

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL W. THOMAS

CONDUCTED AND EDITED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

for the

COBB COUNTY ORAL HISTORY SERIES, NO. 96

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Kennesaw State University Oral History Project  
Cobb County Oral History Series, No. 96  
Interview with Michael W. Thomas  
Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott  
Tuesday, 17 April 2018  
Location: KSU Archives, Sturgis Library, Kennesaw State University

- TS: Michael, why don't we start by talking about your family? I know there is a lot we want to talk about with regard to your father, because you've donated a collection to the KSU Archives that focuses on his activities, but I think your family tree in this area goes back considerably further than that. Why don't you begin by talking about what stories you heard about your ancestors as you were growing up?
- MT: On the Thomas side, not much at all, other than my grandfather. The story there was the Thomas family lived in Atlanta, and they were friends and neighbors to Daddy King and Dr. King [Martin Luther King Sr. and Jr.] They moved to Marietta for better education for their children. That side of the family was a little close knit and not as warm as my mother's side of the family. We spent time with my [Thomas] grandparents, but I cannot tell you any conversations that they ever had with their parents at all, other than life was tough. My daddy [Johnny Marion Thomas] explained that his dad, Tom Thomas Sr., was very hard on him, and there was not a lot of paternal feelings there. I used to spend the night at the house of my grandmom (Lizzie Kate Dinsmore—called Big Mama) and had conversations all the time, but on my dad's side, it was a different, stoic type of relationship. My dad went over every Saturday. He would spend time with my grandfather, give him some of his pipe tobacco, and roll his cigarettes. My grandfather would turn the chair around and talk. He was a very nice man. My grandmom was very nice, but they were very strict, and there wasn't the comfort feeling of my other grandparents. I rarely had that conversation.
- TS: Tom Thomas, do you have a full name for him?
- MT: It was just Tom Thomas Sr.; my dad's brother was Tom Jr.
- TS: What was your grandmother's name?
- MT: Lillie Mae Storey Thomas. I found that her family was from the West Point [Georgia] area.
- TS: Over near the Alabama border?
- MT: Yes. But I never found anything any further, other than my grandfather was listed in a census as being a welder. My grandmom was a seamstress or that kind of thing. We lived in Smyrna, and they always lived on Fort Street, right around the corner from Fort Hill. They had a house.
- TS: They were in downtown Marietta?

MT: Oh, yes. That was their only house that I remember. We would take a very dark Concord Road from Smyrna to Marietta to go to Cole Street [Missionary] Baptist Church in Marietta.

TS: It was dark? No street lights?

MT: It was nothing. It was forest. It was creepy. But Cole Street Baptist Church was right around the corner from my grandparent's house. We would go to church, visit my grandparents, and then head back to Smyrna.

TS: Is the house still there?

MT: Yes, it's still there on the corner. I remember the stairs. I remember the driveway. I remember all of that. Just very sparse furniture, and it was a very different feel there.

TS: What about on your mother's side? Isn't Juanita Elizabeth Miller Thomas your mother?

MT: Yes. Charles (Mos) Miller was her father. His nickname was Mos. That is what I found in the records. She was born in Cobb County, but her real father was from Monticello [Georgia]. I did not know him, because at the time I was born, he lived in Detroit with his second wife. I don't know if it was the Great Migration or how he ended up there, but that's why we used to go up to Detroit. My mom spent most of the summertime in Detroit. But I will say this; on my mom's side, there was a Darnell Dinsmore.

TS: I wondered because in the Marion Thomas collection that you and your mother donated to the KSU Archives there was a warranty deed, dated January 15, 1945, from Darnell Dinsmore to Lizzie K. Dinsmore. I found a newspaper account where the Marietta branch of the NAACP sent letters to the Marietta and Cobb County school systems asking them to develop desegregation plans. The letter was written by Reverend Jesse W. Cook of Zion Baptist Church and signed by branch president J. L. Hutson and secretary Elsie Dinsmore. ["Negro Group Seeks Mix Plan for Cobb, Marietta School," *Cobb County Times*, 7 January 1960.] Is she one of your relatives?

MT: My mom and my sisters remember an Essie Dinsmore who was married to Earl Dinsmore, my step-grandfather Darnell Dinsmore's brother. I knew a little about my Uncle Earl, but did not see him much. The property on Polk Street and Burnt Hickory where the assisted living home is now located was my grandfather Darnell Dinsmore's property.

TS: Way out there?

MT: Yes, that was his property and my Aunt Clara's (Jackson). There is a brick house that is still there that was hers. I remember him, my step-granddad, Darnell Dinsmore. He had a farm.

TS: You pronounce it with three syllables, Dins-o-more.

MT: Dinsomore, right. I've seen it spelled Dinsomore and with an "a" [Dinsamore] in the census. Out there at his farm, there was his aunt, Aunt Laura. She had to have been 80 or 90 years old. I know she chewed tobacco. She sat on the porch, and she didn't say anything. I know she had to have been very old at that time. We used to go out there all the time to my step-granddad Dinsomore's farm. He had a mule named Frank. My granddad didn't say much. He had two homes. He had one on North Cole Street. That was where Lizzie Kate, my grandmom, lived. He had that house, and then he lived out on the farm too. I would see him at my grandmom's occasionally. He didn't stay out there a lot. He had a room, but he didn't stay out there. He was a very quiet man. He would always give five, 10 bucks back in ...

TS: Well, he sounds pretty prosperous to have two houses.

MT: He had two houses. He worked right where the Marietta Museum of History is today. It was a gray building. I guess it was the newspaper or whatever. He worked there.

TS: The Marietta Daily Journal over on the Whitlock Avenue side?

MT: Yes. He worked back of there, and he also had a truck that collected all the cardboard. He would collect cardboard, and I guess sell it. But he had that. He was very prosperous.

TS: He was doing recycling way back when?

MT: Yes. He didn't say much. He brewed his own [laughs]. He would have bottles at my grandmom's. I called her Big Mama. Lizzie Kate was Big Mama. He deeded that house to her in 1945. They had an interesting relationship, but he deeded the house to her, and so that was her house.

TS: So she was Lizzie Kate Dinsmore?

MT: Right. That's my mom's real [biological] mom.

TS: Okay. Let's talk about her.

MT: I can say there were nothing but wonderful times whenever I think about Big Mama and the times I spent with her. We spent the night at her house quite a bit. She was prim and proper. I was telling my kids the other day when we were walking through the [Marietta] Square that she would always go in the side entrance [off Winters Street] to McLellan's [Department Store]. Even though she didn't have to, she just did it. But we would sit on the porch at night after dinner. There was no TV, so we would sit on the porch and just talk about life. She was very kind. She did a lot for Turner Chapel [African Methodist Episcopal Church], the old Turner Chapel. I used to help her on Saturdays before the first Sunday. I would help her put out the white linen and the Welch's [grape juice] for the first Sunday [communion]. She was very active at the Turner Chapel. That was across Lawrence Street from Mr. Shine [Fowler's] business.

But she was the type that she had a house and so many interesting things, like the sewing machine that she had that you pushed the floor [pedals]. And she had a typewriter. It was a very pristine house. Going through the drawers of the sewing machine there were always little trinkets and stuff that I wish I had now. We would spend time doing that, but always spent time with her. She would prepare my granddad's lunch, black-eyed peas and cornbread. We would take it hot in a Mason jar, over to the Daily Journal, and give it to him at lunchtime.

TS: How about that!

MT: She had a car. She worked as a maid for the Stocks family. She loved them.

TS: I don't know that I recall them.

MT: Yes, I went to school with their kids at Hickory Hills Elementary School. Ms. [Annie L.] Stocks was my friends' grandmom. I never met her, but I'll tell you this—my grandmom always talked very fondly of the Stocks. Ms. Stocks always gave her just tons of stuff.

TS: Now where did the Stocks live?

MT: On St. Anne's Road off Kennesaw Avenue. She was their maid, and that's what she did other than the church. Farris Stocks was the president and general manager of Johnson Tire Company and Annie Stocks was the secretary-treasurer.

TS: Now were you living on Henry Drive when you went to Hickory Hills?

MT: Yes. I lived in Henry Drive. The first year we moved there was 1965.

TS: You were in Smyrna until 1965?

MT: That is correct. My dad created the plans for the house. We would go up there every week, and Dad would inspect it while it was being built. I remember that. But when we moved there, the projects were across the street, Johnny Walker homes. For first grade, I went down the street to Wright Street. Ms. Jeanie Carter was my first grade teacher. Mr. M. J. Woods [Marion Jerome Woods]—I don't know if he was principal there when I was in first grade.

TS: He was principal there from 1962 to 1966, when he retired.

MT: Then he was, yes. You could see the school if you walked out in our front yard. Our house is still there across from those condos [Marietta Walk]. My sister Linda was in third grade, and Ms. Jeanie Carter was my first grade teacher. She was a family friend. She was in Ms. Carter's class. Then that second year, my dad said, "You're going to go to another school." I was, "Why?"

TS: Now let me do my math. You were born in 1959 and must have started school in 1965. So that makes sense in terms of the desegregation. The first two African American students went to Marietta High School in 1964. So by 1966 you could have gone to Hickory Hills under a freedom of choice plan. If you didn't want to stay at Wright Street, you could go somewhere else.

MT: Yes. I remember it was like four families.

TS: So your parents basically chose for you?

MT: Yes they did. It is incorrect if I said I asked them why, because I didn't ask why. The four families all had to carpool from the Henry Drive area to Hickory Hills.

TS: Because there was not a school bus to take you there was there?

MT: No. I didn't think about that, but my mom would drive. We had a station wagon. She would drive around the corner, pick up the Rossers [children of Noah A. and Carrie H. Rosser of Henry Drive] and the Durhams [children of Doyle and Cleamontine L. Durham of Henry Drive], and we would go to Hickory Hills, and she dropped us off there.

TS: The Rossers and the Durhams are African American families?

