TRANSCRIPT – HERBERT FRAZIER

Interviewee: HERBERT FRAZIER

Interviewer: COURTNEY AKANA

Interview Date: March 18, 2015

Location: Charleston

Length: 79 minutes

COURTNEY AKANA: Okay, it's recording. All right. My name is Courtney Akana. It's March 18th, 2015 and I'm doing this interview with Herb Frazier for the oral history course with Jacqueline Hall. And would you like to state your name?

HERBERT FRAZIER: My name's Herb Frazier.

CA: And my first question that I would like to ask you is just for you to give me a little bit of your history about your past here in Charleston, your family's history, maybe here in Charleston.

HF: Well, for the first fourteen years of my life, I lived at the Ansonborough housing project that was at the east end of Calhoun Street. I was raised by my grandmother, Mabel McNeil Frazier, who came from Cordesville which is in lower Berkeley County. And at some point she came to Charleston and she married my grandfather, my paternal grandfather, Benjamin Frazier, and they had a son, Benjamin Frazier, who was my father. My mother, my biological mother, I never knew her. Her name was Mary Cunningham. So Louise Cunningham was her mother, my grand grandmother, but her name was Mary Cunningham. They were divorced, I think in 1952,

1953, maybe. And I never met my biological mother, I was raised by my stepmother, who I call my mother. My parents, my stepmother and my biological father were married March 1st, 1959. I was eight years old. I remember the wedding. Well, it was at Aunt Carrie's house. My mother, when I say my mother, I'm talking now about my stepmother, my mother's sister Carrie Prior lived over on, Jasper Street on—I guess that's the central part of the city and across the street from, I think that was used to be Simonton School. It's no longer there on Jasper Street. It's a little short street that runs between, I think Radcliffe [St.] and Morris [St]. I think. It's been a while since I've been on that side of town.

And so I lived in Ansonborough in the fifties until the mid-sixties until March of 1965. So my father was in the Navy and, he was transferred to the U.S. Naval Base in Guantanamo. So I left Charleston when I was thirteen. I turned, no, I'm sorry, I was fourteen, I turned fifteen that year in November. And the first seven years of my schooling, I attended Buist Elementary School on Calhoun Street. And back in those days, you really didn't have a middle school structure. You went from first to seventh grade, the elementary school, and then eighth grade through twelve grade at high school. So, I went to C.A. Brown as an eighth grader, and I was scared to death when I went from middle school to high school. Growing up in Ansonborough it was a very close-knit community, you know. It was a different time in America, different time in Charleston. It was a very tough time for adults. A lot of people had left Charleston looking for opportunities elsewhere, particularly in New York, because in the segregated South, there was not too many opportunities for people of African descent, but being a kid, I mean, I don't know. I guess maybe your youth immune you from all of the harsh realities of life,

whatever period of time in which you live, you know. I sort of kind of knew of segregation, I sort of, kind of knew that I didn't see white people around the neighborhood in which I lived, I didn't see white people at the church that we attended my grandmother and I attended Emanuel AME Church on Calhoun Street. I certainly didn't see whites at Buist Elementary School, but it was not necessarily one of those things that you were troubled by, it was just natural. You saw whites come to the shipyard to work at the shipyard that used to be at the end of Calhoun Street, where Liberty Square, the National Park Service has a museum and boat launch where you catch the boats to go to the Fort Sumter. That used to be a shipyard. And next to it was, and where—what's in that building that used to be the IMAX Theater. I don't know the IMAX Theater is still there, but that used to be as SCE&G power plant. That area was very heavily industrial. And so that was on the fringes of my backyard. And you'd see, white people came down there to work, but you never really felt as though that your life was missing anything as a result of the absence of white people in your classroom or your church or your neighborhood. Because back in those days, and although people think that we were poor, we were rather rich in a number of ways because we had families, we had strong teachers, caring teachers. We had the church and we had the outdoors in which we played. And it was not one of those environments in which people really were, you know, preyed upon.

Now. I'm sure people preyed upon other people, but again, I think maybe the youth being young, protected us from all of those harsh realities in the ugly side of life. And like I said, I go back—I ramble—you tell me when you want me—you ask something, redirect me if I'm rambling in too many different directions. But like I said,

when going from that transition from the eighth grade at Buist Elementary School into the ninth grade at C.A. Brown, I remember the older boys over that summer. They said "when you come to school that fall, they were going to beat you up and they going to get you" and all that kind of stuff. I remember being very, very anxious about that first day at C.A. Brown. And in 1963, the fall of 63 C.A. Brown was a relatively new school. I think it was built one it's 1960, 61.

CA: Well, it opened in 1962, but it was built a couple years before or from what I read. Yeah. Yeah.

HF: So I guess if it opened in 62, I was the got there the second year it was open. And by saying that, that reminds me of something that I remember very vividly and I'm going to skip ahead so I don't forget this because it was one of the greatest disappointments of my life. When I left C.A. Brown in March of 65, I didn't see Charleston or C.A. Brown again until August of 1969, a lot had happened in America. Malcolm X had been assassinated. MLK had been assassinated. There had been riots and Watts in Detroit, other cities, Newark. And we were living on a Naval Base of Guantanamo. And we were looking at all these events from afar. Okay. And so when I came back to C.A. Brown in 69, the Vietnam War was going on. I think the war ended in 1972 America had changed it, or either America had changed or I'd gotten older. And I started to see some of the other ugliness and some of the difficulties of life of being an adult or a young adult. And also I started to see that C.A. Brown in some ways had declined and maybe the discipline had, or the caring or the love of the school had declined, you know. The school was at that point beginning to show its—it wasn't no longer that sparkling brand new school that I remembered. And of course Charleston had

changed because when I got back, like, I guess anybody who leave a community and come back after a number of years—you immediately asked—"well what happened to so, and so, what happened to this person" and, you know, invariably thing was, the answers was, "well, they were in jail or they in drugs or they were killed in Vietnam", you know?

So a lot of the people that I remembered and then some people were still there. Some were still in the community and some had left to go off to college. Well, I left to go off to college and I never lived in Charleston. Like I would just come for holidays and weekends and I would leave. And I would go back to the campus at that time was campus at the University of South Carolina. And then I'd back to Charleston and try to reconnect with some of my old friends and, and of course stay in touch with my family because my parents were living here, they were living on Wadmalaw and they moved after my father retired from the Navy. They moved back to Charleston and they built a house on Wadmalaw.

