

Oral History 4425 Adairsville Project
Danny Pelfrey Interview
Conducted by Jeff Kurtz, Liz Christensen, and Jennifer Dickey
Location: San Souci Women's Club, Adairsville, Georgia
October 4, 2018
Transcribed by Jeff Kurtz and Liz Christensen

Kurtz: We are Jeff Kurtz and Liz Christensen. We're interviewing Danny Pelfrey at the San Souci Club in Adairsville, Georgia. Today is October 4, 2018. Could you please state your full name and where you are from?

Pelfrey: I'm Danny Pelfrey. Danny David Pelfrey, actually. I'm from Adairsville, Georgia. I have lived most of my life here.

Kurtz: Where's your family from originally for you? How many generations have been here?

Pelfrey: Well, both sides of the family have been here for, oh, at least three, maybe four generations. My mother's family as well as my dad's family and have been in the general area for that long.

Kurtz: Okay. Do you mind telling us when you were born? Just an idea how long you've lived here?

Pelfrey: I was born on May 2, 1946, and I haven't lived here all that time as an adult. I went to college, and after college I spent some years, well, four years, in Richmond, Virginia, before going to Indiana—to Chicago for a year. That's about as long as I can last. And then, back to Indiana and then to Ohio. So, I spent a good number of years in the Midwest before we came back to Georgia a good number of years ago.

Kurtz: What are some of your earliest memories growing up here in Adairsville?

Pelfrey: Well, my dad was an alcoholic, and I don't have a lot of fond memories of those years. I lived with my grandparents in and around the area, my mother's father and mother, for a good number of years, and it was always within 20 miles of here. But my memories of my early childhood are not so good. Later I have some fond memories of my high school years as I got to know people better and participated in sports and that sort of thing. And those high school memories in Adairsville are the ones that stand out for me. And some years ago, for several years, I wrote a bi-weekly column for our newspaper. It was titled "As I Remember It."

And many of those columns are in the book that I wrote, *Life in Adairsville*, and if you go through them, you'll find that most of those memories come from my high school years. And so, uh, those are, our

memories, memories of a lot of great people. I went to high school with some fine people. There were only thirty-seven of us in the graduating class—thirty girls and seven boys—and that was sort of neat. And I happened to be the only boy athlete in the senior class. So, I got to be captain of everything. That was sort of neat. My wife and I started dating our senior year. We went to college together, and then were married after two years of college, and we've been married now for fifty-one years. And so that was a very, very special memory that year in high school as we began to date and develop our relationship.

Kurtz: And you mentioned you participated in high school sports and during your high school years, what are some of the other things you did around town to pass the time?

Pelfrey: Well, I was very involved with the church youth group from the time that I was about almost sixteen years old through the rest of my high school years which involved about twenty-five of us teens which is a pretty good-sized, small-town youth group. And we did a lot of things together, you know, that was sort of neat. One of the things I used to do—this building doubled not only as the ladies San Souci Club, but as the library. This room used to be lined with shelves, and I used to come in here and check out books. I used to check out my Hardy Boys books and that sort of thing here and did a lot of reading in those years. But sports were sort of the center of my life when I was a teen. I did the church and sports.

Dickey: What sports did you participate in?

Pelfrey: I played basketball. I was a three-year letterman in basketball. I thought it was sort of neat. Recently, I discovered that the Adairsville boys' basketball team has had fifteen times that the boys have gone to state. And I was on one of those teams when I was a sophomore. It would have been the 1962-63 season—a few years ago. And recently my grandson was on one of the other teams. So, he and I covered two of those fifteen state championships in basketball. I also played football. It was my senior year. I was captain of both a high school basketball and football, ran track, held the two-mile record for about a year or two. It did not last very long.

And we did not have a baseball team in those years. So, I played summer baseball, the program in Calhoun. There wasn't a program around the area. So, I played out of a Calhoun, and I played baseball. I was offered the opportunity to try out with a professional baseball team when I finished high school, but had, by that time decided to go to college. I had decided that the Lord was leading me into the pastorate and had already made that decision. So, I passed up what had been my dream for years prior to that and did not take that opportunity.

Kurtz: You were at school during segregation then. What did you notice about that, and how did that affect you?

Pelfrey: You'd have a hard time finding a real story about that in Adairsville. We like, of course, every other town in this region. We were completely segregated at that time. I never went to high school with anybody who's color was other than mine, you know. What we knew about those sorts of things... It's what we saw on TV and what we read in the newspapers. I can remember the separate water fountains, not here, but when I went to Rome. I can remember the separate restrooms in Rome but not here. That reason I don't remember them here was that we didn't have anything going much here during that time. There weren't any restaurants, hardly, one sprang up from time to time. We didn't even have fast food places in those days. And so, there's not a lot, and I don't remember a lot of, uh, even though there was segregation, I think we integrated as a school either [this whole sentence needs another listen]. I don't remember the year, but it had to be the second year after I graduated. All the sports that I played. I never remember playing against anyone except kids. And, you know, that was the way it was. Most folks had black friends. And that's not to say everything was perfect. It wasn't. I can remember, you know, there was a lot of language that was used in reference to others that would certainly be inappropriate, was inappropriate then and inappropriate now.

