

# Brenda Smith

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Fulton County Schools Archives, Teaching Museum South, Hapeville, Georgia

*Brenda Smith is a native of College Park, Georgia, having grown up there in the 1950s and 60s. She attended Jefferson Franklin Beavers Elementary School, South Fulton High School (8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades) and Eva Thomas High School (10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>), where she graduated in 1967 – a member of the second graduating class from that school. After high school, Smith pursued a degree in Psychology at Spelman College and subsequently, worked in the entertainment industry for 37 years.*

**Michael Santrock:**

So, what do you have?

**Brenda Smith:**

I have an article. I don't, it doesn't have the year on it. But this is me. And Gary Greer and Raymond Pugh. We were given a citation from the mayor for a stop smoking campaign trying to get teenagers not to smoke. And we ran it for a year. This is our first year at Eva Thomas. And I was 11th grade, and they were 10th grade.

**MS:**

You don't remember the year exactly.

**BS:**

Okay, so if I graduated in '67, then that was '66...

**MS:**

So, you did graduate from Eva Thomas?

**BS:**

Yes.

**MS:**

In '67.

**BS:**

Yes. I was in the second class, the second graduating class. And oddly enough, I don't know if anyone has shared this with you. But the first graduating class of Eva Thomas never wanted to be recognized as that. They always joined with their South Fulton classmates. Yeah, because they actually spent more years at South Fulton than they did at Eva Thomas, but ours was, my class was kind of even. We were two years at South Fulton, eighth and ninth grade. And then 10th, 11th and 12th. We transferred to the new school.

**MS:**

And of course, South Fulton was all the way to first grade, right? Wasn't it?

**BS:**

Well, not when, not when we were there. That was during my parents' time. When South Fulton was like the school, yeah. Yeah, but we had elementary schools put in in College Park. First there was Beavers. Jefferson Franklin Beavers. And then it started to I guess, overflow or had, you know so many kids. They set up Avery.

**MS:**

Sophie Avery.

**BS:**

Yeah, yeah. And then they even put a third one. I can't even remember what it was. But

**MS:**

and that this third one would have been for Black students only at the time to or it would...

**BS:**

No, I think it was at the beginning of integration.

**MS:**

Got it.

**BS:**

Yeah, it was over on Herschel Road, by the way I can't remember was the name of that school was. But anyway, I mean, they took the whole building down and everything. Well, just like Avery and Beavers, you know, all of the actual buildings are gone. And it was too far out of I wasn't in that district. That was, and I wasn't even in elementary school, or anything. Then when they put it up, I was already graduated and out. [laughs]

**MS:**

Right? Oh, yeah. Graduating of 67. That's really when they started...

**BS:**

This is the news article that I wrote for the *Atlanta Daily World*. Portia Scott was the daughter of Mr. Scott, on the board back there. She was our advisor, the teenage advisor, for all of us who wrote. But that was one of the articles and...

**MS:**

This is relation to Coretta.

**BS:**

No. The family of the *Atlanta Daily World*.

**MS:**

Right. Right, right. I'm sorry. No, no, Scott.

**BS:**

Oh, no, I think I think Miss Coretta was from Connecticut. She was from somewhere up north.

**MS:**

Sure.

**BS:**

Um huh. That was just like a day in the life of the school.

**MS:**

Would you mind before you left if we copied these?

**BS:**

Oh, no, yeah. That's why I brought it. I thought I thought, you know, that was great. And this one was really great. And this one is an article. And I guess we'd have to give credit as far as this person, Larry Smith, who was my cousin. Oh, he graduated from South Fulton. But he was one of the first people who went to the war from our, from College Park. He went to Vietnam. And he wrote this and sent it back. He, he got to be a pretty big officer in the Marines. I know he was a corporal for a long time. But when he came out of the Marines, I think he was a sergeant. So...

**MS:**

My father was in Danang, a year later.