But going back to C.A. Brown, I'm going to roll back to 1960, 1963, August of 63. Some of the teachers I remembered Mr. Brown, I think Mr. Brown was the math teacher. I think that was his name. I might be wrong. Coach Buck, he was a football coach. Coach Robinson, Robert Robinson, he was the basketball coach. And I remember he was tall lanky guy. He was always in the gym in the mornings. And he would tell you don't walk across that gym floor in your street shoes. I mean, you could eat off the floor. It was shiny. It was like a mirror. You could see your reflection on the floor. I'm just thinking of some of the random thoughts. Well, I think perhaps maybe the most dramatic moment in, in my time at C.A. Brown was the day Kennedy was shot and they came

across the PA system to announce that the president had been assassinated. That was a saddest day in everybody's life.

CA: And do you remember the, I mean, just the administrator's

HF: Reaction to that? I don't remember any specific administrator's reactions per se, but I just could remember that the day. It came across on the PA system that the president had died in Dallas and it was an audible collective moan that you could hear. I mean, it was just the whole school just went, oh, and you could hear it across rippling down the hallway. And everybody was real sad because I remember when John Kennedy was elected president in 1960, I was 10 years old. And I remember seeing his picture on the front page of the News & Courier and thinking that god the country is heading in the right direction. I don't know what direction, if that was the right, it's just, I just have these faint memories because I read the paper. Because my grandmother before she lost her sight, she was an avid reader. She worked crossword puzzles and anytime I would ask her how to spell a word, she wouldn't tell me how to spell a word. She'd throw the dictionary at me, you know?

But C.A. Brown was a very, I can't recall any specific incidences, but it was a very caring place. And of course, one person who we all interacted with a lot because I was on the band was George Kenny. Back in those days, the school district had a very, very vibrant music program for children. Depending on the side of town, in which you lived, you would meet at a school after school, after your regular classes, you would meet. For us it was Courtenay's School on the Eastside. And I think Rhett was the place where kids met on the West Side of town and you took music lessons. And now this

started in the elementary grades because at Buist I initially wanted to play the saxophone. My father was a jazz enthusiast. He had stacks of jazz records as tall as me. And he would play jazz. He would play W.C. No that WC Handy was blues, Big Spider Beck, and Thelonious Monk and John Coltrane. And the list goes and Duke Ellington and Lionel Hampton and the list goes on and on and on. I can remember him coming from Fox Music House, which used to be down on King Street. He would come home with an album and the album was packaged in a flat bag, yellow brightly colored yellow bag. And that was back in those days. That was pretty cool. You were walking down the street with an album from Fox Music House—you got the latest music. And he would come home and he would play that album. And he used to set—I can remember very vividly—the turntable would be spinning and he would gently set that album down on the turntable and it would begin to spin to, and then he would gently lift that arm, that needle down. And he put that needle on that record and out came that music, that jazz music, and he would cut the lights out in the living room and we would sit there and we would listen to the music because he felt, he felt that music should be enjoyed in the dark. So no other senses would interfere with the audible enjoyment of the music. And so we listened to the music and I'd think about the music and I'd listen. I was very, very interested in playing the saxophone.

So when the time came for me to take music lessons, I chose the saxophone, the tenor saxophone, but I wasn't all of that. I wasn't a big guy, you know, I guess I was a little kid. So, I had to carry this tenor saxophone from Buist School on Calhoun Street, all the way to Courtenay to take music lessons. But it wasn't only the saxophone. It wasn't the only thing I was carrying. I still also had to carry my books. So I had all these books

because I'm always amazed. Now I see kids walking around, going from school to home or home to school and they don't have any books. I said, “what are kids’ books?” Because when I was in school, I had books that almost weighed as much as me. So I'm lugging these, this book bag around with these books. And I got this saxophone, this moldy musty mildewy saxophone that had been sitting in this music locker room all summer long that hadn't been clean. And so I couldn't carry that saxophone around. It was too heavy.

So, I got a trombone. I started playing the trombone and George Kenny taught us how playing out instruments. And Mr. Kenny is a phenomenal musician and a very gentle man, but yet stern, but persistent yet stern and very talented. Now I would marvel at later on, I entered the band at C.A. Brown and marching band. And Mr. Kenny could play every instrument in the band room from the drums to the flute, to the saxophone, to the brass instruments, you name it, he would pick it up and he would play. And he would demonstrate how the music is supposed to sound. And of course we tried to, you know, he was teaching us also too, how to side read. And one thing that was really, really rigorous with the band, the marching band at C.A. Brown, we had every foot, every home game, and some away games, not all away games, every home game. And we played at the Stoney Field, which is still there on the West Side of town by, the River Dogs’ stadium. We would play the halftime shows. Did you play an instrument?

CA: I used to play the flute

HF: Did you play in the marching band?

CA: No. No.

HF: See, you you've seen marching bands before, right. And you see that a lot of times they play and they had the music and they're playing. Well, we never played for music. You had to memorize your parts. And every week you had a new show to learn, you know. Not only had new music to learn, but you had new formations to learn on top of that. And somehow we did it. I still don't know how we did it, but we did it. And then we also had grandstand music, you know, we had to play in the grandstand and we had to memorize that too. It's a crazy, crazy, I don't know if kids do it nowadays. My daughters have played on the band too. Well, all three of my daughters played on the bands. My oldest daughter played on the Burke band and I think they memorized the music, but my two youngest daughters played on the West Ashley band and they had music and I told them, I said, "look, when I was at school, we didn't have music, we had the music, but you had to memorize the music and you played it on the field without the music." So anyway, I skipped ahead and kids got it too easy nowadays, you know.

CA: I want to go back just a couple too. Your community Ansonborough is that as is pronounced.

HF: Ansonborough, Ansonborough

CA: Yeah. You touched briefly on the community and being rich. But I wonder if you could elaborate a little bit more on just how you felt the community around you was.