MT: Yes. If you know Johnny Walker Homes, there are residential homes, and then you go around Wright Street, and Henry Drive picks up again. There were more residential homes, and they lived there. I will say that there were a couple of people from the projects that went to Hickory Hills, but maybe not that first year. That first year it was very scarce. It was the Kemps, Reggie Kemp. I don't know if you know Reggie Kemp [Reginald H. Kemp]. My grandfather sold him property where his house is today on Polk Street [819 Polk Street].<sup>1</sup> They were friends. It was the Kemps, me, and a couple of other families, and that was it as far as the black students.

TS: Let me go back and ask whether you know how the Dinsmores acquired their property?

MT: No. I was in charge of helping my mom sell that property, and I do know that he purchased it in 1927. The area was different around there. It was multiple plots up there. I don't know how much he had in all, but I know that 1927 was the earliest date I saw on the plats. I don't know how he purchased it. I don't know if he had been a sharecropper. I don't know.

TS: You don't have any family stories that go back further than your grandparents?

MT: None.

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: Several weeks after this interview, on May 6, 2018, Mr. Kemp passed away at age 86.

TS: Nobody talked about it?

MT: No. Not in a negative or a positive way. There were not a lot of negative conversations.

TS: I guess if you don't want to remember bad times, you don't talk about them.

MT: Right. Knowing my grandfather Dinsmore, he was very quiet, didn't say a lot, but very proud. Their whole family, Jackson, Clara Dinsmore Jackson, had a filling station and a store, so they must have been fairly prosperous.

TS: They had a filling station?

MT: My Aunt Clara—they had a filling station down on North Cole Street. It was right down the street from my grandmom's house, across from the original Eppinger's funeral home. Across the street was a Standard, and that was my uncle Roy Jackson's place. Aunt Clara was a Dinsmore, and then she married Roy Jackson. I don't remember it being a filling station, but I remember it being a store, because we used to walk down there.

TS: Let's go back to your elementary school experience. How was the switch from Wright Street to Hickory Hills? Was it a positive experience or a negative experience? It took you away from a lot of friends. I guess, and you had to make new friends.

MT: That's the interesting story. The friction that we got for many years was not from the white community. It was from the black community.

TS: The ones you left behind?

MT: Yes. At Hickory Hills, Ms. [Jo] Tanner was my second grade teacher. I still have friends from that class. We talked about it at a reunion four months ago. It was great. The school and everybody embraced us. I don't remember anything negative. It was just fun. I remember all the friends around me and where they sat, [children of] Dr. [Charles T.] Henderson's family, the Eleanor All family, and all those people. The All family lived right by Burnt Hickory [Road]. Andy Roukoski and all made it great. It was not a problem at all. I remember Jayne Henderson. She sat right in front of me. We're still friends. The principal was a man named Mr. [William R.] Carter. He was big and stern, but he was stern to everybody. He was just a very strict principal, but everything was fine, and I had a great time. I assume the friction we got [from African American families] was because we had a house and two cars, if you want to call it two cars.

My dad had a Renault that he constantly worked on. I never really saw it running, but he just worked on it—a gray Renault. All I remember is Dad working on it. I don't remember it running. We caught a lot of flak because we were studious. We could interact, but I couldn't go hang out down at the playground. I wasn't going to hang out that young anyway, but it was tough I'm sure for my family. All I knew were the teachers, the [Louis and Josetta] Walkers and all that. Then all of a sudden, we were going to another school. I'm not sure my parents went through anything, but I don't

think it ever mattered. My mom and dad knew they wanted a better education [for their children]. They never discussed it with us. I never had a discussion with my dad about it. I do know he wanted us to have a better education. I remember him saying that.

TS: Now I know he graduated from high school. We've got the diploma in the Marion Thomas collection.

MT: Yes, Perkinson.

TS: It's actually called Perkinson Industrial High School on his diploma. By the way, that resolves a problem that I found with the Marietta school board minutes. On August 14, 1947 the school board voted to change the name from Perkinson to Lemon Street High School, but a number of people that were there in 1948 have told me that it was still called Perkinson throughout the 1947-1948 school year. The diploma proves that it was still called Perkinson when he graduated in 1948.

MT: Yes.

TS: What did your father do after he graduated from high school? I guess he must have gone straight into the Air Force.

MT: I know his school was Georgia Tech.

TS: He wanted to go to Georgia Tech?

MT: I think so.

TS: But he couldn't in 1948 [since Georgia Tech remained segregated until 1961].

MT: He couldn't, and so the next thing was the Air Force. He was very studious. He would have gone to Georgia Tech if he could have, but I don't think it was even an option to him.

TS: There wasn't an engineering school in Georgia for African Americans. He would have to go out of state.

MT: Yes. I do know from when I'm talking to people that knew him in school that he was extremely studious. They knew that he was for good things, but his home life was pretty strict, and I don't think he cared for it as much.

TS: Wanted to get out?

MT: I think so. I actually have the document that my grandmom signed when he went to sign up for the military. She had to cosign for him or something.

TS: Is that maybe because he was still 17?



MT: Maybe. Now my two uncles were in World War II, my dad's older brothers. I didn't know that until after they died and saw their tombstones. But Dad felt that Air Force was the best route. I don't think he looked at Army or anything. He went right in, and I think he mainly spent a lot of his time in Germany. I've found out that is where a lot of things came from, [his preferences in things], like cars, stereo systems, and cameras.

TS: How many years was he in the Air Force?

MT: Well, it was very interesting, and I only learned this, Dr. Scott, when I went through his records. He was in the Air Force, as an active Air Force, until the early 1960s, when he was discharged to come back as a reservist.

TS: Well, that is what was confusing to me. There are two different records [in the Marion Thomas papers] about when he was discharged. I wasn't clear that the first time was active duty and then the second time was from the reserves.

MT: I really didn't know. The fact is we never moved, so I was not a military brat. When he got his discharge, he joined back, maybe the next day, I don't know. I'm just saying that he was an active reservist because he wore a uniform every day, and he went, of course, every first weekend as an active reservist.

TS: So even though he had a "civilian" job at Dobbins, he, in fact, was still in the military all the way to 1973?

MT: Yes, all the way until 1984, when he ...

TS: I was thinking in the Marion Thomas files that I saw discharge papers for 1973.

MT: It must have been the same scenario.

TS: So he didn't really ever leave?

MT: No. The last year he was dying of cancer. On the first Saturdays, we would slip him in his uniform, drive out to the base, Colonel Ralph Connell would sign it, and he would go back home. He retired probably a month or two before he passed away.

TS: What year was that?

MT: He passed away in 1985, January 8<sup>th</sup>, at 2:20 a.m.

TS: Well let me do my math. You were pretty young.

MT: Twenty-six. I spent a lot of time with him that year.

TS: Well let's see. He was born in 1931 [December 21, 1931], so ...

MT: He had just turned 53.

TS: Pretty young.

MT: Yes. I remember that we had many conversations. I think I was the only family member that we could have a discussion and face the fact that he knew he was terminal.

TS: What kind of cancer was it?

MT: Lung cancer.

TS: Did he smoke?

MT: When he was younger, but, no, he didn't smoke a lot. A pipe. It was pretty odd how they found it. Actually, Dr. [Robert T.] Sessions was the one that found it after the doctors couldn't figure out what was going on. But, yes, Dad was in the military. In 1979 he spent a year in the Canal Zone. He was on the team that closed out the Canal Zone.

TS: After President Jimmy Carter gave up our control [with the Neutrality and Panama Canal Treaties, signed in 1977 and ratified by the U. S. Senate in 1978, that gave to Panama most of the land of the Canal Zone by October 1979 and all areas and facilities after 1999].

MT: Yes, Dad went over there to do that. As a matter of fact, one of the most prized items I have is a photograph with the C-130 and a note written by the crew to Dad, saying, "Thank you."

TS: You're going to have to put some more things in the Marion Thomas collection.

MT: It's one of my most prized, but yes.

TS: But you say you had long conversations with him when others weren't ready to face reality?

MT: No, they weren't. I was twenty-six. No one really would want to talk to him about it, and he just sensed that I could. We had many conversations about life and things that went on. Many nights I stayed at the hospital with him, just talking to him.

TS: Precious memories.

MT: Yes, it was good. But even though he was in the Air Force, I do know that he took classes at Marietta-Cobb Area Vocational-Technical School. He took classes off Auburn Avenue for TV repair. I guess those were his interests and that's what he was planning. He took classes all the time at Marietta-Cobb Area Vo-Tech. I remember that. Auburn

Avenue—I just saw that in the records that he took TV repair back then, so it was an interest if his.

TS: What kind of school was it on Auburn Avenue?

MT: It was a school of electronic repair type of school, just a vo-tech kind of school. I have the name. I think it is in the collection. So he went to school on Auburn Avenue for a couple of years. We went to a lot of Georgia Tech [football] games because his friends would give him tickets. I remember going to the games when Eddie McAshan was Georgia Tech's quarterback [1970-1972].<sup>2</sup>

TS: Well, he was a chief master sergeant. Was that his highest rank?

MT: I want to say senior chief master sergeant. I can see the Human Resources records that he applied for a number of things, but he never complained [when he didn't get them]. The people that were over Dad knew that Dad knew his stuff. His best friends were the colonels, Colonel Connell, who still lives in Marietta. He came by the house the night my dad died. We always had people at Dobbins that we would meet. Ms. Caldwell was his supervisor when he first was a civilian. I remember going out to the base and seeing her. She gave me my first Bible. I still have it. She would always give us presents, and she was very kind. All of his senior leadership were always just extremely kind. They appreciated Dad's work. His paperwork was just outstanding.

I could tell that it probably hurt him at times when he applied for certain things. A lot of the reasons why I don't think he got them weren't always stated. It may have been racial. I'm sure some of it had to have been. But he was good. My uncle said, "You can walk into his office and say we need a part for a plane, and [Dad] could probably tell you without even going to the massive amount of books that he had." He just had that kind of mind. But Dad never shared [his regrets] with us. He might have with Mom, but he never complained [to us].

