

David Jackson: Oh, okay. Was that strictly [01:47:30] on Merritt Island? Or?

Isaac Houston: That was Merritt Island/Cocoa. Of course, the kids, some of them went to school in Melbourne too.

David Jackson: How long was your mother in school in Eau Gallie or Melbourne before she went to Ocala to go to school?

Isaac Houston: Well, she went to Ocala prior to going to Melbourne. She went to Ocala. Yeah, she went to Ocala in I think it was in ninth grade. I think it was ninth and tenth grade. And of course, she finished in Melbourne. [01:48:00] They had a high school by that time. They didn't have a high school before that. And since that time, that original high school in Melbourne was burned. Then they built Stone High School, you know. The Stone Middle School now. That's how that got started.

David Jackson: Your uncle, who owned the shoe store, did you ever work in that shop for him at all?

Isaac Houston: No, I didn't. I was always busy. Well, see, he owned that shoe store ... I was working on that job. [01:48:30] I was teaching when he owned that shop.

David Jackson: Oh, okay. All right. All right.

Isaac Houston: It's not been too many years ago, you know. Of course, he died with cancer back in ... I can't recall what year he died. It was '80 something. In the '80s. Don't recall right now. I think it might have been ... See, Pop died in '85. He probably died in, oh, I guess about '81 or '82. Might have been '82. Because my grandmother died in '72. I can remember that. [01:49:00] My son was just beginning kindergarten and school when she died.

David Jackson: Do you see--Are there a lot of your contemporaries still here in Merritt Island? Cocoa area?

Isaac Houston: Quite a few in Cocoa area. Yeah, there are quite a few of my contemporaries in Cocoa. Not very many in Merritt Island. [01:49:30] Right. More or less in Cocoa. In the county, I should say, Brevard County. You know, Cocoa, Melbourne, Titusville where my contemporaries are.

David Jackson: When you were in grad school, did you ever-- was Dick Blake ever your roommate? Mr. Blake ever your roommate?

Isaac Houston: Well, we were like roommates almost. He would come to my room for me to type his papers. We worked together so we ate together. We both worked in the men's faculty club for waiting tables. In fact, he was [01:50:00] the one who got me the job. 'Cause he was there a year longer than I was. Yeah, we were roommates some time. When he didn't want to go home. We stayed up late working, doing school work.

'Cause he had a family then. He was married. I had not married. He had children then. I think his first child had been born. So we [01:50:30] didn't have time to play around. We were up there to work. 'Cause we went to plays and things together. We visited a lot of the attractions and, as I said, the museums and Radio City. A lot of the plays and things we went to. Anything educational we went.

David Jackson: [01:51:00] Can you remember any of the names of the families here locally that owned the citrus groves?

Isaac Houston: Well, as I said, Mr. Sawyer owned ... He was one of the black owners. And Mr. Williams, Joe Williams, was a black owner. I'm trying to think of the man down south Merritt Island near where the [01:51:30] Stewart's mansion was built. He owned lots of property down there. In fact, I'm trying to think of his name. Oh, God. I can't think of his name now. But there was a lady in Cocoa was a niece of his. He had acreage. Beautiful groves down there on the river.

And of course, eventually the property was sold. It was like I'm living here. It was all just acres and acres of grove. It was owned by a black. Of course, a lot of it's sold. In fact, [01:52:00] as I said, the rich family, that millionaire, bought some of the property, the Stewarts, and they built that mansion on that property. Those were blacks that owned the groves.

Of course, the Carltons were white and the Crisafullis. They've been around for years. And the Andrews. These were white families that have been around for years and owned big citrus groves. As I said, the Nevins and the Porcher [01:52:30] family. They had huge industries when it comes to citrus groves. They are the ones that I can remember most.

And of course, as I said, there were a few blacks and they always stand out in my mind because Mr. ... Oh, I can't recall his name. He was black. He was Mr. Sawyer who owned this area through here. Dennis Sawyer. This man owned further down south. In fact, my neighbors [01:53:00] over here, the tractor that they've got it was bought from somebody that bought that guy's property down there. The grove, you know, the citrus grove.

It was one of the most beautiful groves on the island they said. It was. For the love of me I cannot even think of his name because I was a kid then. He still owned it as I grew up. And since I've been a grown and married I just can't think of a name right now. But he had a niece in Cocoa who was related [01:53:30] to the Halls. In fact, I think Ginny Hall, the guy they called Ginny Hall, was her uncle. They were related to this rich black man on Merritt Island that owned all that property down there with the groves.

David Jackson: Did you ever know him? Or just knew of him?

Isaac Houston: Knew of him. I didn't know him that well because he was much older but I knew of him.

David Jackson: Did you know Dave Nisbet?

Isaac Houston: Yes, I knew Dave Nisbet. In fact, [01:54:00] Dave Nisbet was a kid along with me but a little bit older. He had a half-brother by the name of Bobby Hill. Robert Hill up here. Robert Hill had a huge, a huge alligator up there. I mean, they said it was the largest anyone had ever seen. I think it was probably about 20 foot long and he was about ... My grandfather said he was at least four or five feet wide, you know, in the stomach area. Of course, eventually, they kept it for years.

I had a cousin who would get inside [01:54:30] and clean the cage and feed him, you know. He was that docile. He was that tame. He wasn't so docile but he was that tame. And of course, he would feed him. He was a worker for Bobby Hill. Bobby Hill I would say he was self-sufficient. Kind of on the rich side. He eventually after that, the gator got older and older, he donated the gator to the Sanford Zoo.