**BS:**

Wow. Yeah, that was that was a pretty, it kind of ravished our little area. You know, it just took all the available guys away.

**MS:**

Yeah. The draft?

**BS:**

Yeah. The draft. Yeah. Yeah.

**MS:**

That's interesting.

**BS:**

And so, it was very interesting that the *Atlanta Daily World* did a did this article on him. He actually sent it back kind of letting people know that they were all right.

**MS:**

Yeah. And he talks about why he's fighting. It's cool... Is Larry is your cousin? You said your first cousin?

**BS:**

Uh huh, he was my cousin. He's passed on since now.

**MS:**

Great. We'd love to have a copy.

**BS:**

Okay, cool. I thought it would be good to, to bring that. My mother had all of these things in a photo album.

**MS:**

Right. Most people do that or did that... and the newsletter?

**BS:**

This is from one of the churches in the area. A church, a Methodist Church. That was Laster's Chapel. They told me that Mrs. Dudley, Emma Dudley has come over. Well, this was her church.

**MS:**

She mentioned it.

**BS:**

Did she?

**MS:**

I'm pretty sure,

**BS:**

Yes. And they had a great youth program that children from other churches participated. And so, I thought that this was just a good representation of the College Park area. Yeah. Knowing that the kids got more than the education from the schools. They were educated in terms, in the churches as well.

**MS:**

I'm glad you said that. Because that's a theme that's come out in everything that I've learned from, from the Dudley's...

**BS:**

Oh, her husband came with her? He was our teacher, too. Yeah. Before they were married. They were our teachers in high school.

**MS:**

We recorded their story and how they met at the.... but I've, even when it came down to and I'm sure you're familiar with the, the integration and Eva Thomas, the sit ins and stuff. The church was a place like a kind of a headquarters. And not, not Lasters, so much as it was Friendship,

**BS:**

Friendship. That was my church.

**MS:**

Was that your church?

**BS:**

Yes.

**MS:**

So yeah, so I've kind of gotten, I've gotten that kind of that side of things. It was very much that church slash school education...

**BS:**

That would mean someone talked to you about Miss Lottie Miller. Yeah, because she was kind of like, the community savior. She was kind of like the community activist that made sure that we didn't hold our heads down. All the children, not just her children. She was that way about; she was that way about College Park. Just wanted us to be proud of where we came from.

**MS:**

Great. Yeah. Well, so um, thank you for these kind of, we'll make copies before you leave. And I do kind of the way we've been doing this as kind of like we're doing now is kind of a conversation. And I don't want to stop if you want to share anything that I don't ask about. Please feel free to.

**BS:**

Okay.

**MS:**

There are some topics that we'd like to introduce and talk about. And so, you know, I'll get to those. But I don't want you to feel like we have any kind of structure just because I have a sheet with questions on it. But the first thing I've been really getting everybody who's come in to talk about is their, their, their early childhood, where you're from, tell me about your family when you were a child, your parents, siblings, and where you were.

**BS:**

Oh, wow. Well, we grew up in College Park. Yeah, we grew up in College Park. My mom and dad grew up in College Park, as well. My dad, and I could have brought some pictures of them when they were young. And we were just kids and they would carry us along to wherever. We finally got a car, then they didn't have to make sure that we would pair, walking along with them. But we used to be a very close-knit family. My dad was an only child of us in a single parent household. So, he didn't want his children to experience that. He wanted the nucleus of the family to always be together. So, I had three brothers and me. Right. And I was very well protected in the town.

**MS:**

Where were you in line? Were you oldest? youngest?

**BS:**

I was the second oldest. My brother. I have one big brother. And then me and then two, knuckleheads. Right. [laughs]

**MS:**

That's okay, I have two knuckleheads too.

**BS:**

But yeah, so I had to, I had to be a big sister a lot. But that was good, too. You know, that was a good thing because my big brother taught me how to be the older sibling. He taught me how to care for them and look out for them and stuff because he always looked out for me. Um, let's see. What else about us.