HF: What of the community was caring in the sense that I think people owed—younger people for certain, certainly you respected your elders, you know. We all did what, all, what every kid and every generation did, you know, but at least when I was in

the fifties and the sixties, you didn't let an older person see you do something that you didn't want your parents to see you do; that you didn't want do, that you would not have do in front of your parents. Like maybe say a bad word or curse or whatever, a fight or whatever. You always try to be respectful of the older people. And maybe, I don't know whether not this is anecdotal or an exaggeration. I don't think young people have those same sets of concerns nowadays, as we did, when we, when I was a kid. And of course everybody, most people of my age group will say that the older person had no fear of correcting you if you were wrong and, or saying, quite frankly, “does your mama know you're doing that?” or “I'm gonna tell your mama.” I don't know, to what extent you get that nowadays, that people are sort of, kind of withdrawn, and sort of, kind of, because you don't know how kids are going to react when they they'll get in your face or they kill you. And I don't think older people had that fear, certainly older. Certainly, kids had no fear that somebody is going to kill you. And I've been in, I was in my share of fights when I was a kid, as far as neighbors, neighbors looked at out after the kids. I mean, there were two families when our immediate street or two families on our street who were close to us, they babysat me. Of course you could find babysitters.

Now, I don't know if that's any different than what it is today. It was just a sense of community. And I don't know whether that community still have that sense today. I know where I live now. I only know the neighbor to my right. I know her first name last, but the couple to our left, I don't know them. Last name, we speak. I see them in the yard. I certainly don't know the people across the street from me. But I live in a single family. I live in a neighborhood with single family houses.

The project was a little bit more densely packed and you had a lot more children. So you would go from one house to the next, to the next, to the next and, and Christmas time you were always, in the summertime, you were always out playing and Christmas time you were out skating. That was a big, big deal. On the Eastside. If you talk to anybody who grew up on the Eastside of Charleston or the West Side of Charleston in the fifties, ask them, what did you do when you were a kid? And I bet you one of the top three things that they would out of the top three things that they did, one of them would be skating. That was a big deal. There was skating zones set outside by the city of Charleston and Marsh Street where I lived in the borough on Ansonborough, which is—they called "the borough." People skated all day long from Christmas, all through up until New Year's up until the time you went back to school, and then on the weekends, or when you got back from school, you'd get back in the street and you'd skate, you know. Again I have no scientific evidence. I didn't take any surveys, but this is just a kind of a recollection that neighborhoods were closer knit.

And of course I don't—my wife asked me this the other day had I ever because my father and my mother, they grew up doing the depression and they really, really knew what it meant to be hungry. And my wife asked me, my wife, Adrianne Troy Frazier. She asked me the other day, she said, "do you ever have any recollection of being hungry?" None. There was always food. There was always clothes. There was always toys. And before TV there was radio. And if there wasn't the radio on, there were records playing. There was always music in the house. There was always a newspaper. There was always something to read. There was always books and my first book was *Moby Dick*. Then he gave me *Robinson Crusoe* to read, you know, and on the bookcase and on bookshelf was

War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy. I never picked that up because of it was a little intimidating, but I knew of *War and Peace*. I knew of *Manifest Destiny*, Andrew Jackson's *Manifest Destiny*. I remember that as a kid, my father and my grandmother loved books. So reading was a big part of your childhood.

And I told my daddy, it was around when I was about twelve years old. I wanted to be a writer because I wanted to be a lot of things. I wanted to be an astronaut at one time, by the time I got to Guantanamo and knew of the CIA, I wanted to be a CIA agent. But when I was twelve years old, I wanted to be a writer. And I remember daddy got me a typewriter. And I remember it was a toy typewriter. Wasn't a real, real typewriter, but it was a typewriter I had. It was functional, you could type. And I had a typewriter and I used to type stories. Of course I wanted to be a newspaper reporter even before I knew what a newspaper reporter was because my idol newspaper reporter was Superman.

I remember for whatever reason, I liked that whole idea of working in a newsroom and typing and writing. And then, I expressed certain whatever, I must have said some things because my Christmas gifts always centered around something that provided some, either creative outlet or a way to explore something. I remember distinctively asking daddy one day. It was sunset, it was in the springtime, it was in the late evening. And we were looking in the Western sky and I asked him, I said, “what is that?” It was a bright object in the sky. And he said, “that's Venus.” And then that Christmas, I got a telescope and I could see Venus closed up. Then I got a microscope and I could look at things under the microscope. And then, there was something else. Oh, then, then there were always books. I remember I got *Robinson Crusoe* one Christmas. And then, then I got the typewriter one Christmas and I still got the kind of normal kind

of toys that kids got. I got bicycles and got skates, got a wagon, got a football helmet and shoulder pads and a football. Although I look back on it and I've never thought I just thought about it. Although he was in the Navy for twenty three years, rather twenty three years, the military uniform that he got me was a Marine Corps uniform. And so I was a Marine. I was a Jarhead, you know, other day. Because I had that, I don't know. I was about maybe seven, eight, nine years old. My Marine Corps uniform had impact on me because at some point I remember one point in high school, I wanted to join the Marine Corps and be a pilot and go work for the CIA, these childhood fantasies. Because when you grew up in the Cold War and you grew up in, on a naval base in the Cold War at Guantanamo with the constant threat or the constant fear of whether the Cubans are gonna come across the fence line, you think about these things. I know we digress away from, C.A. Brown. All of these things I guess, are connected in some way to C.A. Brown because C.A. Brown was all black. And when we left Charleston, I went from that all black C.A. Brown experience to that predominantly white William T. Sampson High School experience. Or there were just a handful of Black kids in the school when I got to Gitmo in March of 65.

CA: So were, was that school segregated?

HF: No. William Sampson. Yeah, no, no, no. It was a naval base. It was not segregated. The military wasn't going to to— the US government wouldn't tolerate—and black kids went to school with white kids, but because of the demographics of the base, since there weren't that many black families on the base, there weren't that many Black kids now keep in mind, where the base is. You know where it is?

CA: Well, I've seen the air force base in North Charleston.