TS: Right. He was a supply management officer at one point at Dobbins.

MT: Yes. I will say though, that regardless of where he was, they obviously thought a lot of him. He was officer of the day several times. Obviously, they thought a lot of him to have him to be officer of the day. We went to picnics at [Lake] Allatoona with white people from the Air Force. I was around white people all the time at a very young age, so it was never an adjustment. Before I went to Hickory Hills, we would always go to the base. Officer Don would always do this Christmas thing. Even though [our] Smyrna [neighborhood] was all black, that's all I knew.

TS: Was the Smyrna neighborhood Rose Garden Hills?

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<sup>2</sup> Editor's note: McAshan was the first African American football player at Georgia Tech when he arrived as a freshman in 1969.

MT: Absolutely. My sister went to Rose Garden Hills Elementary School.

TS: Which they had carefully zoned right outside the city limits of Smyrna.

MT: Yes. We went to Belmont Hills [Shopping Center] quite a bit, but everybody that lived on our street did something pretty decent. It was a very close community. We had community barbecues. A couple of guys that worked for the Air Force lived there. Very nice, neat community, and Rose Garden Hills Elementary School—my sister went there, but I never did. For kindergarten, my sister went on the base. I guess I was a special case that I found out later. I didn't like kindergarten, so Mom kept me at home, and I never went to kindergarten. But we went to the base, I remember.

TS: Missing kindergarten didn't seem to hurt you too much.

MT: I don't know. I just know that it probably said a lot about the type of person I was at the time. But on Turpin Road everybody helped in. It was just such a nice neighborhood, very prosperous. When we moved to Marietta, it didn't surprise me that we moved into that house. My father wanted to be closer to Marietta to the church and his family, and it was an opportunity.

TS: What attracted him to Cole Street Baptist? When you were still living in Smyrna, were you going to Cole Street?

MT: Yes. My grandparents, the Thomases, went to Cole Street when they moved up here. That was the church that they went to, right around the corner. My aunts were very involved in the choir and singing. They were very talented, and so that was the church he went to. Dad was not a normal deacon that you would think. Everything was so methodical. He was very unemotional. He was very religious, spiritual, but he was not like the normal southern deacon type. He was the guy to handle the books and all that, and so was Reverend [Otis B.] Burnett [Jr.], which I think was to his detriment.

TS: Detriment?

MT: He was not a fire and brimstone pastor. He worked for the Atlanta Post Office and had a very nice house down in Collier Heights [in southwest Atlanta]. He was a friend of Dr. King. He would come to Marietta, and Dad aligned with his personality, I think, because they were the same. They were very quiet and stoic. The Burnetts would come by our house every Sunday and have dinner after church. His kids were all college educated. We grew up in the same fashion, but they lived in an area in Atlanta that was really nice. He had a nice car. Just like working for Pullman, the Post Office was a good employer. He wasn't doing preaching for the money.

TS: Right, and working for the federal government gave him a lot of independence.

MT: Oh, yes.

TS: You could say what you wanted to say.

MT: He did, yes. But I remember him. He was the one that baptized me. But he was never a fire and brimstone preacher.

TS: I know in recent years Cole Street is really small. How big was it when you were going there when you were growing up?

MT: I would say fifty or sixty, maybe. They filled the church up. We did a lot of stuff with Zion [Baptist Church]. I used to get a headache every Sunday because we would be in church from 9:00 for Sunday school to 2:00 pm and longer because Dad had to count the money. So I had to wait for him. But it was about that many. It was a full church, and there were some pretty key members there. The Grogans [Hugh Lewis Grogan Jr., 1937-2009], Ms. Lockhart [Edna Roberson Dyer Lockhart, 1913-2010], there were some key people.

TS: I met Ms. Lockhart.

MT: Ms. Edna Lockhart, yes, and the Dyers, and Ms. [Myrtice] Grogan. There were some key people at that church, but they were different. It was very scholarly.

TS: Ms. Grogan was Hugh's mother?

MT: Yes. The Eppingers were there, and the Eppingers were a family like ours.

TS: Well, Mack Eppinger and Sons Funeral Service.

MT: Yes. They were very prominent. Dad went to school with their brothers, so we knew the Eppingers very well. Church was quiet. It wasn't a Zion type, but it fit. To the people that were there, I felt like they were meant to be there. They were just in the middle.

TS: Before we started the interview, we were talking about Mr. M. J. Woods, and he was the clerk for the church that signed the certificate in 1964 when your father became a deacon. He had been the principal of Lemon Street High School [1929-1960] and then Wright Street Elementary [1962-1966]. But you were saying that he didn't actually go there, even though he was the clerk, because he was going to Zion.

MT: Yes. I think he did multiple [things]. Ms. [Kathryn Roberson] Woods was there, but I rarely saw him in church with her. She sat by herself, and so he must have gone to Zion, but maybe earlier he was at Cole Street. I just knew a very small, meek man. He was very soft spoken.

TS: But when I was looking at the diploma from Perkinson High School for your father in 1948, I noticed that it was signed by Shuler Antley and M. J. Woods. Woods was the principal, and Antley was the superintendent [of the Marietta School System]. When I started this oral history project in 1978, after I finished my doctorate, the second person I

ever interviewed for the Kennesaw College Oral History Series was Mr. Woods and the third Mr. Antley. I did one or two interviews earlier in my career, when I didn't know what I was doing, but when the project officially started in 1978, the first one I interviewed was Herbert [C.] McCollum, the former Cobb County Commissioner for whom McCollum Parkway and McCollum Field at the Cobb County Airport are named. Then also in 1978 I interviewed M. J. Woods and Shuler Antley.

MT: Wow.

TS: It gave me goose bumps to see those signatures on there.

MT: Yes, I remember going to his house at certain times. I don't know what for. I just know we went to their house, and it was on that road where anybody who was anybody lived, the [Kenneth and Jeanie] Carters, the [Louis and Joesetta] Walkers, the [Walter D. and Winford S.] Moons lived on or near that road.

TS: You're talking about Shepard Street that later became Woods Drive?

MT: Yes.

TS: Thanks to [Joseph H.] Pete Silver Sr. and some others, they got the name changed.

MT: And the [Frank C.] Gullettes [lived on Shepard Street]. They are a very key family. The Gullettes went to Cole Street as well. Mom was a classmate with some of the Gullettes. Some of them were good ball players. They lived right across the street from the Woods. We were always around those. The people that lived in the projects weren't mean. They just thought we were wealthy, and we weren't. But they just felt we felt we were better. It took a while for me [to understand]. I wanted to fit in. Now my friends and I laugh about it, but I wanted to fit in. I thought the projects were cool.

TS: Well, I've talked to many people that went through freedom of choice and felt like they were between two worlds, not accepted by those that they "left behind."

MT: Right, and there were people that did. In the barbershops that was a big thing. I always used to spend more time than I really wanted, because Dad was the guy that everybody would ask questions to. "What do you think, Sgt. Thomas?" I think they liked the fact that he was leading the way. Mr. [Winston] Strickland and Mr. [James] Brock [Jr.] knew what he was doing. They were very good friends. His wife [Lois Brock] kept my two oldest kids when they were younger. That's where we dropped them off every day, so Ms. Brock is like a family member to us. But Mr. Brock—I didn't realize how smart he was. He could have been an engineer. He went to Morehouse [College]. I didn't realize that, but he was an entrepreneur.

TS: Sure. He had his auto repair shop.

MT: Yes. Of course, he took two months to repair my MG.

TS: Oh, did he?

MT: “We’ll get to it.” I’m like, “Okay.” But he was another one of the strong ones. But the neighborhood people [from the projects] weren’t mean to us. They just didn’t have anything to do with us.

TS: Way back when, I helped put on a program on black businessmen in Marietta. Mr. Brock was one of those on the panel.

MT: Absolutely. Mr. Brock and Mr. Strickland had the entrepreneur spirit. But Hickory Hills, I will say this, I used to walk home from my friends’ houses in Hickory Hills and hang out at their houses. Walking through the neighborhoods, it was just Joey Duke, Terry Williams, Andy Roukoski—we would walk to their houses [on Hickory Drive] and hang out. I shiver now thinking what was going on in the world at that time, when I was walking home in white neighborhoods with my friends, who totally embraced me. I remember at a birthday party for [Thomas E.] Tommy Borgel, his family had moved here from up north [Pennsylvania], but anyway Tommy Borgel invited me to his bowling birthday party. I think it was third grade. I remember getting ready for that, and my mom and dad driving me to Tommy Borgel’s house [on Sugar Hill Drive NW, just north of Lewis Park and west of Campbell Hill Street]. We walked up to the door, and Tommy Borgel’s parents [Henry E. Jr. and Marion S. Borgel] came to the door. They opened the door, and they did not know I was black.

TS: Oh, they didn’t? Okay.

MT: Tommy never mentioned it. He just always mentioned “Michael. Michael, Michael.” They were fine; it was just, you know.

TS: Just it was a shock.

MT: Yes. I remember going to that. It was a big deal. It wasn’t a big deal for me, but it was a big deal, going to a birthday party. We went bowling on Highway 41 for Tommy Borgel’s birthday party. I was probably eight or ten.

TS: So this would be probably between 1967 and 1969, something like that?

MT: Yes, I think so. I will say of my teachers, Ms. Tanner was my second grade teacher, Ms. Norman was my third grade teacher, and the most influential teacher was Ms. Darden, Ms. Lillian [Budd] Darden, Buddy Darden’s wife [wife of Congressman George Washington “Buddy” Darden III, 1983-1995].

TS: I didn’t know she taught school in Marietta.