But most of those comments were things that those who were using them had heard and all they knew, and I'm being completely honest when I say that to most of that, we guys probably didn't even have any idea we were doing anything wrong by using that kind of language in those days. I don't know if you guys grew up in a small town. I think you have a small town of a different generation. Oh, but that's the way it was here. My first real close black friend was between my first and second year of college. I worked in a carpet mill in Calhoun and worked in the shipping department and had a guy, I thought he was in his mid-seventies. He was probably late forties, early fifties. We got to be buddies and he invited me to speak for special occasions in his church on one occasion.

I lived later in the Midwest and there was no difference as far as that subject is concerned. I saw no difference in those years in the Midwest toward attitudes and even language than what I had experienced here. You know, probably if I had been an African American kid in those days, I certainly would have noticed that there was something wrong, but we'd never had problems of that nature. I shouldn't say we never had any, we probably did, and I didn't know about them all, but if you've read my book, I compile the works of several people and Dan Bowdoin talks a little bit about that, but he's over at least one generation older than myself.

Kurtz: When you mentioned that you lived in quite a few places other than Adairsville, going to college after high school, what prompted you to move back? Did you miss the town?

Pelfrey: Yeah, we really did. We missed it, but my wife was an only child, and her mom lived to be ninety years of age, and dad was not in good physical condition for a good number of years. In fact, he was bedridden for the last three or four years of his life. And we had to be nearby in order to take care of them. She was the only one available to do that. And so, we moved to Rome, I accepted a ministry.

We were living in New Philadelphia, Ohio. Now, we lived there for two years when they called and asked if I would accept the ministry to the church in Rome where I had been youth minister when I was a college student, and we agreed to do so in order that we would be close enough. Wanda's mom and dad lived in the next house down this road, the big white house, right down here on the left [pointing out the window]. It happens to be the home in one of the novels that we wrote. But they lived there, and so we were only twenty-five minutes away from them in Rome. And I spent eight years there, and the last year and a half we actually lived with them in the house here. And I commuted to full-time ministry in Rome. And the time came when we needed to be here.

And so, I resigned my ministry there and begin to do interim ministries in about a five-state area, or I, just on weekends, went to churches that were between ministers in about a five-state area, and we did that for several years. And also, during that time, in that kind of ministry, you never know if you're going to be able to pay the bills or not. And so, I'd always loved books and I got involved in dealing in rare and used books, which I still do to some degree. I have a little book shop up in the 1902 stock exchange. But did that in order to put food on the table and pay the bills. Then when later my home church, which is right up on the hill here, the First Christian Church of Adairsville, needed a minister, they asked me if I would consider becoming the full-time pastor for the church. I told them I'd give them four years, and I gave him six before I retired. And it was a wonderful experience to spend your last six years of your ministry with your home church. That was sort of neat, and it is still my home church. It's where I attend church now, but I have not been the pastor for over two and a half years. I've been retired.

Christensen: So, you talked a little bit about the first Christian Church in Adairsville. What kind of role did it have in your life? Can you elaborate a little bit on that?

Pelfrey: Oh, it played a big part in my life. The people who were a part of that church both old and young. I'm thinking of three elderly people: Chester

West, Tom Swindell, names probably aren't important to you, but Ed Stevens. These were men who were well known in the community, but they were great men that really had a tremendous impact on my life. And then I mentioned earlier the youth group of kids my age, we were very, very close in some very difficult times in my life. They were there with me and really made all the difference in world. The young pastor of the church at that time was the one who influenced me to go into the ministry when I became a Christian. He started talking about when I would go into the ministry, so I thought it was all a part of it. He just assumed that I was going to someday go into the ministry, and I did, and I loved it. I spent forty-five years or so in the pastorate, and I told someone not long ago that I loved every minute of it. Then I got to thinking about that and say, well, maybe not every minute, but I love most of it very, very, very much, and miss it today tremendously even though I enjoy what I'm doing today.

Kurtz: You mentioned that you first started going to church around the age of sixteen?

Pelfrey: Well, the church here, yes.

Kurtz: What prompted you to go here? Was there an influence?