HF: No, this is Guantanamo. This is Cuba. Yeah. This is Cuba after the Bay of Pigs. So therefore, the naval base is, which is still there, which is always in the news because, because it's a prison, part of it's a prison for enemy combatants, but it's still a little bit of America, military, civilian personnel with their families live on the base. I don't know how many people live there, but it's like a little piece of America on the southeastern tip of Cuba. So we got there, we flew from Norfolk Virginia and took an eight hour flight from Norfolk and landed at the naval base. It was cold in Norfolk that March and we got to get more was probably almost a hundred degrees in March or ninety degrees. Maybe it's very hot in humid, always.

My whole world was turned upside down in a sense, but it wasn't a traumatic turn. I mean, emotionally upheaval. It was just, it went from all black to nearly all white with a few, like I said, with a few Black families and with a sprinkling of Cuban families and plus few Jamaicans and a small, small Chinese population. Chinese would work in the laundry, base laundry.

CA: What were the teachers like at the base school?

HF: Oh, they were cool. They were really nice. Mr. Perry, I believe he was a chemistry teacher. Mr. Granton was an English teacher. I go back and look at those yearbooks and reminisce all the time. And I have some friends from those years, I call them and they call I have friends scattered all over of the United States. When we call, we talk, we talk about GTMO. And of course my father, before he died in December 5th,

2014, just last December. I mean, my, my mother is still alive. She lives on Wadmalaw. We talk about those days at Guantanamo, along with my brothers who still living. We talk, we think of about those days very fondly because living down there was very, it was good duty. I mean, it was very easy, easy lifestyle living at Guantanamo. And then you could get, if you had the time and you had the money, you could get on a military flight and you could go to Haiti. So I remember when I was 17 years old, we got on a flight and we took a day trip to Port Prince. And so I got to see a foreign country, another country outside of the United States. And so without digressing, that sort of sparked my interest in travel coupled with my interest in writing. So, my life, my professional life took that path, travel and writing and using journalism as an avenue, a conduit to travel to explore because I was always, I guess, rather inquisitive asking questions.

So that's probably why I got a telescope and I was given books and I was, she tossed me the dictionary and he gave me a microscope and, and he gave me a typewriter. And of course he gave me a trombone, you know, to express my musical interest. Now I never perhaps maybe developed my musical talent if I had any musical talent at all. Because at one point I thought I wanted to be a professional musician, and it didn't. That idea, I think, kind of phased or was phased out after college. You know, I played on the jazz band at USC, which I enjoyed it, but I don't, I don't think I could make a living playing the trombone.

CA: CA Brown, your first day was in 1963. You said? Yes.

HF: The fall of 63, I guess back in those days, kids didn't go back to school until after Labor Day. So it's yeah. September. Yeah. 63.

CA: Yeah. Do you remember the mood of the campus or on the first day or other than just being fearful?

HF: I think there were a lot of cool people. Cool kids. I just remember everybody was dressed sharply, your new school clothes. You would go downtown King Street and get some new clothes you wanted to wear the latest, whatever the latest was at that time. Your shoes had to be shined and cleaned. I remember going to school, I remember in the morning pressing my shirt and my pants to make sure that my pants weren't—my shirt and pants weren't wrinkled, and my shoes were polished. Yeah. You didn't wear you—you didn't wear like sneakers to school. No. You wore dress shoes and you wore pants. You wore a shirt, button shirt. If you had a coat and you had a sweater depending on the weather conditions. So that's how you dressed, going to school. Because we didn't have buses. You wore, you walk from the projects or wherever to your school. And then on the way from school, you might get in a fight, or you might not get in a fight, or you'd stop off at the corner store and get a soda or some cookies, candy.

CA: Did you ever get in any fights walking home from school?

HF: Yeah, I used to get, I got in a couple fights. I remember a guy named Sapphire, for whatever reason he and I couldn't get along very well and we tussled. But we—I didn't try to, well—I tried to hurt him, but I, he didn't try to hurt me beyond just a couple blows, a couple kicks, but you didn't try to cut somebody or you didn't have a gun to shoot somebody, you know? But I didn't get in that many fights. I got along pretty well with people, I think. Yeah.

CA: Do you remember any fights or anything like that happening on campus?

HF: Yeah, there was one fight. I remember that led, I saw some blood, somebody had a box cutter and it happened right outside. Let's see that wasn't the band outside the gym. It happened outside the gym. I don't remember who was fighting, but somebody got cut and I'm sure there as time went on, there were more serious things and that. And that seeing that was kind of shocking. That was extremely shocking. You know, see that, that often, you know, that wasn't everyday fair at C.A. Brown.

CA: What was the reaction, do you remember of the teachers or administrators there?

HF: Don't remember how they, but they kicked the kids out of school or what happened, you know, you saw those things and then you moved on, you wasn't involved. So

CA: If somebody did act out or something like that, do you know sort of what the punishment would've been like, or even just, if you relate to school or you didn't have your homework or

HF: I'm sure there was some punishment and some detention or expulsion or suspensions. And I'm thinking back. I don't think I wasn't ever kicked out of school. I wasn't a good student. I might add, I didn't have great, great grades. I didn't for whatever reason, I guess a) I was lazy or b) I was impatient, or combination of all. I didn't make As and Bs, I made Cs and Ds. And my father used to kid me and say “well, I had my doubts about you there for a minute. I didn’t know whether you gonna make it or not,” but I

made it. But getting back to your question about discipline, I can remember, I don't remember very much discipline metered out at C.A. Brown, but I remember there was one kid at William T. Sampson at the naval base who got kicked out, white kid. He just wouldn't come to class, and they kicked him out of school. And then we'd see him working with one of the construction and civilian construction companies on the school. And we were somewhat envious of him. At least I was because he wasn't in the classroom. He was out on the construction site, making money and I'm in the classroom.

But you know, that's probably not the place where he should have been at his age. He should have been in the classroom. You know, you can make the money, make the money later on. Some of the kids who were there longer than me, because when I left, I was fourteen years old and I don't remember any major disruptions, something might pop into my memory. But I wrote a column years ago about discipline in the classroom and a school in Charleston County. And I was just, and I sometimes go back to the schools and I don't recall a situation where you disrespected the teacher, or you acted out in the classroom. I'm sure kids acted out. Kids are kids, no matter what generation, but I don't recall it ever being to the extent that it led to someone being kicked out of school.

CA: Do you recall ever thinking if you did act out or just knowing that your teachers would then communicate with your parents?