MT: Oh, yes. She is probably the most influential. She was so nice. I met her. I remember they had just gotten married [on February 18, 1968], and I remember we were all jealous of her because she was so pretty and she was so nice. But Ms. Darden was just the best

teacher. She was so kind. I had trouble in school, of course, with paying attention and finishing my work, and she understood it. All the teacher did, but she did the most. I taught her kids swimming. I taught her swimming. I talk to her all the time. All the teachers at Hickory Hills were super nice, but Ms. Darden was, out of all the teachers, probably the one that was most caring. That was fourth grade. Mr. [Carroll T.] Love was the principal. I only got paddled once, and that was because Joey Duke and I were singing a different version of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*.

TS: You made up your own words?

MT: Yes. I used to sing, “The glory of the burning of the school; we’ve tortured every teacher and broken every rule,” or something like that. Somebody told him. Joey Duke, a very good white friend of mine, and I got sent to Mr. Love’s office, and we both got two paddles. Of course, I got more when my parents found out. But other than that, it was just cool. Hickory Hills was fine. There were organized school teams and all of that, but I wasn’t a part of [organized sports]. Once I got home, a black Boy Scout troop was in our neighborhood with Ms. Edna [K.] Phelps. I wasn’t involved in any sports, but the sports thing was not for me. I wasn’t that athletic.

TS: But you were in a Boy Scout troop?

MT: Oh, yes. The Phelps family lived [on Page Street] near where Turner Chapel [AME Church] is now. Mr. [Edward Q.] Phelps was also very influential in the neighborhood. His wife held a Cub Scout troop, Webelos, and Boy Scouts at her house. My mom was den mom, and I was involved in that until Boy Scouts. Ms. Phelps was at our church. Her husband was a baseball coach. I played at Custer Park.

TS: Do you have a picture of the team?

MT: Yes. There are people that I went to school with. The Stricklands—I never realized they were Jewish. I didn’t understand that. They left our school at third grade, I think. Jim Kemp, there are a lot of people here. Dana Eastham [James Dana Eastham, Marietta mayor, 1974-1982].

TS: Was he a coach?

MT: Yes. The father of Rex Robinson [former place kicker for the University of Georgia and the New England Patriots]—Rex and I are good friends. I talked to Rex last night.

TS: Rex, and his brother was ... I’m trying to think that his brother was ...

MT: Allan?

TS: Yes.

MT: I didn’t know Allan. Allan is a lot older than I.



TS: Okay. Allan attended Kennesaw back in junior college days.

MT: Did he? Allan was nice, his mom was nice, and his dad, Mr. Robinson, was nice. Mayor Eastham, before he did anything in any public office, was a coach, and that is how I met him.

TS: Now let's see; you would have been fourteen in 1973?

MT: Yes. That was major leagues. We had a pretty good team. But Mr. Phelps was a baseball coach. There was a team at Custer Park called the Yankees, and they were pretty much all black. They beat everybody. I wanted to be on that team, but it was just that Custer Park was another thing that pulled a lot of us together. I started playing baseball when I was seven or eight.

TS: I want to ask you about your experiences growing up. When you were doing the lectures [on black history] at the Marietta Museum of History, you said something about going through the side entrance at the Strand Theatre. That would have been after the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Were you still going through the side entrance at the Strand Theater in the late 1960s?

MT: Yes. I remember when I first went to movies there. I remember going into the side door for the Saturday matinee. I thought it was the matinee door. I didn't think anything about it, and my parents never said anything about it. We just went to the side door, gave her [the salesperson] our ticket at a little stand [booth] there, and went up to the balcony. I didn't know why until later. My mom mentioned it, but I didn't think anything about it.

TS: She questioned the separate entrance?

MT: No, no. She mentioned it years later.

TS: That you went through the side?

MT: Yes, but it wasn't a focus in our house because my parents—I admire what they went through because they must have been terrified at times while I was hanging out with my [white] friends. Carol Bode [Fowler] and I went to the prom together.

TS: Oh, really? And she came to Kennesaw, and you are in the yearbook.

MT: Yes. We were friends, and we both decided [to go together]. I was class president, but [earlier] in high school I was pretty quiet, and I stuttered. I didn't talk a lot when I was in the eighth and ninth grade, but I had a sister that was two years older than me, and she was very popular.

TS: That is Linda?

MT: Linda. Her friends knew me as Linda's little brother. I got to be, I guess, pretty popular. I was in the band and was junior and senior class president.

TS: Well, you must not have had too much problem speaking.

MT: I didn't at that time. I think it is because I just started doing things in the band.

TS: What did you play?

MT: I played trumpet. Mr. Boyd McKeown, who just passed away [on April 8, 2018, at age 93], was band director [at Marietta High School, 1954-1969]. In fourth grade you had to play *Go Tell Aunt Rhody* on the tone flute. I couldn't play it. I started crying, and Mr. Boyd McKeown told my mom, "You know what? We're going to let him try the trumpet, and we're going to let him be in the band." And Mr. [Terry H.] Segers—that is how I got in the band, because I really didn't pass that test to get into it. Mr. McKeown was running the qualification, but Mr. Segers was the band director by the 1970s when I was there. Marietta High School's band, when I was there, was supreme. He was a strict, almost militaristic director. I got into music when I was in fourth grade. The band opened up a lot of doors for me, too, because the Marietta High School band wasn't nerdy. It was popular to be in the band.

That's how I got [to know people]. I was friendly with everybody. I guess I just won things any time I ran for office. I don't know. It was just something that was fun to do, and I liked everybody. It just worked for me. But my parents never said anything. I went to things like Lynyrd Skynyrd concerts with my friends. I went to many concerts of groups like Chicago [rock band] and ELO [Electric Light Orchestra rock band] with my friends from Hickory Hills. High school really opened up a lot of the things that I did as far as popularity and running for office and such, but I was not the studious person that everybody thought I was. I was not. That was one of the problems I had with my dad.

TS: I bet.

MT: He did not understand. He was hard on me, especially in math, very hard on me.

TS: "How are you going to get ahead in the world if you don't study," and questions like that?

MT: That's exactly why. I remember his conversations, and I know now the frustration for him. I remember him saying that when he was angry once. I never understood that [back then], but I know now what he was saying. I didn't know then.

TS: You were pretty sheltered in a lot of ways?

MT: Tons of ways. Very sheltered in a lot of things. Dr. Scott, I just didn't pay attention to a lot of things. I just didn't. If it didn't catch me, I didn't follow it. I think part of that

gave me the creative side to do things. The fact that I was nice and kind explains why my teachers gave me C's when I should have gotten D's.

TS: But you didn't do as well as you could have done?

MT: Oh, no. I had a problem focusing on things. But I learned the creative side of things from high school, and that is what got me to where I am today with the things that I've done. In the ninth grade, Mom took me to the Y. I was working at the church once a week, cleaning it for Dad and making \$7.50, but mom took me to the Y. She was friends with the staff and Ms. Barbara Bruegger, who was the executive director. I loved this lady. She walked me around the Y. There were camps, and she goes, "Michael, what do you want to do?" She walks me around, and she walks me up to the pool area. I'm looking at the pool area, and I'm looking at the deck, and I see these girls.

I remember Mary Ann Wiseman [Guarnieri]. She later went to Kennesaw, she and her sister, Nancy. The Wisemans were a very good family. I said, "I want to work in the pool area, teaching." Ms. Bruegger goes, "Okay, that's fine. Do you know how to swim?" I said, "No." She said, "You don't know how to swim?" I go, "Well, no. There's not a pool [near me], and I played baseball and never learned." She says, "Okay, let me think about this." They took me into the Y, talked to the aquatics director, and said, "Look, you're going to work with the small kids, bringing them in, and in between classes, you're going to take a class to learn." I did, and I worked in the pool all day, learning.

TS: You learned to swim at the YWCA on Henderson Street?

MT: Sure did, yes, I worked there, and I took every class they had. I worked so hard that I became a water safety instructor trainer for an aquatic school, maybe four or five years later. That's just me. I just take on things. People are like, "What? Why would you do that?" I felt, "Well, I can figure it out, right?" I did that. I do remember one thing though. There was a summer where the Y was going down to teach swimming lessons at other pools, and this was a pool at Smyrna. I'm thinking it was Fair Oaks, right off Austell Road. You took a left, and the pool was right there. I remember them talking to us before that, and the thing was they were talking to Ms. Bruegger and Ms. Wiseman [Clara Theresa Wiseman, financial director of the YWCA for twenty-five years] and all. They're like, "Well, they don't allow black people in their pool."

TS: We're talking the seventies by now?

MT: Yes, this had to be 1973 or 1974.

TS: Wow.

MT: I remember the Wisemans and Ms. Bruegger saying, "Well, we're going. Michael, do you want to go?" I said, "Sure." I didn't think anything about it. They said, "Well, this one guy that works there may be [a problem], but we're here." Those Wiseman sisters—

I drove down with them. They didn't care. I saw the guy. I remember him, but no one said anything. I think they were more afraid of Ms. Bruegger. I didn't know what the deal was. That was one incident. I remember an incident once when I was teaching lifesaving. There was only one pool in Marietta, so Sprayberry [High School] and any of the Cobb swim teams practiced there, and I taught all the lifeguards in Cobb County for many years.

TS: At the YW?

MT: At the YWCA, yes. One time I was there on a Saturday, and this dad came out with his daughter and his mom. They were like, "Hey, we're excited. We hear this is the best place to go." We're talking, and the lady receptionist says, "Yes, Michael, the instructor, is right here." The guy goes, "He's the instructor?" She goes, "Yes, he's one of the best." And he goes, "Well, she's not taking his class." The receptionist really gave him ... I didn't know, but it was because I was black, and he didn't want me. But that was the only other time. Other than that, I taught swimming for all the pools. I lifeguarded in East Marietta. I only moved out of that when [Charles H.] Charlie McCann and Mayor Eastham wanted me to go to Lawrence Street [Recreation Center]. They didn't have any black lifeguards or any presence in a new pool that they had just built there. That's how I got involved with that.