**MS:**

What did your father do for a living? Your mom too.

**BS:**

He, he in the, in the early years. As far back as I can remember, he worked in construction. He worked for a man in College Park, Mr. Holly; and Mr. Holly's business was plastering the insides of houses and buildings. And so, he taught my dad from a young man how to do that. And after he stopped, retired, I guess that's what you would say now, but he just stopped working. He got old and did, so my dad did it. And my dad had a crew of guys who looked up to him as a boss. And they'd get on my dad's truck and go and plaster houses for people. My dad took his team, his group of guys, and they worked for Mr. Herndon and put, in doing insides of houses in Atlanta and everything. So, he did that until plastering kind of went its own way, when sheet rock became the material that everybody wanted to use. And so, he had to start eventually letting people go, and then he was just doing little small plastering jobs himself, which wasn't paying the bills until he got a job at a warehouse. I don't know if you've ever heard of a grocery store chain called Big Apple.

**MS:**

Nope.

**BS:**

But that was a southern grocery store chain. And they had their warehouse in the West End. And so he got a job there working on the docks at that warehouse. And he eventually became the warehouse manager from over years of, you know, working there. I think he worked there like 40 years.

**MS:**

Oh, wow.

**BS:**

And retired from there.

**MS:**

So, he started working, he stopped doing plaster and started working there. You were, how old? Were you out of the house already? Or were you young?

**BS:**

I was young. But he retired. He was well, I mean, he was still working there when I left to go to college, and then never came back. [laughs] He was, he was there for like I say, I think it was 40 years. So, when I was working, after I started working, he was, he was there. He retired from there. And then he got a job at Sears after he retired from there. And then he worked at Sears for a little while. Then he got a job at the Atlanta Auto Auction. And he worked there 17 years.

**MS:**

Renaissance man.

**BS:**

Yes. And then he retired from there. He just had to work. He was a, he was a working man. He wasn't a sit down and be retired kind of guy.

**MS:**

So did your... did your mother work when you were young too?

**BS:**

My mother didn't work when I was very young. But she did work. She started working when I was like, third or fourth grade, or something. Our house, like I said was Ross Avenue. I don't know if you caught that when I was coming down the hall.

**MS:**

Yes.

**BS:**

Ross Avenue was kind of I don't know, it was almost the center of the community. But it was we lived on the hill on Ross Avenue. Down the hill to the left was Jefferson Franklin Beavers Elementary School. So, we all walk to school every day. And then when they built the new high school, Eva L. Thomas was down the

hill to the right. And we walked to high school so but for those two years that we went to South Fulton we had to ride the bus. We had to ride the bus.

**MS:**

Because that was all the way in East Point.

**BS:**

Yes, it was in East Point. And there were a few bus stops, one of which was Ross Avenue. And my brother and I went there. Now my brother, my big brother graduated. South Fulton. He was a full two years ahead of me. So, he graduated before Thomas...

**MS:**

Before Eva Thomas was built.

**BS:**

Yes.

**MS:**

So, for our researchers who may be listening to this recording, South Fulton High School was the, and you can correct me if I'm wrong. It was the only high school for Black children in the south...

**BS:**

...in the South Fulton area, which included Hapeville, College Park, Fairburn, Red Oak, East Point, Union City; it was like seven cities that all had to bus their kids to South Fulton, that was something, huh. [laughs]

**MS:**

We do know stories I've learned from in here. At the same time, South Fulton was the school for the south part of the county, there was a school called Bailey-Johnson up in Alpharetta. And before that was built, and you can I don't know if you know anything about this history, that children, Black children had to actually go into Atlanta to Booker T. Washington.

**BS:**

Yes.

**MS:**

To go to high school, if they wanted a high school education...

**BS:**

Exactly. and they had to find their way there. So, my mom and dad were in that era.

**MS:**

So, your parents were both from College Park as well?



**BS:**

Yes.

**MS:**

Ok.