Pelfrey: There was two things: I was aware of the church, because it was my grandmother, my dad's mom's church, and as a child I occasionally came to church with her, so I was aware of the church, but that wasn't a deciding act that drew me there. In my childhood, we lived for about three years in a little community, Plainville, which is fifteen miles sort of west of here and right on the Gordon County border line right there. We were living in that area, and I went to church there. But when I came back to live with my parents, I wasn't going to church anywhere. And there was a guy my age, actually, he was about 10 months older than me, that influenced me and started asking me to go to church, and so I went with him. I liked it. I liked the young preacher very, very much. A preacher named George Peavey. And so, I continued to go to church there and ultimately became a part of the church, started going when I was probably fifteen, but, but I probably didn't become a member of the church until I was sixteen. I hear people say all the time, they can tell you the exact date they became a Christian. I became a member of the church. I can't tell you the exact date, but it must have been right after I turned sixteen, right in that area, but it was the influence of those two people, Joe Ellis, a guy my age. We were later roommates in Bible college for two years before we were both married, and he has deceased since then but had a great impact on my life.

Kurtz: I remember reading one of your columns in your book about Joe and that was very impactful. Is there any more you can tell us about that friendship?

Pelfrey: Well, it was a very special friendship. We, as adults, after college, seldom saw each other. We lived in different parts of the country and we didn't stay in touch that much. Occasionally I might get a call, or I might call, but not very often. When we would get together, it's just as if no time passed. We were still best friends and had some really great times together. He and I were in college. At one point we were pretty much the maintenance crew at a little college we went to during the summer months, we were the two guys. They had a supervisor who worked full-time, and we were the two full-time flunkies that worked for him, and we rode around in an old 1953 army surplus pickup truck all the time have been converted. We rode around campus and only occasionally we got into downtown Atlanta in it.

I sort of figured that when I reach retirement age and he reached retirement age, we would be riding around in some old pickup truck again having a good time. But he passed away a few years ago suddenly, and I miss him. I had a cousin who was like a brother to me. We were very, very close, and he was the pitcher, and I was the catcher, and we were together all the time when we were growing up and he passed away a number of years ago. My middle school best friend passed away a few years ago, and most of the people that were very, very, special to me. Friends in those early years are gone now and I miss them. I really miss them.

Kurtz: How would you describe your role in the community in Adairsville today? What do you do with your time?

Pelfrey: Since, of course, until my retirement, I was one of the pastors and spent a lot of time through church activities working with a lot of people in various capacity around town. I'm still very much involved mostly in now the history of the town. I spend most of my time now writing. Basically, I'm a person who has to have a full-time job. After I resigned from the pastorate, I had off and on, both my wife and I had written for years. And so, I decided that's what I wanted to do. I've always loved books. When I was in high school, I mentioned the fact that my dad was an alcoholic, we didn't have entertainment. We didn't have a TV at home. Most of the time we didn't have electricity. Most folks don't believe me when I tell them this, but we usually saw with a little kerosene lamp, and it was a situation. But, not having a TV, I would check a book out almost every day at the end of school. The school library would be open for half hour or so and I'd go pick a book, I'd check it out, I'd check it in the next day and check out another one.

And now all my teachers are gone so I can tell this: I took it home and read it and that was my form of entertainment, but I also often had the book hidden on the desk during school reading. I would read at times four or five books a week. Now these weren't *Gone with the Wind*. I did read *Gone with the Wind* during that time, but it's not one that I would have read in a couple of days. But I would read at times four or five books a week. So, I've always loved books, and I had written nonfiction for years, and I decided some years ago I wanted to learn to write fiction, because I always loved mysteries.

So, we have written a little mystery series, Davis Morgan Mysteries. There are four in the series and finished that up; the last one will be released, well, I'm not sure when. The publisher hasn't let me know but it'll be sometime early next year, I'm hoping in January, but I'm not sure. But it's set here in Adairsville, the whole series, and we use the landmarks and the history of the town in order to develop those stories. I spoke at the Bartow History Museum here a month or two ago on the use of Bartow County landmarks and history in the Davis Morgan Mystery series. And so, it's a form of promoting the town. There are a number of reasons that I'm often asked why did you choose to set the series in Adairsville? Well, one of the reasons was we wanted to promote the town, and we finished that series.