This is another story about my dad. My dad called me and said, "Hey, we want to meet at the mayor's office." I'm like, "Okay." I meet him. Mayor Eastham is like, "Michael, we just opened this new state-of-the-art pool. We have swim-team practice, but it's all white teams. It's just the way it is. But we really need ...." Mr. Herbert [Eugene] Porter [Sr.] was involved. I didn't want to do it.

TS: Didn't want to go to Lawrence Street?

MT: No, I was making really good money in East Marietta, teaching private lessons and kids bringing me lunch. My dad just did the nod, and I go, "Okay."

TS: He said you were going to do it?

MT: Yes, I did, and Mr. (Herbert) Porter, of course, lectured me every day.

TS: He lectured you?

MT: He just always wanted, you know, "Thomas, Thomas." He was big into civil rights and stuff. I started teaching swimming to people that didn't know how to swim. I started teaching the Willis sisters, the Bonners, and Herbert Porter Jr., so I had lifeguards. That was a big moment for me because I made an impact there. I didn't want to, but I learned how to lifeguard. At the East Cobb pools everybody knew how to swim. I get to Lawrence Street, and the bather load is seventy-to-one. It was the best thing I ever did.

TS: You were doing a lot of teaching?

MT: Best thing I ever did for the community, and that's what got me into that. But we did work for Mayor Eastham when he ran for office. He would pay us to go pick up people to vote. He didn't tell us that they had to vote for him. He said, "Just pick them up." I remember going through Fort Hill [Homes, Marietta Housing Authority], picking up voters and taking them to the polls. That was all. He paid us \$200, I remember.

TS: He was providing a service to get people to the polls, but not telling them how to vote?

MT: He never said anything about whom they had to vote for.

TS: Did they know who was providing the transportation?

MT: I don't think so. I think they assumed, but no one every asked, and I don't think I ever said anything. Just, "You need a ride?"

TS: But he was paying you to drive people to the polls?

MT: Yes. He was a northerner. He went to Brown [University for a bachelor's in economics; he was captain of the wrestling team] and wrestled Donald [H.] Rumsfeld [former Secretary of Defense, 1975-1977 and 2001-2006 and graduate of Princeton University] and beat him. Mayor Eastham was almost like an Olympic alternate in wrestling [first alternate on the 1956 U. S. Olympic Greco-Roman wrestling team]. He actually wrestled until he was in his fifties. But he was in data processing [owner and president of Eastham Data Processing Company] and got me in data processing because I wanted to be a teacher.

TS: Let me finish up with a few questions on growing up, and then we want to talk about you getting into data processing and all that. But first of all, Cole Street Baptist—was it involved at all with civil rights movement?

MT: I don't want to say not at all.

TS: I know Mrs. Woods was there, but while Zion was hosting NAACP meetings, was Cole Street doing anything similar?

MT: No.

TS: Nothing from the pulpit?

MT: We did some things when Mr. [Hugh] Grogan came to our church, but other than that, not at all.

TS: He would have run for city council the first time, in 1973, when you would have been fourteen years old. Then he got elected in 1977, after he brought his federal suit. In fact, Dick Hunter [former Marietta mayor James Richard Hunter Sr.] was named in the suit of

*Grogan v. Hunter* [1975], where a federal court stopped gerrymandering of city council wards in Marietta. He would have been in Cole Street in those years?

MT: I remember he wasn't very well received at Cole Street at first. I realize he grew up here. He would come to the pool because he was a lifeguard with the Eppinger brothers. He would wear the dashiki, and I remember that no one said anything, but you could sense it that they just felt with [Rev.] Burnett, that that was not what a [church should do]. I'm not sure how they took him. I think they may have understood his case, but it wasn't a big thing in our church.

TS: They didn't want to get involved in politics?

MT: Right. The people that went to Cole Street, even the kids that were my age, were all going to regular schools, and we were doing well in school. Where they had those discussions, the only time I remember is we were told to not talk to the Muslim guys that were on the corner, after church.

TS: They were?

MT: Yes. Right where the church is, they would always be there. I would see them on Saturdays when I would come to [clean the] church.

TS: What were they doing there?

MT: They were Muslims. They were trying to pass out their ...

TS: Passing out their literature?

MT: Yes, *Muhammad Speaks* was the publication. They were very nice. I went and talked to them on Saturdays. I used to get in trouble because I'd go to clean the church, and I would see them and talk to them. They were very nice.

TS: Now did they have a mosque in Marietta?

MT: I don't think so. If they did, it wasn't widely known. But I think that it was a fear thing, a whole Malcolm X thing. But that was the only thing, other than that Mr. Grogan would stand up, and we knew he was running for something. But he was just different. He wore a dashiki, and he was just different. There were a lot of conversations, but I didn't get involved in those. I just know I talked to him at the pool because he would always talk to me, tell me about the good old days. I knew his kids, especially Reece, and [his wife at the time,] Ms. [Bettye] Gober now.

TS: The first time he ran in 1973 I recall the polling place was where the Marietta Power Office is on North Marietta Parkway, used to be Page Street. I've been in the fifth ward off and on for a great many years. At that time I was living in an apartment complex,

right where Fairground Street and Allgood Road come together. I forgot what they called the apartment complex.

MT: It's still there.

TS: Yes. That's where I lived before I got married later that year in 1973. But, anyway, I remember voting there. I think I voted for him in 1973, but I saw him outside the polls. He couldn't get too close to campaign, but I was about to walk on because I didn't think he knew who I was, and he ran up and spoke to me.

MT: Wasn't Dr. [Pete] Silver involved in politics here? But he didn't live here did he?

TS: No, he lived in Atlanta. But he was very much involved in the community for Kennesaw College. At any rate, one of the early oral histories I did was with Hugh Grogan in 1984.

MT: He was a smart man. I only got to know him when I was in my later teens and twenties, and only because he would come to the pool and swim laps. He would just talk to me. He goes, "You know there were lifeguards?" I'm like, "Really?" He goes, "Yes, over at Larry Bell [Recreation Center]." He would tell me those stories. But he would swim laps every day. He would come and swim laps and talk to me. He had very thick glasses.

TS: Oh, yes, I remember that.

MT: Mr. [Herbert] Porter was very influential too. Mr. Porter ran the Rec on Lawrence Street [Lawrence Street Recreation Center]. Mr. Porter was the man. Nobody messed with him. He was just very powerful.

TS: We need to do something to honor him more, I think, in the community. We've got the Elizabeth Porter Park that's about to open.

MT: Mom was friends with Mr. Porter from years ago. Anyway, when he died [in 2008], they just were throwing stuff out of his home, and Mom and I have a wooden cover of Mr. Porter from when he got out of high school to all through military—photographs. I look at it every day. I'm like, "Mom." She goes, "Look; that was being thrown out."

TS: That would be great to add to the collection.

MT: I would love to, but [I need to contact his family]. His son Herbert Jr. is dead—the one I knew [died in Austin, Texas, at age 48 in 2010]. His son Ronald—I don't know where he is. I wanted to reach out and say, "Hey guys, I have this," but I don't know [how to reach them]. I want the photographs to be shown. Mr. Porter was in military. I have them, but no one owns it. Mom had it, and she goes, "Hey, Michael, do you want some older pictures? Here's Mr. Porter when he was in the military." I'm like, "How did you get that?" She goes, "Well, they were tossing stuff out of his home." But someone made these [scrapbooks] for each one of the guys.

TS: Now was Herbert related to Elizabeth Porter?

MT: Yes, that's his mom.

TS: Of Herbert Sr.?

MT: Yes.

TS: I didn't know that.

MT: Oh, yes. His son, Herbert Jr., went to North Cobb [High School]. We were both lifeguards.

TS: Elizabeth Porter was director of the recreation center on Montgomery Street from 1952 to 1974, when she retired.

MT: I remember, because I worked for Charlie McCann and [Ronald E.] Ron Ransom [at Marietta Parks & Recreation]. I have certificates in here from when I used to lifeguard. I know she was there, but I know he was at The Rec, and he was the only person that could have been at The Rec, because you needed somebody at The Rec that people didn't mess with.

TS: She was running one recreation center and he was running the other?

MT: Right. Actually, my friend Curtis Daniels, from the projects [Johnny Walker Homes, Henry Drive] after we all did our chores, I would go to his apartment and we would sit there and decide. We would hit Victory Cab [Company]. We hit all of the rec centers. We would hang out and play pool. That was what we did before we started working, when we were thirteen or fourteen. But we would go to all of them. Now we didn't go to The Rec a lot, because the Rec, if you didn't play basketball, you just didn't hang out there. But we went to Ms. Porter's and several others.

TS: You never played baseball or football, ran track or anything?

MT: I played baseball from little league team at Custer Park.

TS: But not at Marietta High School?

MT: No. That's a problem. I should have. Coach Ben Wilkins knew who I was, but ...

TS: He was the baseball coach?

MT: Oh, yes. He would always go to Perry Parham Park [Fairground Street], but he would come to Custer too, because there were a lot of good players at Custer. He knew me, but at that time, he only had certain slots on the Marietta team. I don't know if I could have made the team. Here's the deal. I was at home, and Dad was traveling somewhere.



Mom said something about I had to come home and mow the lawn. I said something very smart back to her, and she goes, “Okay. You know what? At the end of school, you come home and you mow the lawn.” I go, “Well, no, I’ve got baseball.” She goes, “Well, no you don’t.” I go, “Mom,” and she goes, “I’ll call Ben myself. You’re not going to baseball practice.” I don’t know what happened. I just know that I could have been on the team, because I was an all-star at Custer Park.

TS: But you had to mow the grass?

MT: I did. She didn’t tell Dad, but I do remember that. I wrestled in high school because I was so mad I couldn’t make the basketball team. Coach [Charlie] Hood was like, “Michael.” All these guys that were on the team; I could play, but I was always not on that tier, and my parents hurt me by not letting me play down at the Johnny Walker basketball courts.

TS: They wouldn’t let you go down there?