**BS:**

They were born and raised in College Park. My dad's mom, who raised him, was the fourth of 11 children. And all of her siblings helped her to raise my dad. Yeah.

**MS:**

It takes a village.

**BS:**

...takes a village. It really does. Really does. Yeah. So, my mom though, on the other hand, my mom was a child of a sibling in a family of not 8, 8 boys and girls. And her, her mother. Well, her father died when she was very, very young. And her mother couldn't raise out the children. And so, she and a couple of her other siblings were set to live in. I don't want to say an orphanage. But it was a home called Carry Steele Pitts.

**MS:**

Oh, yeah, I've heard of Carry Steele. I don't know where I've heard of that.

**BS:**

It still exists in a way but not like it was then. It was just to assist families who couldn't handle all their children, who couldn't give them a proper home. So, she was there for a few years or her teenage years, until my dad decided she should come back. And literally, he went there and got her and married her. She was like, 17. Yeah.

**MS:**

The rest as they said they say, is history.

**BS:**

...is history. Yeah. And they were married for 63, 64 years? They both have passed now. But, but yeah, they were married for like 60 some odd years.

**MS:**

So, for most of your, your childhood, then you would have had six members in the household, or did you have other family that lived with you? And I'm speaking your parents.

**BS:**

...and my brothers and me,

**MS:**

Your brothers and you?

**BS:**

Yes.

**MS:**

So, it was most the time it was six people in the house?

**BS:**

Yes. Yes.

**MS:**

So um, obviously, we kind of, we archive the history of the school system and people whose you know, alumni of our school system. So, I'm going to, now at this point, kind of talk about JF Beavers Elementary, because we find we found that to be kind of a fascinating story. And as far as Jefferson Beavers himself, being a postal worker and a community... I don't know how you say it; just a, an educated... supporter of education, right in that community.

**BS:**

He was a very, we used to call him a very dignified man.

**MS:**

Did you meet him?

**BS:**

I did not. I met his two sisters.

**MS:**

One of them wrote a biography... of him.<sup>1</sup>

**BS:**

Oh, wonderful. I didn't know that. I didn't know that.

**MS:**

That's where I learned what I learned about him.

**BS:**

But they were dignified, they were the kind of people that made you want to be better; that made you want to learn and see the world and not just be trapped within Harvard Avenue and Princeton Avenue, you know, but to know something. They were the ones who, his sisters, were the ones who started this civic and

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<sup>1</sup> Correction: Beavers' daughter, Lillian Lydia B. Garnett, wrote *Tower of Strength: A Biography of Jefferson Franklin Beavers* (1975)

education league in College Park, which raised money to help kids who wanted to go to college have scholarships.

**MS:**

I see.

**BS:**

Yeah. So, they were great. His sisters were great. And I guess he was pretty great, too. You know...

**MS:**

...just from what I've read, but yeah. When you were you were young and going there, did you have a sense of who he was then, when you were young as a student there?

**BS:**

Yes. We all had to have, we had, you know, different... I would say... not so much as courses from a book. But we all had to learn certain things about where we were from and what the significance was. And so, Mr. Beavers was a big part of that. We didn't have Black History Month. We had a teacher, Mrs. Benson. I don't know if anybody... Benton, Benton. I don't know if anybody knows about her the first. But she became the principal of Jefferson Franklin Beavers when I was there. And she made sure that we learned about the the different, you know, people in the community who stood out, who were good, what they called good people in the community. And so, we learned about Mr. Beavers from there. And we learned about how he wanted all children... And I don't think he had any children, did he?

**MS:**

When... did... you told me about his sisters a second ago? Right? Okay. He had two daughters.

**BS:**

Okay. Yeah. Okay.

**MS:**

So, um, that I was mistaken. It was one of the daughters that wrote...

**BS:**

...that wrote the history of him. Okay.

**MS:**

We have a photograph of them, when they're presenting. I don't know if you recall a portrait being, a portrait of him.