HF: Oh yeah. That's the one thing that kept you in line that you didn't want anything getting back to school to home. Rather. I think that perhaps maybe have been more of an awareness, an elementary school. Because you know middle grades, as we know, that's a tough time for uh, twelve, thirteen-year-old, eleven, twelve, thirteen year

olds, particularly boys, you be coming, you're coming into your own. You want to be, you want to grow up faster than, you know, your time. I did get into some trouble in the elementary school. I got in a fight in the schoolyard, me, and this kid, we dragged this one kid around the schoolyard and that got back home when I got a spanking for that. But I used to get more spankings at school I mean at home for lying.

For some reason, I had a difficult time telling the truth. And that's interesting for a guy who, spent 34 years of his life as a newspaper reporter. But when I was young, for whatever reason, I tried to bend the truth or not tell out all of what happened for fear perhaps, maybe of that. If I didn't put it all on the table, maybe I could avoid some discipline problems or a spanking. It was more that discipline was more of an issue in elementary school for me than in a high school. Of course I was only at C.A. Brown, 1963, 1964—63, 64, yeah. Two and a half years. So it wasn't a long time, you know?

CA: And the mascot of C.A. Brown is the panther, right?

HF: Yes.

CA: Do you have any recollection of any sort of attachment to that mascot as sort of a Black Panther?

HF: No, I didn't see it as a Black Panther symbol. It was just a panther. Because I guess Black Panthers, the Panther Movement. When did it come in the mid to late sixties? Well, it,

CA: It, the platform sort of began and in 62 from what I've read 62.

HF: Oh, okay. No, I didn't, I don't think anybody ever associated the C.A. Brown Panthers with the Black Panthers. I remember distinctively. I remember distinctively that the whole Black Power Movement for me became part of my consciousness is when the Mexico, the Olympics in Mexico City in 1968, John Carlos and the other guy— what's his name. I remember seeing that because I used to get Sports Illustrated Magazine. And I remember seeing that on the cover at Sports Illustrated. And then I started hearing about Malcolm X. Now of course we were at the Naval Base in Guantanamo. So a lot of what we got was sort of filtered through the military news service, armed forces, radio television. But I, I remember we knew we got those stories, the stories of Reverend King, Martin Luther King's assassination got—was on the base television and radio newspapers.

And I remember that was the first time I'd heard my father curse. He said "damn!" he pounded his fist. When it came on the television that evening, we're sitting around the table eating dinner and he pounded his fist. He went, "damn!" It shocked me because I never heard him say a bad word. You know? You never cursed at. He never cursed in the house. Of course, I'm sure he did because he was a sailor, you know, sailors, but he—and I think a tear came to his eye because. I think Reverend King represented a lot of hope. People were putting a lot of hope in that movement and it was all in an instant dashed same as with Kennedy's assassination. And then, when I came back to Charleston in August of 69, then that's when I started to get reintegrated or caught up with what had gone on while we were gone relative to the civil rights movement. And more importantly, what had just recently happened in Charleston with the hospital strike in 1969 because it

ended just a few months, a few weeks before I returned to the United States in August of 69, you know?

CA: Well going back to, uh, C.A. Brown, do you recall, um, any teachers that sort of were more supportive or encouraging of you to maybe based on your grades encouraged you more into education or push you a little bit harder in, in that like,

HF: Well, I'm thinking. George Kenny was very nurturing, he was our band director and I spent obviously a lot of time with him. For whatever reason, the nurturing was more at Buist for me. Rose Randolph was my first and second grade and I guess as a result of her being a member of Emmanuel AME Church, which was right across the street, she had more of an interaction with my grandmother and seeing to it I got what I needed. What I remember distinctively, I think it was Mrs. Randolph who alerted my grandmother, that I needed glasses. So, because I was squinting or I couldn't see the board and, and the word got back home that I needed glasses and we went down to—I think it was Jackson Davenport, which is still on King Street.

HF: I think that was a store or there was an optometrist in that spot and in the 1956 and that's when I started wearing glasses. And then, Mr. Brown, I forgot Mr. Brown's first name, he's still alive, he lives in Mount Pleasant, you know, a Black male because there were strong Black males in the school—this is at Buist. I'm sure that there were teachers at C.A. Brown that were nurturing and pushed us or pushed me. But I really don't remember anyone individual with the exception of George Kenny, who was always—he as a music teacher, he was very hands on, with what he needed or what he was trying to give you. Whether or not, and I guess maybe there were lessons, we didn't

know it, the coach, we don't know it at the time that he was teaching life lessons through music. And I guess the biggest life lesson is to be, is to practice, practice and be disciplined and pay attention. You know, you got to be in a band, you got to pay attention, and you got to be disciplined, and you got to practice. And all of those kinds of things carry over, into a successful career as an adult. Yeah. So I would say he would probably fit that model, you know.

CA: Would you say that the community was involved in C.A. Brown and vice versa?

HF: I don't recall any major things. I do remember that when we had musical events, people turned out. Politically, you know, all those kinds of things were probably kind of removed from us as children. What the School Board, the white School Board did and didn't do, or what the black parents and black administrators and leaders in the communities were demanding on the school board at that time I'd have to go back in the archives and read that. We weren't, there were no overt, not until about maybe 1963, that Charleston began to overtly exercise or call for a removal of, or asking for integrated public accommodations.

I remember just vaguely that, you know, by the time I started riding the school, the bus, the public bus, the SCE&G used to run the buses, the utility company, South Carolina Electric and Gas Company provided the public transportation. And you couldn't sit in the front of the bus, but I remember by the time we started riding the bus, I started riding the bus with my grandmother to go places. We could sit at the front of the bus and that wasn't a big deal. So I never really suffered from, or was put upon because of

segregation other than going to all black high school and elementary school. And I just thought that was the way it was, it wasn't a big deal.

And then more importantly, when the summer times came, we used to go to the beach. We used go to Atlantic Beach, which is up near North Myrtle Beach. And I told daddy, one time he took me to the beach and we're up at Atlantic Beach. And I looked around, I didn't see any white people. And I said, “Dad white people don’t come to the beach?” We had a good time at the beach, but you never saw any white people at the beach, everybody at the beach were black. I thought that was just the way it was, you know? So again, being a naive kid, you didn't know how the world was ordered around the question and the race and the color of one’s skin.