MT: Not hang out down there. My dad put a basketball goal in our back patio. I could go down there occasionally for the softball games, but you couldn’t hang out down there because it was just bad. I never got into that realm, but Coach [Kenneth] Carter, Ms. Jeanie Carter’s husband, Coach Carter, used to drive around every Saturday and pick me and some of the guys up. They were very good ball players, and he would take us down to the Butler Street Y every Saturday, and we’d play these superior guys [laughs]. I did not want to, but my parents said, “You’re going to.” Coach Carter would come by Saturday mornings, honk the horn of that little green car he probably still has in his driveway, and take us all down to Butler Street and play basketball there. But wrestling was the only thing that I did because I could control that.

TS: You graduated in 1977?

MT: Yes.

TS: And went immediately to Kennesaw College in 1977?

MT: Yes.

TS: The Board of Regents had voted to make us a senior college [in 1976], but we didn’t start offering upper level classes until 1978. You started there in the fall of 1977. Talk about coming to Kennesaw College.

MT: Well, Carol [Bode] went. I visited the University of Georgia and Georgia Southern, but we didn’t have that kind of money. I didn’t like Georgia Southern anyway, when I went down there.

TS: You were accepted at UGA?

MT: Yes.

TS: But you didn't want to go there?

MT: No. You know what? My friends went, but Dad, I remember him saying, "Michael, we don't have that kind of money."

TS: To live in the dorm and all of that?

MT: Right. At Marietta High School we didn't get any guidance on loans or anything like that. I think they assumed [that I knew]. It wasn't a big deal. I'm like, "Okay, Dad. You know what? I'm working at the Y, and I will go to Kennesaw. Carol is going to Kennesaw." He could help me with that, Mom helped me, and I worked. So that's why I went to Kennesaw. I never thought anything about it. I wouldn't have lasted long at University of Georgia. I actually enrolled in Georgia State, went down to the orientation, but after being in traffic and having to pay to park, no, I came right back up here.

You know what? I wanted to be a coach and a teacher. I had to take some remedial classes. I took Algebra 099 two or three times. I loved the school, but I just didn't really care that much [about college]. The whole story around this was in 1978 Dad was out of town. He traveled every once in a while to other bases. And I quit school. I felt like I had to tell him I was doing something, so at the time I was teaching a lady private swimming lessons. She was a flight attendant for Delta [Airlines], and she said, "Michael, you would be a great flight attendant." I didn't even know what a flight attendant was. She goes, "You really would."

I interviewed with Delta, and I interviewed with United. Delta said, "Michael, we'll hire you, but you have to be twenty years old and six months." I was just turning twenty. United called me on my twentieth birthday at the Y and said, "Michael, we want you to be a flight attendant. Can you fly up to Washington, D.C. for a physical?" I had never been on a plane before, and so I'm like, "Good, this is great. Dad will come back, and I will have a job as a flight attendant. I will be learning how to be a flight attendant. He's going to be happy." So I went and trained in Chicago for three months. That was the year [1979] that United [mechanics] had the strike. It was the year that the DC10 engine fell off [an American Airlines plane at O'Hare International Airport in May 1979 killing 273 people]. We were on strike, so I came back home for the summer. United got off strike that summer, then I lived in New York.

My domicile was New York. I had never been to New York before. I got in the car, moved to New York, and lived in Brooklyn with another flight attendant for three months, as a flight attendant, flying out of three airports. I was homesick and didn't like New York. Mom said, "Well, come home." I came back home and enrolled. That's when I got back into Kennesaw. It had to have been 1980. March of 1979 is when I went to United and trained and then went to New York and lived in New York in 1979 until I came back home and got into Kennesaw. I don't know if it was first quarter or

second quarter, but I know I got back in. I was a flight attendant. It was fun. I never knew what it was until I got there, but the FAA training was incredible.

TS: How many male flight attendants did they have at that time?

MT: At that time, out of a class of sixty, there were three guys. Out of the three guys, two lived alternative lifestyles. I had no clue of that either. I just didn't. I was so naïve, but the flight attendants at that time were like ex-teachers and all. I was young, so I couldn't do a lot at my age. I could be a flight attendant, but I couldn't go to places. I was the ultimate minority at that time. I had a great time. The training was perfect. I flew to the west coast tons of time.

TS: You were a young, straight, black, male flight attendant?

MT: Exactly.

TS: That was the ultimate minority.

MT: It was. I was so naïve that I had so many guys and girls hitting on me, and I didn't even know it. I was just a good old guy from Marietta. I just didn't. I thought it was something different, and it was cool, so I did it. People asked me why and now don't even believe it, but I did. I had custom-made suits and everything.

But at the same time, Mayor Eastham asked me to help him with his data processing company. I was going to Kennesaw, and his sons were going to office school, but he goes, "Michael, I know you." I went and had a Steno Notebook and took down everything. He would do payrolls for all the companies around, the country club, and all this, and he taught me how to do that. That's how I got into data processing, thanks to Mayor Eastham. I never knew really what I was doing other than what he taught me, running all the machines and the reels and keypunch, and that's how I got into data processing, which got me into the technology world. But I never planned for that. Never.

TS: Okay. You went several quarters at least at Kennesaw?

MT: Yes.

TS: How did you learn the data processing business? Just by practice?

MT: Yes, I had a Steno Notebook, and I wrote every step down, from start to finish, from picking up the payrolls to doing them and putting the checks in them. He trusted me with everything. I learned that, and I was dependable. I would be there at the middle of the night, doing it, because you had only twenty to thirty minutes to do it, or the machines would overheat. His building was at the back of the G.E.X. [discount store]. There were offices at the back of the G.E.X. on U.S. 41, where Ken Stanton Music and the Office Depot [are located today]. His office was in the back of that, upstairs. That's where data

processing was. Up these metal stairs, that was his office. At first, I had to go down to Druid Hills. We rented time on machines, but then he got progressive and bought his own machines. I just followed my directions and got to where I knew what to do.

TS: How many years did you work there?

MT: I started at ADP [Automatic Data Processing] in 1985, so I worked for Mayor Eastham from 1980 up to 1985. That was a payroll company, and my Eastham processing experience got me a job at ADP.

TS: You were working for him when he was mayor [1974-1982], weren't you?

MT: Yes, he was mayor. He would say, "Michael, here," and I could write my own checks and go to Miss Merrillyn's house [his wife, Mrs. Merrillyn Welch Eastham], and she would sign them. He paid me very well.

TS: I see on the papers you brought today that you even have your college grades. They look pretty good, except your meanest teacher seems to be the one that taught American History.

MT: No way.

TS: Because you got a C in that class.

MT: No way. I'm proud of that.

TS: But you really weren't interested in history were you, like you've become in later years?

MT: I was interested in the way you told the stories about history. That was it. That was what the people loved that I knew that went to that class. You could tell a story, and that was riveting to me. Now, taking tests, the little blue books, that was awful. But sitting in that class, I enjoyed that. You told things that I really hadn't thought about, but you told it in a very interesting way, and I liked that. That was one thing that I liked about the class. I wasn't interested in history. I just thought, man, it was pretty cool to learn, but I wasn't anywhere near where I am today.

TS: But you didn't care about grades that much?

MT: I don't know. I just know that I was working, and it was hard to study and work. But my hindrance was my gift, because of being able to do what I did for Mayor Eastham and ADP. I worked hard there. I was in sales, and I broke every record, just because I was clever, and I just figured out ways. That got me to Oracle [computer technology corporation] and another whole pay scale. That's how I got into Oracle and the software industry where I am now. It's hard to get in that industry. I look at people now, and I go, "Well, I obviously could do something. I'm just creative. I'm clever."

TS: Sure.

MT: But it bothers me. My kids say, “Dad, why didn’t you ever go back and finish school?” I’m like, “I don’t know.” I don’t want to now. I don’t think I could. I just don’t. I just like what I do. They don’t know how I did what I did. I just find a way. I don’t know why. I just do it.

TS: So you started at ADP in 1985, and then ...

MT: American Honda [in 1989].

TS: Were you doing computer type work for them?

MT: Yes. Part of being attention deficit, is sometimes when things don’t go well, you just stop. I was at ADP, did well for five years, and all of a sudden Honda, a customer, said, “Michael, we want you to be a regional guy.” It was great. You would get to drive new Hondas. You did the allocations for all of the dealerships. I went to all the dealerships in Alabama, but I found out something in that industry that the regional manager and others weren’t very ethical. I know my first Christmas I would get all these certificates and gifts in the mail from dealers. The honeymoon for my wife Lynn and I was paid for by a Jacksonville Honda dealer. I didn’t know why, but I found out the next Monday that they were expecting green Accords rather than brown Accords. So during that time, Honda was doing a lot of graft.

TS: Oh, my goodness.

MT: They did prison time. I got out and went back to ADP. I’m like something is not right. How am I going to slight the little small dealership for the larger? I just didn’t think that way. I’m like that’s not fair.

TS: Sure.

MT: I just didn’t like the quietness. I don’t know. ADP said, “Michael, come back. We’ll get you in sales.” I’m like, “Fine.” That is why I left Honda. It was a great experience. In Birmingham I met some very wealthy guys. In Montgomery some of the guys walked me into the Montgomery Country Club, saying, “You know Michael.” But that’s why I got out of that. Those guys did prison time. Honda is okay now, but the government came down hard on them.

TS: So you went back to ADP in 1991?

MT: Yes, ADP, and just killed it in sales.

TS: Then you were there for at least six years it looks like.

MT: My sales turf was Gainesville, Cumming [Georgia], and those areas. They wanted me downtown Atlanta, but I didn't want downtown Atlanta.

TS: You did North Georgia then?