[01:55:00] It was over there for a long time. I don't know if it's dead now or not. But that's where he donated it.

Back to Dave Nisbet. At that time Dave Nisbet was doing grove work just like everybody else was. He worked just like I worked. He was in school. Of course, he was on the poor side. Bobby was rich. Bobby's daddy was rich but Dave Nisbet's mother raised him. And they didn't have much of that money. He eventually [01:55:30] grew, finished school, and I finished school. And he got some college but he didn't finish college. I don't know. He got some courses.

But he was in business here. He ran the Oldsmobile garage. He owned the Oldsmobile garage. The first owner of the Oldsmobile garage. In fact, when I bought my first Oldsmobile in '98 he was the owner then. But he got into politics. He was commissioner one time. Then he got into [01:56:00] the oil thing. One of the oil distributors here. I don't know which company but--

He died not too long ago. A few years ago. Maybe three or four years ago. And as I said, he wasn't a whole lot older than me. He's I would say maybe four or five years older than I was. But I remember him as a boy. And my grandmother at that time had done most of her domestic work. [01:56:30] She was just babysitting for them. And of course, Papa had a new car. It was a new car. A brand new car. And of course, I remember she said, "I don't think I'll drive the car to work because I got some questions from Mrs. Nisbet about the car." She said, "I just won't drive it to work. I'll just drive the old car. I'll go down ..."

I said, "Why do you want to drive the old car?" I understood it but I wanted to say, "Why are you going to let him make you do that?" She said, [01:57:00] "Well, you know, you've got to live, son. I was living before you were born and I still live," you know. A lot of times they don't want to see blacks having anything like that [inaudible 01:57:11] She may think that I have to pay for it by working for her. She doesn't know. I've made it now. I can pay for my own car from my own ...

My grandfather had a bunch of houses he rented, you know. He was a landlord. And of course, he saved money from the groves [01:57:30] and everything. So, they had money. Of course, she still wouldn't drive that car to where she was babysitting. Of course, she said somebody had driven the car. She had driven it for somebody else that she worked for and the lady told her, "Maybe I don't need you now. Your car is better than mine. You probably don't need to work anymore."

David Jackson: Who was this lady?

Isaac Houston: I don't know who it was. It wasn't Dave Nisbet's wife. It was somebody else.

David Jackson: Was it Mrs. Clements?

Isaac Houston: No, it wasn't the Clements. Oh, no. The Clements would never do anything like that.

David Jackson: It wasn't the Clements. [crosstalk 01:58:00]

Isaac Houston: [01:58:00] It was some Southern lady, you know. The Clements were from the North. They were not Southerners. This is one of them ... We call them Florida Crackers. That's what this was. I don't recall who it was right now. She said, "Well, that's fine. If you don't need me, thanks. I won't be back." That was the end of that. I don't think she worked anymore after that anyway.

David Jackson: You mentioned groves and your grandfather. Did he own groves?

Isaac Houston: [01:58:30] My grandfather owned some property. He didn't invest a lot in groves. He had a small grove. He mainly raised it mainly for the family. He didn't sell much fruit from it.

David Jackson: You said he worked in Canty?

Isaac Houston: No, he worked for Thomas A. Canty

David Jackson: Thomas A. Canty?

Isaac Houston: Yeah. Down to Rockledge. For a long time. He had a yard business where he used a lot of high school boys. He used to do a lot of yards down there on the riverfront. Since he was working for Mr. Canty he got [01:59:00] to do a lot of yard work down there. He had a crew of guys that did nothing but cut lawns and trim hedges and that kind of thing. He must have had I guess about five or six lawnmowers then. That was back in the late '40s and early '50s.

So, he made his money that way. Of course, like I said, he was like a butler for T.A. Canty for a while. Mr. Canty was a very nice man. In fact, my grandfather had to have-- he [01:59:30] was told by the local doctors that he had ... He always had an ulcer in his stomach. He had ulcers. And of course, he was told that he had ... He had seen one of the local doctors told him he had cancer. He saw cancer cells or something developing in his stomach. It kind of frightened him.

And of course, he told T.A. T.A. said, "Well, I'll tell you what. We're going to go to Johns Hopkins and we're going to find out whether you've got cancer [02:00:00] or not." He put him and my grandmother, gave them a free trip up there. He would have flown but they didn't want to fly. He put them on the train. They went to Johns Hopkins. He got him right in. Otherwise he would have had to wait for months.

He got him right in. He was seen the next day after he got there. They found out from all the tests that he didn't have cancer. It was just a scar tissue where an ulcer had healed. [02:00:30] Of course, he came back and lived. I guess he was

like 60 something years old then if I recall. He came back and lived until he was 90 something, 96.

So, we had a lot to thank T.A. Canty for. In fact, his daughter Margaret and Alice were very good friends of mine. In fact, Margaret was teaching not too long ago. She used to teach at Kennedy. I don't know where she is right now. Haven't seen her in a while. But, you know, those were good friends of the family. [02:01:00] And that was good relationship between blacks and whites in those days. Because, you know, you didn't find that every day. 'Course it didn't bother Mr. Canty anyway, because he wasn't from the South. He was from the North.

David Jackson: So he was a pretty prominent man then?

Isaac Houston: Yes, he was.

David Jackson: And you say he still has family here?¹

Isaac Houston: Yes, he still has children and grandchildren are here.

¹ The historic home of T.A. Canty is located at 611 Rockledge Dr. Rockledge, FL 32955.