CA: So you don't remember, I guess the mood or anything like that at the school when integration was really pushed in 1963 or even 64?

HF: No, no, I don't remember. Because I know in 1963, Millicent Brown and others were going into Rivers [High School] and I've had conversations with Millicent, I think, we were so shielded from that. And quite frankly, I didn't know, even when we left Charleston in March of 1965, that was the month of Selma, you know, whether I'm sure my parents were aware of it, but they never really made us aware of it and what it all meant. And, but I do remember King's assassination being something that was very overtly expressed by my father. Other than that, I was just a normal kid, whether it was in Charleston or at Guantanamo, I was just having a good time going to school, hanging out with my friends, playing baseball, being on the band. So none of those things sort of, kind of touched, I think perhaps, maybe the kids who were a little bit older, maybe the kids

who were in the eighth grade and ninth, tenth grade, they probably were a more aware of those, those events that were going on in Charleston.

CA: So in your home, you guys really didn't discuss, maybe those sort of events, integration, or anything like that.

HF: No, I remember, well, we did discuss, I guess, as I got older. I remember my father talking about those issues when I got in seventeen, eighteen, nineteen. And of course, his one thing I can hear his one common refrain was “you can't trust Mr. Charlie,” you can't trust the white man, so that's what I grew up with, can't trust the white man—not that you—just be aware, you know?

CA: Was there an obvious pride that you remember about C.A. Brown just attending there?

HF: Yeah. It was a pride because we always thought we were better than Burke, Oh yeah. It was huge rivalry, we were better than Laing or Bonds-Wilson or Haut Gap. Oh yeah. Yeah. That was definite, you wanted to be the best. I remember guys, you wanted, and even there was a sense of pride when you wanted to represent your school, you wanted to look good on the field marching, you wanted the football team, I'm sure you talked to the athletes. They wanted to be, they wanted to win all the games, you know, but I know that we wanted the best band, while we, our uniforms had to be just—so yeah. It was a definite sense of pride. Yeah.

CA: Were there any band competitions that took place or was it just, you guys had performance at the games?

HF: There were always performances at the game. I remember there was all state competition, but that was for individual music proficiency, not band proficiency, like it is now school music proficiency. I don't remember the schools, all the schools coming together for band and competitions. No. Mr. Kenny. And he's still alive. You could ask him that question. Yeah. He would know. Yeah.

CA: Did you know Melissa Brown at the time?

HF: No, I didn't know. Okay.

CA: Did you know anybody else that started to attend, uh, integrated schools or

HF: Pushed for that? No. I didn't know all of that until later. And I didn't know that the pastor of the school or the church, Reverend, B. J. Glover, Benjamin Glover was—in the 1963 was leading a group of student to do sit-ins at the lunch counters downtown. I didn't know that. I do remember coming to think of it. It was quite of a dramatic moment. At least for me, we were at Emanuel. I think it was Emanuel and I was still somewhat small. Because I remember I used, I stood on the pulpit, not on I'm sorry, I stood not on the pulpit, in the pew, I had to stand up because I wanted to see what was going on. And what I saw was people, most of the people dressed in dark clothing suits, dark dresses. They were linked arm and arm like this. And they were singing “We Shall Overcome.” And the church was dimly lit and it was one of the most moving moments I'd ever experienced. The church was packed. There were people in the balconies, there were people in just about every pew. And I don't remember what the event was, but it was some big event and people were singing “We Shall Overcome.” And I had to have been

very young because I had to stand up. I had to stand in the pew to see what was going on. So I had to have been maybe, I don't know, nine, ten years old. Yeah. And that memory stuck with me. I wish I could remember. I wish I knew what that event was, but it was something that happened that people were coming together to, for unity to unite and they were singing “We Shall Overcome.” And that was a stirring moment to hear those collective voices sing that, that song, you know.

CA: So during school, you weren't really aware of the sit-ins or anything like that was occurring.

HF: No, people had the older boys wore their school jackets with their letters depending on the sport, and the girls, just dressed up, it was a big deal to be dressed up with the best fashions or the latest fashions from the department stores on King Street. But not, for whatever reason, that was never really something that I was consciously aware of, except for that moment at Emanuel, except for the moments that my father would come home and he would say “you can't trust Mr. Charlie,” and the fact that sometimes I would notice that there was an absence of white people in the neighborhood. And the only time you'd see white people, the firemen would come around, a police officer would come through or the insurance man would come through collecting the weekly premiums would knock in the door. And of course my father being in the Navy, we used to go to the naval base here in Charleston, get on the bus and grab, go up to the naval base. And then that's when I'd see a lot of white folks there, and the commissary and the cafeteria and the exchange, which is like the exchange, you knows is like a store. That's what you call the exchange in the commissary the food store, you know? So, no,

it’s just, my life was relatively, just a kid, wasn't aware of what was going on. Yeah. But now let me say this. When, after I got older and I came back and I was in college, then I started to vigorously ask people what was going on while I was gone to get caught up on the civil rights movement. And I joined the NAACP student chapter at USC and was sort of on the fringe, not directly involved in the anti-war movement, going with some of the rallies, you know, so

CA: Do you remember as a kid knowing that you were gonna attend college?

HF: That's an excellent question. That's an excellent question. I tell people all the time, my grandmother said, and she would not say, “if you go to college,” she said, “when you go to college, you're going to Allen.” At the time, Allen was the premier college for the, for the AME church, and still is in Columbia. And it was always drilled in my head that I was going to college. No questions asked no questions about it. You, so yeah, I knew I was gonna college. What I was gonna major in when I was younger. I didn't know. But later on I had some ideas where I wanted to major in either physics or journalism. So I liked the sciences, but I was a poor math student. So, I switched over to journalism to avoid being drafted in Vietnam after I got dropped out of school, flunked out of school. So I switched journalism. Didn't have a math, heavy math requirement in journalism. Yeah.

CA: So you came back in 69. How old were you?

HF: I was eighteen years old. Yeah.

CA: And then did you go directly to

HF: Yeah, well Allen the first year, and then USC. Yeah.