My wife has joined with me in writing those, and we're getting ready to start in another series, and it's also going to be set here in Adairsville, with a whole different set of characters. But we'll tell a lot of the history and speak of a lot of landmarks around Adairsville. And of course, I did the *Life in Adairsville*. I probably only wrote about twenty-five percent of that, but I compiled the works of people who knew the history far better than I, and Miss Topsy Howard was our unofficial historian who knew just about everything there was known about the town. I got permission from her granddaughter to use her writings that she had put in a little booklet years ago, and they were becoming almost impossible to get. It's great history. Then her nephew, Dan Bowdoin, who was a grandson of Dr. Bowdoin, who, if you know much about Adairsville, you've heard of that name alone. His information about him is in a historical sign up here in front of the old jail, courthouse at the end of the little white building. But Dan, years ago, wrote a lot of material really basically for family and friends so it wouldn't be lost, and he gave me a file folder full of stuff before he passed away. He was a good friend. It's a long story, but I will not go into, but he claimed my wife is his little sister, and there's a reason for that but it's complicated now. I'm not going into it, but they share a mother in a sense. But anyway, we were good friends, and I asked him if I decided to put it into a book and that'd be okay. He said, do whatever you want to do with it. And of course, I double checked with his widow when I used the material, but he has that sense of humor. Not only is he a great storyteller, fantastic storyteller, but I knew and when I got his material that

I had what I needed in order to put this book together, and I just wanted to save stuff that I felt was being lost. It was concerning the history of the town. And that's why *Life in Adairsville* was self-published. The other books I was reporting to the history or mystery seriously. The first one was self-published and the next three we got a contract from a bona fide publisher. And rather than us paying them to do it, they paid us to do it. Not much, but they did pay us royalties. And um, but, uh, of course, *Life in Adairsville* was self-published through a nice publisher out of Florida. Anything like that always has to be self-published, because the market part's not big enough that any company is going to take it and pay you royalties to do it. And I paid for it out of my pocket to get it done. You have the paperback version there. The only time I'd ever seen the paperback version before I saw yours was they sent me 10 of them when they published. And, I have bought hardbacks—it can be bought both ways—of course the hardbacks are more expensive, but I did that because I felt I wanted people to save it and the hardback, it's more conducive to it being saved.

But that's just my way of trying to preserve the history of Adairsville. Nobody knew it better than Miss Topsy—Mrs. Alice Howard—and Dan. I'd put him second on the list, and then I just sort of threw my columns in because I wanted to be in the book, too. But their material, I have often been sought out by a newspaper in Rome and various people as an expert on Adairsville history since I compiled the book, but I'm not, I'm not. It was the other two people that were experts in history, and I simply compiled their work. I may know a little more than the common person about the history because I've always loved it and dug into the history. I can tell you about most of the people that were of note around here, and, before my time, people who were famous well before my time.

Kurtz: And you were talking about your mystery novels. And just to get back to that real quick, the setting. There's Bartow County and use of local landmarks. Are the characters like Davis Morgan, are they based on real people?

Pelfrey: No, no they're not. There are people who swear that they are, that they can find themselves in other people in it. And I was very careful not to do that. You'll find the police chief, the mayor, a lot of other people, the same mayor that runs throughout the mystery series. Same police chief that runs throughout, and others, and I go way out of my way to make sure they're nothing like the real people in that role. I was at a writer's conference a while back and there was a lady who was both an author and an attorney that was leading the session and we had a question-answer time and I asked her, I told her what I'd done that I had set the novels in my hometown.

I said, “Is that a problem, and could I be sued?” And she said, “Well, if I were you, I’d just change the name of the town just a little bit.” And I said, “Well, it’s too late. At that time two of them had already been published.” She says, “Well, they don’t sue. You have to the first year. You’re okay.” So, nobody would sue me yet. They’re not. I have two or three friends that I just shove in there occasionally, just for the fun of it. They don’t really do anything. Davis Morgan would stop by to visit Carol once in a while in the general mercantile store, and she’s a close friend and, you know, I just do that. I have a lady who’s a friend of ours, who’s a waitress out at Cracker Barrel. I used her one time, and I told her, and I don’t think she ever believed me. I think she thought I’m joking with her, but she’s in there. But no, I do not use real, real characters. I’ll base, you know, like... Davis Morgan has a young daughter by the name of Amy, and she’s just out of college and began teaching here. She has characteristics of my two daughters. I threw that together, but that sort of thing. There are people who think that Davis Morgan is me, and he’s what I would like to be. And so, we were careful not to do that.

Kurtz: You were talking about your *Life in Adairsville* collection of columns and that is from your newspaper column “As I Remember It.” Can you tell us something about that?

Pelfrey: Well, I was still in a pastoral role when I started writing those. I’m not sure how long I did it probably. It was every other week in the North Bartow News, the little weekly paper that we have here, and I wrote them probably four or five years. I’m not sure. It was just things that I remembered and sort of took off on, and I got a great reaction from the people in the community. I could be walking along the street. And it wasn’t unusual for two or three people to stop the car and say, “Hey, I really enjoy your columns,” you know, not because they weren’t that great, but because people enjoy reading about their hometown and about their past and that sort of thing.