**BS:**

In the school? Yes.

**MS:**

It's here.

**BS:**

Oh, wow.

**MS:**

I'll show it to you. In the hallway. We also have a picture of, of his daughters when they were dedicating the school.

**BS:**

Okay. Oh, wow.

**MS:**

So, he did two daughters. I can't remember their names right now.

**BS:**

Okay. But, yeah, he was he was one of the ones that we always kind of, I don't know, say paid reverence to. But, you know, we always gave the respect of having something, I can't remember his birthday. But we used to do an assembly. We called it an assembly, where all of the grades got together in the auditorium. And at one of those... his... you know, it could have been, it could have been his daughter that came to the assembly and spoke.

**MS:**

...and spoke?

**BS:**

Yes. And spoke to us. I'm thinking it really could have been his daughter, because she was older than we were, a lot older than we were, but I thought she was... I don't know, I thought it was his sisters. But I think they were members of Mount Zion.

**MS:**

That's the other church?

**BS:**

Yes, yes. But still, we had all of these churches were on Harvard Avenue. And so, we had to learn also about why all of the, we were called College Park.

**MS:**

Right.

**BS:**

And then we started to realize after a while, when you go through the, the actual walk of the city, 90% of the streets were named after universities. And it was, it was something interesting to learn about those

schools, you know, and what they meant; and what they were all about. And, you know, we had a college of sorts, in College Park. Cox college.

**MS:**

It was a female college.

**BS:**

Well, I think it started out as like a religious college and then it was probably female, but there towards the end before they shut it down. It was, what do you call it? Coed. Yeah.

**MS:**

Do you? Do you remember? So you remember the college? Do you remember where it was?

**BS:**

It was over...

**MS:**

What's there now, i guess...

**BS:**

Some houses or something, but it was over near where College Park High School was over in that area.

**MS:**

Oh, okay.

**BS:**

Off of Main Street. And...

**MS:**

...what's McClarin now for people who don't know... Yes. McClarin. I assume now. Oh, College Street. Yeah. It was over there. Of course. Where else do you put a college?

**BS:**

[laughs] But I was trying to think of the name of the street. Okay. College Street. Yeah.

**MS:**

You've, you've mentioned just a minute ago that... I think you said Miss Benton didn't want or it may have been Beavers... she said didn't want young people to think of themselves as confined to between Harvard and Princeton. Was that the Black neighborhood of College Park? Or was there? It was a divided town?

**BS:**

Yes, it was very divided. And Rugby Avenue...Rugby Avenue was the beginning of white College Park, as we called it. Atlanta Avenue and all the streets that ran right up to Rugby, were, that was the Black community. And then going down Harvard... no, Princeton, Harvard, Columbia. Think about those universities.

**MS:**

Right.

**BS:**

That was, those were the main thoroughfares that ran through the Black community. And Main Street was the dividing line. Because they were all businesses on Main Street, and then the railroad track and then the other side of town. Yeah.

**MS:**

What do you remember fondly about living in College Park back? I guess this would have been the 1950s or early, late 50s. When you were at JF Beavers, maybe early 60s.

**BS:**

I think that the best parts of College Park were kind of centered around Mr. Wayman and Miss Bessie Brady.

**MS:**

The Brady's Gym?

**BS:**

Yes.

**MS:**

I've heard all about Brady's Gym.

**BS:**

Mr. Wayman, it was just... ah, goodness. To me, he was like Mr. Beavers was to my mom and dad's era. Mr. Wayman cared about all the children. I mean, every single one. They had two boys, but oh, my goodness, they just cared about all the children. And we used to be denied going up the hill, to the recreation center in College Park. And so, he petitioned for us to have our own, our own gym in our own neighborhood, and got it. And we were like, "What? We're going to have our own place to play basketball? and our own swings?" And he was just great. He was great.

**MS:**

Did he own it?