MT: Yes, and I did very well. Those chicken places up there in Gainesville that have weekly payrolls, I never had an issue at all. I sold the heck out of that—tons of awards and president's club with the CEO of ADP. I just broke records. I figured out a way. I worked harder. I figured out I didn't have to cold call. I would just sell the customers that I had. I just always have figured things out, Dr. Scott. I can't explain a lot of things that I do, whether it's doing triathlons or whether it's photography. I do know one thing I do that was deliberate, and that was being a parent. It's obvious we did that very well by the three incredible people that we have as our children. I've done a lot of service things. I worked with the Red Cross. I just take what's in front of me, and I don't give up. It wasn't hard. I just figured out a way to do it. The experience helped me, but I do a service. I just got a Lenovo account today, which is huge—Lenovo [the Chinese multinational technology company]. I got that just two hours before I came over here, and they want me to handle it. I'm like, 'Okay, fine, sure.'

TS: You got into customer relationship management, I guess. Would you call that your major field?

MT: It was at first, payroll and HR [human resources]. That's how I started out. But I learned that I love sales, and I love marketing. When I was at Oracle in 1996 is when CRM merged sales force automation, marketing, and customer service into one entity. I got involved in that in the early stages, when it was just CRM. So I was very involved in that. I had my own company for a while and used to write. I was an analyst and speaker. But I went back to the corporate world because I had three kids that I knew were approaching college, and being an analyst didn't pay much. But I was a Microsoft sales force partner. So that's what got me into CRM. I was on the cutting edge of Twitter and social media monitoring and all that. I became involved in that, and that's what Microsoft liked. I do a lot of that social media stuff with them.

TS: You've been at Microsoft since 2010?

MT: Yes.

TS: Then even before that, you were national president of the CRM Association.

MT: Yes.

TS: How did that come about? That sounds pretty prestigious.

MT: When I was at Oracle, the corporation was overwhelming. It is a very hard company to work for, and I was traveling a lot. *A lot*. I didn't like it because I wasn't home. When I left, there was a very defining moment that adds to a lot of my historical interest. I was

recruited by PeopleSoft, which is a software company. They wanted me to be regional manager of the HR and CRM consultants in the southeast. I'm like, "Oh, cool." I had a team of twelve people and did very well, but here I am again. Always, when I see something that is not right, I try to help others. If I see discrimination, I will mention it. I think I got selected as a problem because there was an incident that happened. I saw something going on in a regional office, and when I reported to HR, all of a sudden I was a target. It was so wrong. It was like I made all my numbers, and my team did everything right, but they had all these things that I didn't do. I knew why, because I had just brought attention to a regional director that was doing some not good things with another employee. They turned on me. I even had an EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] case. I went down and everything.

It was disparate discrimination. That's the way I looked at it. I was the only black manager, and I was scrutinized. I was doing fine, then all of a sudden, I was on the chopping blocks because I didn't do this. I'm like, "I'm the top guy. I made all these stock options, everything." It was a political thing because I got the regional guy. Anyway, I fought that for a year, had an attorney and everything and even had a confrontation with the CEO of PeopleSoft, Craig [A.] Conway. I wrote him a letter saying, "Here is what is going on in the field." He referenced me to Shelby Steele and J. C. Watts, saying that I was blaming race, and this is the CEO. It got publicized, and they weren't very happy. But it opened my eyes to things. I held onto it, but I let it go and started my own business with a business partner of mine.

We started Microsoft Partner and Salesforce.com. We said, "How can we be better?" We met the president of the CRM Association, and we started writing. They said, "Look, you should be running this thing." [CRMA founder] Ginger Cooper asked me to run the Georgia chapter, so I did. Then they asked me to run the national. I did that for several years, and we won awards. I wrote articles, but that wasn't paying the mortgage, and so that's when I went back to the corporate world with Microsoft. But what happened to me at PeopleSoft was probably the best thing that ever happened to me. I saw a side [that I hadn't seen before], and it made me start reading about history and discrimination and the like. I just started reading it, and it opened my eyes.

That's when I really started reading everything I could possibly read, from Shelby Steele [senior fellow at the Hoover Institute of Stanford University and conservative columnist and filmmaker] to Keith [M.] Ellison [member of Congress from Minnesota's fifth congressional district and deputy chair of the Democratic National Committee]. Everybody that wrote anything—I got their books because I wanted to understand. I saw that it wasn't direct; it was just disparate. It was like there were different rules. It was like I didn't do anything, but I couldn't defend myself. The EEOC said, "Michael, you have a case," but then about three weeks later they said, "You know, you really should settle." "What?" They go, "The district court is Republican. You're not going to win." "What?" I had to settle, which was nothing, but I didn't have control. I was at the lowest of low for a long time, but it was the best time of my life.

TS: Is this when you really get a social consciousness?

MT: I wanted to figure out where it came from, and the fact that I was so oblivious to it because I had always been able to ... I didn't say no one else was, I ...

TS: You always thought you were treated like everybody else?

MT: I thought so.

TS: Then all of a sudden, you weren't.

MT: Right. But it happened at ADP. I didn't really recognize it at the time, but I just laughed it off. I did well there. That's what opened my eyes to it.

TS: Now you read back through events of the past, and see them in a different light?

MT: I see them in a different light. A lot of it didn't attribute straight to me, but it [happened] to other people. I travel a lot, and it bothered me last week, when I went to the airport in Raleigh. I was in the restroom. I said "hello" to the guy that works there. He was my dad's age, and he was cleaning the toilets. It is a social burden. I am angry, but I want to help everybody. That is why I helped all the homeless with the photography I do. It's that I know now why. I never really knew the why, and that's the whole purpose of teaching the classes [on black history for the Marietta Museum of History], is to understand why. I'm not mad. I don't want reparations. I just want people to understand why we are where we are today. That's all. That has got me into why I wanted to do the courses, and that is what I take photos of, of people that never really had a chance. I'm reading a book now called *The Burden: [African Americans and the Enduring Impact of Slavery]* by Rochelle Riley (Wayne State University Press 2018), and the whole fact of who knows if this mortgage rate was just at this time?

TS: You're talking about ...

MT: My dad, when he bought the house on Henry Drive because of red lining, the insurance companies that wouldn't insure [in red-lined areas], and the extra money that people would have to pay. There was no inheritance. There was no legacy other than my grandfather who owned property. Dad had insurance, great insurance. Mom never had to work.

TS: But now you're questioning whether he got the same mortgage and insurance rates as everybody else?

MT: I think maybe, knowing Dad and [insurance company owner] Jack Wilson, that Dad did fine, but I'm thinking that there were others that didn't [have a fair rate]. See, I'm not saying us, because I know Dad. I just know how he thought. He was ...

TS: He was different?



MT: Yes. He was a walking computer. But I'm just saying that when you read about this, even knowing your family, even knowing my grandfather, there are no records. I've looked, and I've looked. I've done the genealogy, and I ...

TS: You can only go back so far?

MT: Right. Now, it doesn't keep me up at night, but it is if you don't have a legacy ... and thank God my legacy is my father and my mom. Mom was incredible. She's funny now, but Mom did radio shows. She was just Miss everything.

TS: Radio shows?

MT: She did a radio show doing all the news for all the churches for WERD [Atlanta's first black owned and operated radio station, founded in 1949]. She would record them on Saturdays, I remember.

TS: Did she record them on a tape recorder?

MT: Yes, and then they would play them on the radio. Mama knew every church. They would call her up. She had a northern feistiness to her, but a southern understanding. She is the type that would have a conversation with [white supremacist] J. B. Stoner, and nothing would bother her. He would be very nice to her because he had to [laughs]. I'm not saying me. I've been very fortunate. I'm very fortunate. I could have been born to one of my uncles, Tom and Paul Thomas, who were great masons and great guys, but they were both alcoholics, and they were partiers. They were great uncles, but they just did what they had to do. I feel for other people. I don't have an ax to grind, and I understand both sides. The majority of the uncles on my mom's side migrated to Cleveland and did very well.

TS: Went with your grandfather?

MT: Yes. My mom's uncles are from Detroit or Cleveland. I could tell they were just different from the way they dressed. That side of the family always had homes, my grandmom and everyone. Mom lived in Fort Hill, but I didn't even know that until much later.

TS: When would she have been in Fort Hill?

MT: Well let's see. She was probably a teenager. She was there a couple of years. I did not know it until we did the Fort Hill thing. Mom was there, and Mom said, "Yes, I lived right ...." I didn't know that.

TS: There is a photo in the [Marion Thomas] collection that you donated to the archives of the first mothers in Fort Hill, with their babies, which would have been early 1940s.

MT: She wasn't one of those.

TS: No, it wouldn't be that far back.

MT: But I do know she lived there a couple of years. I did not know that until not even a year ago. I only knew that in the summer [of 2017] when we were going through that. She was there for a brief time. She lived there, but she always spent a lot of her time in Detroit, where she was spoiled rotten, then she came home, and she was spoiled there. You could see that she did everything in high school. She was just very high maintenance. She still is. But that was something that Mom never covered in stores and stuff. They were strict on how we acted, but it was military discipline more than anything. Mom doesn't remember a lot of it, but she took us to the library every summer for stacks of books. I look at this now as that the conscience I have now is hurtful. Every time I travel, like last week, when I drive home and see people at MARTA stations at 11:30 p.m., it bothers me. My photography tells those stories.

TS: Talk about your photography. You say you've been photographing homeless people?

MT: Yes, I first started photography two years ago. I did an errand for my wife where I had to drive down off Hollowell Parkway, [named for civil rights attorney Donald Lee Hollowell, formerly Bankhead Highway, in southwest Atlanta]. I really didn't want to do it either. I was angry because my wife was out of town, and I had to go to Charlotte, pick up something, and take it down there. I drive down there, and I'm like, "Wait a minute, my daughter goes to Tech there." All of a sudden, I'm driving down these roads, and I'm like, "What is this area?" I see schools that aren't there. It was poverty. I almost started crying. I dropped off this stuff at the church, and then I parked my van and started taking photos of people.