I did it for four or five years and as I said, it was called “As I Remember It.” I soon got where I couldn’t remember anything else. So that’s a lie. I’d written about everything that was important as to what I could remember. So, I just sort of tried to turn it over at that time—Dan Bowdoin was still alive—and sort of trying to turn it over to him, but it didn’t work out. He and the person who was the editor at that time didn’t seem to be able to click and never really got it worked out. It was something I did voluntarily, and I’ve never received a cent for those. I did those because I enjoyed doing them, and I’ve always enjoyed writing.

I might say that my wife is the real writer. My wife, Wanda, knew before she finished college, she wanted to be a professional writer. She was, after a year or two out of college, she started writing professionally. At first, she

was doing basically curriculum for various Christian publishing companies, and that went from one thing to another. She has done a lot of Christian-education-related material. She wrote a book entitled *Making the Most of Your Child's Teachable Moments* that was published by Moody Press and distributed by James Dobson and Focus on the Family, and it sold more copies than most of our other books combined. It was actually a Christian bestseller. It went through something like, I think it went through six printings. I hesitate to say how many because I'm not sure. James Dobson and Focus on the Family reprinted some. I'm not sure, how many printings they did.

She's the writer. In the little fiction books that we do now, I'm the storyteller. She says I have the imagination; she makes it readable. And she's certainly a coauthor on the books. Even though the stories are mine, much of the writing is also hers. I chose to list her as coauthor of all those books. The last couple of books she says she felt like she's a fraud having her name on there, but that's probably because I've become a little more comfortable with just basic writing that she's taught me, and I've not had to lean on her as much as I used to.

I think probably, and I'm going on and on here, I don't know, I think probably my imagination for those kinds of stories... You know, I mentioned my home life situation when I was growing up, and I read an article recently where someone was saying that when you're in that kind of situation, you sort of develop this imagination because that's how you sort of shut things out and try to cope with the situation. And it was. I spend a lot of my time in places that I'd never been in those days. And I think I've probably developed that ability to, as my little sister says, to have that wild imagination as a result of that environment. When it was, when I was growing up.

Wish I had started doing that much earlier, writing fiction. Now that I'm on the downside of my life. I'm just now learning, and I wonder how much longer I am going to have to do this, and I've got so much. I have one book that I want to write, and it's not a cozy mystery, like these. It's literature and I keep putting it off because I know it's going to be a struggle to get it published, you know, and all this sort of thing. I wish I'd started much earlier. I really do.

Kurtz: So, you are somewhat of a local historian as you mentioned, or as people say you are, could you help us describe the beginning of Adairsville starting back around the 1800s?

Pelfrey: Yeah. I know what my research has told me. I wasn't around then, despite what some people say, yeah, it actually began about oh, a mile and a half, two miles north of here—actually about a half mile off of the highway,

back where the pumpkin patch if you've been up, there's a farm, Pumpkin Patch farm where thousands of kids go this time of the year every year. It was in that area. You know water comes together from everywhere right there and there was an Indian village, which gradually developed into a little village. It became known later as Adairsville because they were two guys by name of Adair who had both married Cherokees and actually became Cherokee chiefs as the story goes. I never found that confirmed, but I've been told that and, but then when the railroad, when they developed a railroad in around 1840, some were like 1830s, 1840s and of course they moved, they moved everything here. The whole deal was, this was halfway between Chattanooga and Atlanta so it was a big deal for the railroad. It was this, used to be a hotel up here on the corner and went across the street that, that building on the corner of the, over on the... I never remember the name of the streets, but right closest to the railroad was, was actually a hotel. When they recently, when they started digging in that thing to remodel it, they, they actually uncovered twenty-something fireplaces in that building and that, those were rooms in the old hotels. They each one had a fireplace, but they, that the town was moved in the 1840s, to there had been a little store that had sprung up outside of town, but it all moved this way and that was the beginning. It was what, 18 and, it's in the book. I've forgotten the exact date without looking, but I think it was incorporated in the late 1840s, early 1850s, right in that neighborhood, and from there it became a very, very prosperous little town for some time and continued that way until, continuing to make a lot of progress until after the early 1900s is when things began, when the automobile came along and people suddenly could go to all the stores and Calhoun, Calhoun and Rome and Cartersville, even though Cartersville at that time was still developing. But it sort of took away from you up to that point business had done, been done locally, and there were several big, you know, what we would call department stores. They were sort of country stores in town here and a lot of other things that most everything was done pretty much locally in, in those days but, but with the coming to the automobile, that began to change. The town began to lose progress and by the time I was a teenager, 1960s, we didn't even have a place to buy a hamburger in town. Occasionally someone would open up the old Red Pig Cafe out on 41. It was a little restaurant, and everybody who opened it up called the Red Pig, and I think I would have changed the name probably, but that, that was, it was a little, the little old restaurant the building right on behind the police department here was the Little Rock Cafe, which was a breakfast/lunch place that sat right on the old Dixie. In fact, it's about ten feet off of the old Dixie Highway there and my wife's grandfather starting that in 1934, and he also had an ice house. He was the person that provided ice for the town and he, and it was, it was there for, and operated into the 1950s. He later sold it and again it would open up. The last people to operate it as a restaurant was my two sisters, who did that in the 1980s and they called it the Little Rock, and that was the last time it was open.