CA: Nice. So I guess, let's see. What age did you say you were in 63?

HF: It was 63. I was twelve and I turned thirteen at November. Okay.

CA: Yeah. From what I remember, that's the year that maybe I think USC started to desegregate or integrate. So were you, was USC on the map for you at all?

HF: I don't know if I was aware that there was a University of South Carolina. I don't, you know, because we were aware, at least I was aware of the black schools Benedict and Allen and colleges. Watching college football, if there was really any college football in 1963, I don't think there was college football, collegiate football was deal on television at that point. I just remember my grandmother before she lost her sight. She was an avid baseball fan and she used to watch the World Series and watch baseball games at that time were broadcast during the day. And I would come home and she'd be sitting in the living room, watching the baseball game on television during the daytime.

So that was not necessarily something that, now I did know in 1962, 1963, that there was a fan column in the newspaper and it came out every day. Because I was a paper boy, and I'd go down to Columbus Street. I used to sell the afternoon paper at the time was the Evening Post. And I remember of seeing John Kennedy's picture, I remember reading about the Bay of Pigs and the nuclear standoff between the Soviet Union and the United States and thinking, oh my God, the United, the Russians are gonna blow us off the face of the map, knowing that having been to the naval base on regular visits there, knowing that there were nuclear powered submarines at the naval station, the

naval base. So, and that made Charleston a very prime target for the Soviets. And I remember, and then I remember the amazement that, gosh, we're leaving Charleston, but gee, where now we're going to Cuba, the epicenter of the Cold War. Now how, how ironic was that? You know, so I was aware of keenly aware of those geopolitical situations, but to tell you the truth, I wasn't really aware that there was a University of South Carolina. So that wasn't something that really was discussed or something that I picked up in the newspaper.

CA: What years did you do the paper

HF: Specifically. Oh, when I was twelve, thirteen years old. Yeah. Seven, sixth, seventh and eighth grade. Me and Leon Bryant. We made a pact that we were gonna get paper routes. I think he got one for a little while, but I got, had my paper route. I used to deliver papers on some of the rep businesses on upper King Street and then over, towards Meeting Street and the Eastside. Yeah.

CA: Was that the Post & Courier?

HF: That was the Evening Post the afternoon paper. I did that after school when I got out of school.

CA: Yeah. Okay. Let's see that one. So you didn't know anybody that was actually doing the sit-ins or pro, did you have any contact with any of

HF: I know some people now, but I didn't know anybody there.

CA: So you went to USC and you majored in journalism. How long were you at USC?

HF: I left there in the spring of 72.

CA: And you came back here to Charleston?

HF: Yeah, I got a job, internship actually at The News and Courier in April of 1972.

CA: And, um, so coming back, I guess in 69, although you do just visited,

HF: Well, my parents were living here. Well actually when I came back in 69, my family, my parents and my brothers were still at Guantanamo. They didn't move back to the United States until 1970, 71. So I lived with my aunt who lived on the West Side of town, my grandmother's sister. And so then if I wasn't in Columbia, I was in there in Charleston until they came back and built a house on Wadmalaw

CA: Did you have any family members that then that went to, uh, like integrated schools or anything like that in Charleston?

HF: No. No, no. Everybody went to Burke or Simonton and my father went to Simonton.

CA: You said you have a brother?

HF: Yes.

C.A: And is he older or

HF: I'm the oldest.

CA: Okay. So then, did he attend Brown or no?

HF: No, no. They were little, they were very small. Yeah.

CA: So they, I guess, went to school on, uh, at the naval base? And is that why your parents stayed there a little bit longer?

HF: No daddy just got a job. He retired from the Navy, had a civilian job stayed a couple extra years. Yeah.

CA: Nice. Um, so looking maybe to now present time, or maybe I guess using today's perspective to look back—and you mentioned community and also just the changes that occurred that you felt occurred here in Charleston after you returned—do you think that maybe integration played any sort of role in, I don't want to say in the breakup of community or anything like that, but maybe

HF: I know where you're going. And that was a subject. I think what you're saying is to what extent desegregation hurt or helped the black community, right? And my argument is it hurt the black community. And that was one of the things I wanted to study, when got a fellowship in the academic year, 1992, 93, a journalism fellowship in the University of Michigan. And the focus of my study was that question. And I called it "the re-segregation of the black community" and my professors really kind argued me away from that issue. And I said, well, it's not a physical separation. I don't see that the

African American or the black experience in America is so intertwined with America, that you can physically separate yourself from America.

HF: You take the Garvey movement of the early nine hundreds When was it? early, 1920, 1910, the Back to Africa Movement. Yeah. And they were in the settlement of the Liberian Colony. Maybe some people, if you look at, I'd skip around, if you think about just people, physically Black people, physically wanting to leave America, you look at Acraa in Ghana. It is, it has according to what I've been told it has the—

Now just a little background in journalism and most reporters will tell you that there are three major journalism fellowships in the journalism profession may be more, but at least at the time when I was seeking a fellowship and a fellowship in journalism was an opportunity to get out of the newsroom and focus on a particular subject that you're interested in. And at the time, the Newman Fellowship at Harvard, the Knight Fellowship at Stanford, and the Michigan Fellowship at the University of Michigan. And it's an opportunity for you to get out of the newsroom for an academic year and do whatever you wanted to do whatever you want to do. And so I got, I applied for all three. I got accepted into Stanford and Michigan. I chose Michigan. And the three things I wanted to do was to take, have a trombone tutor so I could improve my trombone, my music proficiency. I wanted a Spanish tutor or take Spanish classes. So, I could say more than "*una cerveza por favor y donde esta el baño"* and because one of my great regrets as having spent five years at the Naval basic Guantanamo, all I could say "*una cerveza por favor y donde esta el baño."* And my third thing, having been away from Charleston and missing that those critical years in the civil rights movement, I did not experience it

myself. So I started, so I took classes on, civil rights movement, civil rights history, and all that kind of thing. And I was doing some reading and social and the social studies department, on African American experience in the United States and my thesis, or my idea was that Black people in America needed to regain or recapture that spirit that held us together during those years of segregation. Now, we were not segregated by choice. We were segregated by force, but in that period of time, we had institutions that did not survive desegregation. So somewhere in the equation, somewhere in this experience in America, there has to be some energy that could be recaptured and repackaged and put back into the Black community, to get people thinking about caring for the kids the way teachers cared for us when we were in school, for neighborhood's to be more cohesive, the way neighborhoods were when I was a kid. It was a very, for me—I found it a very difficult argument to articulate and support because people misconstrued what I was trying to get across was a physical separation from the United States. And as I was saying earlier, yes, some people decided to leave this country altogether. And you have as best, I've heard, just sort of informally that Acraa in Ghana, there are 50,000 people of African descent, African Americans. The 50,000 expat Americans living in Ghana and in Ghana, the government there, encouraged American migration, Black American migration to Ghana by doing certain things. So, yes, I'd think in some respect we lost in the rush to join America. We lost something and how you get that back, I don't know.