Ever since then, I've done more of that. I did it the other day at the Mountain to River Trailfest [April 14, 2018, celebrating the opening of a new Marietta segment of the Mountain to River Trail]. I took photos there at the Trailfest, and I started interviewing people. I carry shoes, clothes, and toiletries in the back of my car, and I just like to get people's story to say that they count and they matter. People that are on the [Marietta] Square—a couple of guys are out on the Square all the time. I went to high school with one of them, and I talk to them all the time. I think people should just raise their heads and look. Everybody doesn't have it the same way, but we are all down on our computers and our phones, and we don't acknowledge [others]. That's my photography. It just tells a story of hope. I shoot photos of a lot of things I do at Microsoft with minority high school students. I volunteer as a tutor and all that.

TS: You tutor minority high school students?

MT: I tutor elementary. I'm a tutor of reading. We do a lot of STEM things [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math], and I'm a photographer for that. I talk about how to be in the industry. That's hope, and that makes me feel good. Microsoft allows me to follow my conscience.

TS: They encourage you to do this?

MT: Yes, they do. I like them because they are a company with a [founder William Henry] Bill Gates heart. That's my photography. It's a creative part of me. I love to write, but I don't. It is an effort because I don't type well.

TS: Well, you write very well. I read some of what you have written for that CRM Association.

MT: Yes, that was fun. I enjoyed that, but my typing instructor in high school was my wrestling coach. So that's all I'll say. I like to tell stories that way. That is what I love about photography. It allows me to tell a story of good, bad, and indifferent. It doesn't have to be all bad. It is just I want people to be aware of why. I've had many discussions with high school students that say, "Michael, look at you. You made it. What's wrong?" I say, "No, you don't understand. Let me explain to you. Don't use me as a gauge for what things should be. I was very fortunate, but that doesn't mean it was that way for everybody.

TS: Yes, sure.

MT: My son even said it once, and I said, "Son, we have to have a talk." Now he realizes it. His data science is all focused on medical issues, like autism. He doesn't want to work for corporations. He wants to work for [humanitarian] things.

TS: Well, good for him.

MT: I love it. He went to Roswell High School, and he didn't know. They are diverse. But I had to explain to him, "Michael, it's not the same." He learned it when he went to school. Roswell High School had people that were busing in that were sleeping all morning on their bus, coming to school, that lived in the, you know [projects]. He didn't understand that. So we had a discussion. They now understand it. They all worked. You probably saw one of my sons working for catering at Kennesaw. He goes, "Dad, you don't get it. I met the dean, and I met the president," and they all knew him because he worked for catering. He worked at Dunkin' Donuts. My kids all work, and they owned the HOPE scholarship [for students that graduate from high school with at least a 3.0 grade point average and maintain that average in college]. They own that, and I'm proud of that. We provided for them, but we didn't give them. It's just they wanted to earn it. That's all I'm trying to do. I look at Marietta, and I learned a lot. I am very proud of Marietta in certain ways, based on what we've learned. What Jay [Jason (Jay) Lutz] wrote, what Alan [McClarnand] wrote [about African American history in Marietta], I'm proud. I was talking to [former Marietta city councilman and businessman] Philip Goldstein just this Saturday. Did he tell you he had the [historic] movie clips of the Marietta Square? He said, "Look, I want to show them to you." I'm proud of Marietta. Was it that bad, and I just ignored it? I'm not saying it was perfect, but it was a lot better than other places.

TS: Are you going to stay at Microsoft for the rest of your career?

MT: Yes, but I'm not a long-termer. I'm retiring in two or three years, maybe. I don't want to just retire, but to do my teaching and photography.

TS: It's hard to believe that somebody born in 1959 is almost sixty years old.

MT: Yes, and working for a software company is sales driven. It's fun, but it's pressure, and it's just not me anymore. I do well, but it's just not in my heart anymore. They ask me, "Mike, what do you want to do next?" I'm fine with what I'm doing, because while I'm doing this I can do the other things.

TS: Do they call you Mike at work?

MT: They call me MT. I don't know why they call me MT, but it just came about because my son is MMT—Michael Marion Thomas. He is just like my dad. Everything. He never met him, but it is the way he analyzes things.

TS: I know we are jumping back and forth, but one thing we skipped over about your father that I thought was important was that [Mayor] Dick Hunter appointed him to the Marietta Housing Authority Board. He was the first African American, in 1971, to serve on the Marietta Housing Authority.

MT: I remember it well. I remember the extra work we had to do because Mom was getting the house ready. I remember when he came over to the house. I didn't think anything about it.

TS: You had to clean up the house before Dick Hunter came to visit?

MT: Well, yes. We had to polish the silverware, and it was just little extra stuff, and I'm like, "What?" He was really laid back. I knew his kids, but I didn't know why he was at the house. I figured it out later, but we were just, "How are you doing, Mr. Hunter?" We knew who he was. We went to school with his kids. You know what? I think that helped because people would come over to the house, and Dad would help them. That helped too in the neighborhood. Dad was already helping, but I didn't realize all he did.

TS: Well, I thought it was interesting that he replaced Dr. Luther G. Fortson. Dr. Fortson was my physician for a number of years.

MT: He had a daughter, Becky Fortson. [The Fortsons lived on Bouldercrest Drive near Hickory Hills Elementary School]. I think they were at Hickory Hills. I didn't realize how much he was doing on the housing authority.

TS: Your father made some kind of remark about wanting to help disadvantaged people by being on the housing authority.

- MT: Yes. He was very stoic, and it's funny. I remember asking him for the car, like "Dad, can I borrow the car?" He was sitting in the den in that chair, and it would be five or ten minutes while he thought everything out.
- TS: Weighing the pros and cons?
- MT: Yes. I'm the same way now because Dad helped his siblings out. But I do too, and it doesn't bother me. If you need it, I'm just the same way. I'll figure it out. I'm never going to retire. I'm always going to have something to do. I'll always figure it out. I didn't come this far and not be able to figure it out. I'm the same way. I got his heart, and I got Mom's heart. Mom taught us to give. I didn't know that Mom used to give people clothes all the time. She's taught me that. She taught me the volunteering and the heart. She does that still today. To this day, she does that. My life is incredible. I don't mean that in a pompous way. I'm just saying that it's been good.
- TS: Do you want to add anything to the interview? We've been going for a couple of hours now.
- MT: I think the full circle is I've never known the full story of where I was from and the benefits of it. I always thought that because of my parents, I skated through some things that weren't really reality. I've learned in the past six months that there was a core here in Marietta. It was something for my grandfather to have property, for both of my grandparents to own their homes. There had to be something from the photos. My goal now is to fill in missing pieces, that we were here supporting as well. My goal is to get more [documents and artifacts] into the [KSU] Archives and more into the [Marietta] Museum [of History], to document that we were here. That is my goal right now until somebody tells me I can't do it anymore because I don't live in Marietta. Then I'll figure out how to live in Marietta.
- TS: Well, you just have to move back to Marietta. It's not that far from Roswell.
- MT: It's not at all. But it completes some pictures of mine of what really did happen and why, and how I am the way I am—friends I grew up with, being at Central, people that were supportive, Ms. Carter and Mr. Carter—it all fit in.
- TS: When you say being at Central, are you talking about the middle school?
- MT: Yes. That was with Rhonda [Anderson]. When they were building the junior high, they decided that all the sixth graders would come to Lemon Street from all the different schools.
- TS: Right, the old Lemon Street Elementary School becomes Central sixth grade school?
- MT: Yes. I met people that went to West Side and Allgood [Elementary Schools]. I would never have met them otherwise. I won't say I would never have met them. I saw them at church events, but I would not have been as close with them. We were all there, just us.

TS: This would be in 1970 right?

MT: For sixth grade it would have been, yes, in 1970-1971. That was a big deal because you're talking about a lot of white parents driving into Lemon Street. There are some that didn't [that went to private schools instead], but I'm still friends with those that did. It gave us a core that we took to high school. We all knew each other, and we didn't have to adjust. I learned about poor whites. I didn't know that certain people existed because I only knew Hickory Hills. Central did that for us, and that's why our class of 1977 is probably the closest class there has ever been. I know I'm biased, but I'm just saying that we were just there, and we had a great time. Even the teachers like Ms. [Mary J.] Fredd, who was my mom's teacher—she had been a teacher at Lemon Street. She was one of our teachers over there. That's how I met some of the teachers that went to Marietta Junior High, because Marietta Junior High was brand new [the following year]. We already knew each other, so it was no adjusting or anything.

TS: Did you go to the new Marietta Junior High School in 1971 for the seventh grade?

MT: Yes. Ms. Carter was there and some of the other teachers, like Ms. [Janie L.] Sadler. She was a very prominent teacher, and also Ms. [Dorothy M.] Dyer. Miss Sadler was, oh yeah.

TS: What you're basically saying is that everybody in the city school system went to school together from sixth grade through the twelfth grade?

MT: Pretty much, yes.

TS: I guess that does make for a tight group.

MT: It does. There were people that didn't go because their parents took them to St. Joseph [Catholic School] or Walker [School].

TS: You're right, yes.

MT: But there were very few. No one ever skipped a beat. For instance, [Patricia] Renee Burruss, [A. L.] Al Burruss's daughter. I talked to her this morning. Renee and I are the closest. She didn't go to Central, but we just all fit in. Renee is just phenomenal. Her dad was so nice, and her mom ["Bobbi" (Barbara Nelle Elrod) Burruss] was so nice. Renee was very wealthy, of course, Tip Top Poultry [of which Mr. Burruss was president]. But you never knew it. It was very fun. I hope that that will help you. It's hard to tell the story.

TS: Well, you've done very well.

MT: Well, I'm pleased. I liked every component of it, and I think what you've done, and Jay and Alan and all, I'm just in awe sometimes. Mr. [James] Gober—I want to do more like

that [with local citizens telling about their experiences]. I was very pleased with the amount of people that were in that class.

TS: It grew from week to week.

MT: It grew, yes. I want to do more with the churches.

TS: Great. Let's call the interview quits with that. Thank you very much.

MT: Thank you for the opportunity.

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