And now it's a different thing in the building about every year or two, and it looks nothing like it did in those days, but it was a, there was just nothing there during those days. Population stood still. The population in 1960 census, if I remember correctly, the population was 1,113. I have to check that to see exactly, but that's what I remember, and it was, that's about what it was in the middle 1800s. You know, not a lot, not a lot of difference and population just, and it was not jobs here. They weren't businesses here. And things really began, and as I mentioned in earlier in the graduating class of high school, right there where our new elementary, beautiful elementary school is now just opened up this year. It was all, all of our grades first through twelve was right there on that hill. And that's where I went to school in a building that had been condemned several years before I was there. But at least part of it. And I, there were only thirty-seven of us in the senior class, and I don't know how many in the high school, but not more than, not more than 300. I'm sure maybe not that many, but it just really looked bad and then things begin to, you know, after I went off to college and left the area things really begin to pick up, and things were going great as a, with a, you know, recently, until the financial crunch came, we had subdivisions going up everywhere, and when that happened, all of a sudden these subdivisions, the building just stopped in midstream. There's little power things sticking up all over the place, and some of them still, and it's just recently some of those had begun to resume building those. Population however, up to that point had grown to somewhere between four and 5,000 now I think in Adairsville proper, and a little more than that if you go to the outskirts, but that came to a screeching halt. I was on the planning commission when that came. We used to meet and handled several items of business every month and when, when that came, all of a sudden, we met every eight or nine months, whether we needed to or not, because nothing was happening, you know. But that's beginning to change, and things are beginning to pick up again and it looks, it looks promising now.

Dickey: Quick Question. Why do you think you say it sort of took off when you were away at college? What do you attribute that to?

Pelfrey: You know, I think probably a lot of hard work on the part of some, some people who loved the town, who deciding that, even if it was not going to be best for them financially, they weren't going to stick with it here in Adairsville and did that over a period of, of time. And I'm not, I was away and I, I don't really, I did not have firsthand knowledge of why that began to happen, but then the building, of the subdivisions around, not in Adairsville proper, but a mile or two outside of town began to spring up and folks could, for a while you could buy a house in Adairsville, a new house, a lot cheaper than you could buy one anywhere else in the whole Atlanta area. And still on a good day we're only an hour away from, from Atlanta when the traffic cooperates, and I think that had a lot to do with it.

People came to Adairsville looking for a house they could afford, and I think that helped with population a great deal. And then, I think, our schools began to bounce back. It's the only way I know to put it. And we have right now, we have new schools and at every level, and it's nice as anywhere around, with a good staff of teachers. My daughter teaches in the elementary school. I know more about it than I'm, I know a lot of the folks that I have known through the years, a lot of the folks teach in high school and middle school as well and I think that there are people who won't, who see the value of having their children in a small town school if that small town school is, is the quality that it should be and I think that had something to do with it. But I keep... I don't know the answer completely, but it was during that time between about the late 1970s, early 80s, up until the middle 1990s, there was just a real surge of growth during that time.

Dickey: I bet the interstate helped too.

Pelfrey: Yeah, it did. The interstate was there.

Dickey: It was completed to Atlanta in 1977, when it finally opened all the way.

Pelfrey: It was, for a while we got a lot of, we've got a lot of traffic, and I mean traffic in Adairsville, because this stretch was the stretch that you got off the Adairsville exit. And my granddad had a little peach stand set up right where the traffic came off and hit 41, and when, during those years, and he sold Georgia peaches that he went to South Carolina to get. And [laughter] I can remember holiday times. There would be traffic backed up for miles sitting there. My uncle had a service station... he loved those times. He would sell them his gas, close up, and go home. But, it was, with each, you know, we were right on the old Dixie highway, main route to Florida for many, ran right behind town here and then that, I remember when I was, it was before I went into first grade, that 41 opened up. I can remember just vaguely when highway 41 opened, and then suddenly traffic moved out a ways, and that hurt downtown. It was, of course, everything is facing the railroad because it was a railroad town, but the old Dixie highway ran around behind. And then, then along came 75, and it went out further, and at first nothing happened out on 75. It took us a while. It took a while for that to catch on, but once it did, I think it had a lot to do with it.

Kurtz: Are you pleased with the direction that Adairsville is moving today?