And I think there are probably anecdotal or pockets of American society, Black American society in which people are trying to recapture that. And I think you see that that black chart of school movement is one of the ways people are trying to get the Black kids and then get them involved with teachers who really, really care. And I know we

digress, but what I do once a week on Wednesdays, and I didn't do it this Wednesday because I got so many, a lot of things going on, I teach a little writing slash history, course it CDA Charleston Development Academy because I think what would've happened to me, if I was the kid who had a black male figure in my classroom to encourage me to study history and writing. So I do that once a week over CDA, you know, I don't know. And I'm sure the kids and I don't have the opportunity because I'm only there for an hour and a half. And each of these little afterschool programs are very short, but the faculty over there, they say just the presence that they have a black male in the classroom would mean a lot. So we talk about Gullah culture. We talk about Caribbean, the connection between this part of the United States and the Caribbean. We talk about civil rights. I talk, tell them about my experiences of growing up when I was their age growing up on the Eastside of the peninsula. But their experiences are much, much more different than my experiences as a kid, because they have the drug culture, they have the music culture, which is very, very harsh in its language and its lyrics. And they have, and I'm sure that they probably have had people in their families who have been the victims of some of the violence that we've experienced in the Gadsden Green projects where it is. So, yeah, I think we lost something in the rush to join mainstream America.

CA: Do you think, and then I'm guessing probably that you think that like movements like the civil rights movement in general or sit in movements and things like that created a unity.

HF: Yeah, it probably created a unity, but I'm sure there was a lot of jealousy and I've heard that there was, I've not studied it in depth, but I'm sure there was a lot of jealousy and we all know that Dr. King was not necessarily well liked by a lot of the black leaders and a lot of these local would you, he would encounter because they saw him as coming in and, and doing his thing and getting all the headlines and then he'd leave and go back someplace else. So, there was no, there was probably some jealousy and that's just function of human nature. And also, I've written about this and I may have said this maybe in a previous oral interview with this program being a person, being a Black reporter, always sort of feel like I was dancing on the edge of a razor because on the one hand you go into the Black community, some people really applaud you for gaining some professional success and going maybe where, where Black people had not been before. But then some people would call you an Uncle Tom for working for the white newspaper. And then if you go into interview or a community in a situation, you have to interview someone white, you hear the N word. So, you know, so it's kind of a double edged sword, you sort of, kind of walk about it wasn't that way in every case. But you had extremes and, and I've experienced both extremes, but most of the experience were quite pleasant and I did it for thirty four years and I really, really enjoyed it.

CA: The reason why I ask you about the movements is because I'm curious to know, um, with the recent development of the Black Lives Matter Movement, do you think that in your personal opinion, that there's enough steam and sort of unity there to start maybe a ball rolling in unifying the African American community?

HF: I would hope so, but I hope that it's not necessarily around protesting and saying black lives matter guess black lives matter, but we can make a difference. If we start exercising the right to vote, then that's where you're gonna start to see some change. All these things and these shootings, all so depressing all around the country, you really are so saddened by them. Maybe time you turn on the radio or turn on the TV or pick up a newspaper, it's sort of like a repeated an unarmed black man was shot by police, just, and then, then the situations are different. But I hope that will galvanize people to start, being able to understand that maybe it's at the ballot box, you can start to make a difference in some of these situations.

CA: All right. Well, I've actually gone overtime.

HF: Oh, you did. Do I get extra? You gonna pay me? I'm just kidding.

CA: But the question that I finished off with my last interview, which may or may not, um, work for you since you did not finish attending Charles Brown. But, um, the question is, is what do you feel the legacy of CA Brown High school is?

HF: Well, since I didn't finish it, I think the legacy, like any school where you had black teachers, who had been prior to their professional positions as teachers, they knew what it was. They knew what it was going to be necessary, what would have to happen to prepare us for life beyond Ansonborough life beyond whatever neighborhood we lived in. And so I think they came with a sense of purpose, much more beyond that of the days educators, because they lived an experience that they did not want us to live, have to live through. They knew that when we left C.A. Brown, that we would have to go through a,

somewhat of a different crucible because they were working in an all-black environment, but we were gonna have to work in an integrated environment. And just as I said, my integrated environment in the newsroom, well, my newsrooms weren't necessarily all very integrated were mostly white. But when you go out into an integrated community, you meet white and black people, and you're gonna be met differently depending on that individual's attitude towards you. So to be succinct, I think the people, the teachers, the legacy of the teachers, they were preparing students for a much different world than what we are experiencing now. And I think perhaps, maybe unfortunately in America, we might be, we need teachers like that, even now, because I remember when we know everybody was saying, "gosh man, you know, Mr. Obama's, election of presidency in 2012, now we're in a post racial America". We're not in a post racial America. No, no, no. We're probably in the issue of race has become so politicized and it's become sharper, and the differences. And so, I think teachers of this era going to have to prepare students just like the teachers of that era prepared us at that time to be mindful of the fact of the differences and that we're going to be perceived different and we're going to have to handle ourselves differently. And you know, one of the things my father always used to say, and I'm sure it's a thing that every father at that time told their sons and their daughters "you're gonna have to work twice as hard to get half as much." And nothing has, hasn't changed. You have to work twice as hard to get half as much, you know? And that's the legacy of C.A Brown.

CA: Well thank you very much. I really appreciate you sitting down here and talking with me, enjoyed it.

HF: Good. Okay.

End of recording

MLL 2/18/2022