Pelfrey: Yeah, I am. I would, I'd like to see us be a little more economically sufficient. It bothers me, sometimes, especially in the old business section, that we get people who come in and, and they, you know, if they don't, so many of them, if they don't develop a booming business in six months,

they're gone. And that hardly ever happens. In fact, I can't think of one time it's happened, but there had been several people who have stuck, such as Rita at the Stock Exchange who, the 1902 Stock Exchange, who just stuck with it for years and years and years, and she's done some neat things. She's had some dinner theater upstairs from the little tea room as part of it, has my bookshop in the back of it, and she stuck with it. Carole at the mercantile has stuck with it, and of course there's been a little clothing store over here, ladies clothing that's has been there longer than anybody, and she said she had her best year last year. That's what someone told me that she recently said, and, but most people move in and out, in and out. And I really, I think, you know, halfway between Atlanta and Chattanooga, what a location! Just off the interstate. We've got, you know, our old town area has really been dressed up recently and boy! What you could do here. And I get a little disturbed sometimes that we, we don't do more, you know? And that was again, one of the reasons for *Life in Adairsville* and four mystery novels that are set in Adairsville. It was all a part of promoting the town. And, in fact, in the first mystery, I even have some people sitting around talking about that very fact at the festival as they're eating about what Adairsville could be you know, but generally speaking, there's a lot of vision now. I think it's interesting you know, we were talking earlier about, the Civil Rights, you know, we have, we have a black mayor, and we're a town that, you know, where whites far outnumber the blacks in the town, but yet we have a black mayor. I kid that it was primarily, it was three people that ran, but it was primarily a race between he and a lady, and I kid that we were more ready for a black mayor than we were for a lady mayor. I get in big trouble when I start talking that way. But, you know, it's, it's that kind of town. It's not that people are you know... I can't say everybody loves one another, but there is a lot of, a lot of closeness and some great attitudes and, you know, some businesses that have, as Adairsville goes, have taken off—you know, might not be considered very prosperous in some locations, but have done pretty well here and so I'm generally pleased with where we're at and where we're going right now. I'd just like for us to do it a little faster, move a little more rapidly and, but yet keep it all in perspective and guard what needs to be guarded during that growth. I think that's extremely important. We, you know, a few years ago there was all the talk about our getting the, I've forgotten. When I get upset at people, I sometimes forget their names. The business, the sports...

Dickey:

Cabela's

Pelfrey:

Cabela's, yeah. That was all, I mean they even advertised in their catalog that their new store was going to be here in Adairsville, and I was on the planning commission at that time and we had, we had, we had eight motels there waiting to sign on the dotted line when, when they finally saw the building going up for Cabela's, but that didn't happen. And I don't

know all the reasons it didn't happen, but it would have, it would have triggered some tremendous growth. The original idea was to build Cabela's around Yarber's Cave. There was actually going to be a cave inside the store up on the hill there. A cave I used to play in when I was a kid. And we got all upset, and that didn't happen. But once I look back now, it may be a good thing. We may not have been ready for it, and it might've produced a too much growth too soon also. So, it may have turned out for the best. And most people would be very upset at me if they heard me say that, but that may be the case, and we will, we keep moving in the right direction.

Christensen: So, what would you say that sets Adairsville apart from the other small towns around here?

Pelfrey: Well, you know, I, I don't know. To me, I mentioned the attitudes of so many people, and the kindness. And, it's not that you don't get that in other places, but I'm just not aware of the kind of fellowship, the kind of community that we have here in Adairsville. And people seem for the most part to want to help one another and encourage one another, and it's the people that may make the difference. And I think, you know, that's the big factor. But again, I mentioned earlier, look at our location. You cannot have a more perfect location—an hour to Atlanta and 50 minutes to Chattanooga—sitting right on 75. The gentleman who at the time was a high official in the Rome city government once told me he wished Rome had the location that Adairsville has, you know, and so the location is certainly a big, big part of it. And I think the history. It has such a fascinating history. Read all about in *Life in Adairsville*. But it really does. There's some... I've often told the story of Colonel Boyd, lived up on Boyd Mountain here, if you go out and look up on the hill there, we call them mountain Boyd Mountain. You'll see the house. One of the Boyds have lived in that house since the mid-1800s, I guess. Jimmy Boyd still lives there today. But that's where Colonel Boyd grew up, and the American Legion in Cartersville is named after him. He's the gentleman who gave the cease fire order that ended World War I. He was, on the staff of General, who was the general?

Dickey: General Pershing

Pelfrey: Pershing, yeah, I couldn't remember, but he was on his staff, and they said every time he had to make a decision, he began to yell, "Where's Boyd at? Where's Boyd?" and this was, he was a young man, and the stories that I've heard is that, you know, he had gone to West Point, and he hadn't developed, his army career was moving much faster than the other guys. They come out of West Point at that time, guys like Eisenhower and so forth and he, he died, Colonel Boyd, of the flu in France just weeks after the end of the war, and he's buried in France. But had he lived, you know,

I've often heard it said that he probably would have been, instead of hearing about Eisenhower and those guys, it probably would have been Boyd. He was ahead of those guys. And being General Pershing's right-hand man during those years and, you know, from Adairsville. I speak of, I go into all of this in the book—the Martin family, four sons who, one headed up a national corporation. One was, the, oh I can't remember what they all were. Two of them were actually, one commanded a fleet in the Navy during World War II and the other had his own ship during World War II. Another was a college professor. These all came from a middle-class family here in Adairsville. You know, there's just story after story like that in the history of, Adairsville. Just fascinating. We have a, well, I'll give you another example. I get started with some of the, some of the figures from the past, and I'm so fascinated by them that I have a hard time stopping sometimes.

Kurtz: Well, we're talking about figures of the past and you've mentioned a couple that are from here in Adairsville, but you said the highway used to pass through here, the Dixie highway. Any travelers of note that have passed through, left their mark here?

Pelfrey: I don't know. Probably. But when I spoke at the Bartow County History Museum, I told them I think a little differently than the average person, but I was, we were talking about the little cafe, Little Rock café, set eight or ten feet off of old Dixie Highway, and I'm wish that my wife's grandfather who ran the cafe back in those early days, had kept a little guest book or something that people pass through because you think everybody who drove to Florida coming from that direction and went right by there and probably stopped in for breakfast, lunch or whatever. And there have been, no telling how many. And, of course, you've probably heard the story that Pretty Boy Floyd grew up in the little gray house—that he was born out of town here. There are different stories about that, but the actual fact was that he was born outside of town, but anyway, he was still a very young child and moved in to town. They moved away when he was seven years old. But there are, you know, the first Eagle Scout in Bartow County lived about three houses up from right here. George Hayes. I think George Hayes Junior. George Hayes Junior and I were together in high school. We played football and basketball and ran track together. In fact, I had an outstanding time in the 880, and for three years, two years I couldn't win in the 880—never won because I ran behind George Hayes. He won state for three years, in the 880. This was George Jr, but his dad was a very quiet man who was quite a figure, but there are just a lot of, you know, I, I'm not sure who passed through. There's no record of that. But there were some, some, uh, some pretty well-known folks that once lived in this, in this town.

Dickey: Well, is there anything else, any final words you'd like to leave us with?

- Pelfrey: Oh, [laughter] I don't know, I, I just, my wife and I are like a lot of folks. As we begin to get older, we were anxious to get back home, and we find that happening. I mentioned George a moment ago. He lived out in Seattle or somewhere, and he showed up about the same time we did, little after we did. Someone told me when he when he moved back, was moving back to town, I said, well, probably the first thing I'll do when I see him walking down the street is run up to the person that is closest to him and do a pick on him, basketball, because that's what I did for two years, was set picks for George to shoot. But a lot of folks, we have noticed seem to want to come back to Adairsville, and I think it's just, it's a great place to live. And for a lot of us, once you've lived here, you never quite get over it and want to come back.
- Dickey: I think we end on that note. It's hard to top that. Thank you very much.
- Pelfrey: Well thank you. I appreciate it. I hope it was okay. I'm, I'm not great with interviews.

Index

“As I Remember It”, 2, 9, 10
 Adair, 11
 Adairsville, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18
 Atlanta, 6, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16
 Bartow County, 7, 9, 17
 Bartow History Museum, 7
 Boyd Mountain, 16
 Calhoun, 3, 12
 Cartersville, 12, 16
 Chattanooga, 11, 15, 16
 Chester West, 5
 Chicago, 1
 church, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
 Civil Rights, 15
 Colonel Boyd, 16
 Dan Bowdoin, 4, 8, 10
 Davis Morgan, 7, 9
 Davis Morgan Mysteries, 7
 Dixie Highway, 12, 17
 Ed Stevens, 5
 Eisenhower, 16
 First Christian Church of Adairsville, 4
 Florida, 8, 14, 17
 George Hayes, 17
 George Hayes Junior, 17
 George Peely, 6
 Georgia, 1, 14
 Gordon County, 5
 Indiana, 1
 interstate, 14, 15
 Jimmy Boyd, 16
 Joe Ellis, 6
Life in Adairsville, 7, 16
 Little Rock Cafe, 12, 17
 Midwest, 1, 4
 Ms. Alice Howard, 7, 8
 North Bartow News, 9
 Ohio, 1, 4
 pastorate, 3, 5, 7
 Population, 12
 Red Pig Cafe, 12
 Richmond, Virginia, 1
 Rome, 3, 4, 8, 12, 16
 San Souci Club, 1, 2

segregation, 3
South Carolina, 14
Tom Swindell, 5
Wanda, 10
West Point, 16