**BS:**

So no, the city owned it? Yeah, the city on did he actually worked for the city of College Park. But he managed that gym until he passed away. And his wife, man, she stayed there. I mean, they stayed there,

they did it. They had camp in the summertime. So, we always had someplace to go and something to learn and something to do and to keep our bodies in good shape and our minds and to give us something to do instead of just being in the street. And I think that anybody who grew up in College Park would have to say that Brady's Gym; and they didn't call it Brady's Gym in the beginning; they eventually named it that because that's what we continued to call it. We called it Brady's Gym.

**MS:**

Kind of spoke it into being.

**BS:**

Yeah, right. Yeah. And so, it was like recreation department number something or whatever. But we just called it Brady's Gym until, you know that's what they finally put on it; and they have signs now with... that direct you to Brady's Gym and it's still there. And his, his nephew ended up running it. One of my classmates ended up coming back home from college and everything and running it after they retired and then after they passed.

**MS:**

What were the kinds of things, I mean obviously, you think of, when you think of gym you think of athletics maybe volleyball, basketball or what have you.

**BS:**

Oh, yeah, there was all of that.

**MS:**

Was there, did you all do other things there? You had a camp there? Was it mostly sports?

**BS:**

Oh no, we had a camp where we learned how to do arts and crafts. We had a little choir where we learned songs. We were just singing one of those songs the other day at Thanksgiving. Me and my brother and his children and grandchildren. And they were like, "What?" Like, okay, you don't understand anyway. [laughs] It was funny...

**MS:**

I find myself doing that a lot lately.

**BS:**

Yes. Thinking about, you know, things that you grew up with. So that was one of the things we did that and we get on buses and take field trips. And, you know, we go to other places in Atlanta. We, like we went to Etowah Mounds. I think that's in Macon. And we went to, what's the Indian Reservation up near Rome, not quite to Rome... maybe it's Cartersville.

**MS:**

It's Cartersville. I think the one in Macon, is that Ocmulgee?

**BS:**

Oh, yes.

**MS:**

Etowah is the one near Canton...

**BS:**

Okay. That's the one we went up there. We went up there several times. Miss Bessie, with you know, we had to get permission slips from our parents and the whole nine yards. But we would pack our little sandwiches, and then we get on the bus that the city would provide, for us to get on the bus to go. And we would go on field trips and learn stuff. I mean, it was not just the fun. I mean, well, that was should have been fun. But I'm saying it wasn't just a recreation, playing sports, it was a place of education for us to learn about those things, to learn about the Indians, to learn about other ways of life. So, Brady's Gym was a very focal point. And then after I became a teenager, he was successful in getting a swimming pool added. Wow. We all learn to swim back there.

**MS:**

How did he have so much? That couple have so much power and ability to organize and have this stuff come to be?

**BS:**

You know, that would really be a good question. I just don't know. But he just didn't take no for an answer.

**MS:**

I guess not.

**BS:**

He just didn't take no for an answer. He always fought for the kids, for us to get more equipment for us to be able to have basketballs that had, would hold the air instead of the flat ones that wouldn't hardly bounce. And we had those at first. It was like we got the cast-off equipment. But he would, you know, he just kept pushing for us to get new equipment. And he was just he was great like that. And, and his wife too, Miss Bessie. I mean, she was great. And she pushed for equipment in different ways. She pushed for arts and crafts materials for us to work with, for us to know about textiles and know about how to loop a rug. And to know, we've done all that stuff. And I mean, she was great. And then her sister, Miss Carrie O'Neal was the one who got us into singing. She was, she could have been an opera star, I think. But she only sang in church and with us. But you know, they were just great. It was a really great family. And Mr., Mr. Brady's brother, he had one brother, and they were all kind of entrepreneurial. His brother owned the first dry cleaners for us to go to in College Park. So, we didn't have to take our things up the hill. You know? And I say up the hill, because once you go down Harvard or Princeton, it's kind of a slope. And we used always refer to it as going up the hill, up Harvard hill, up. That was just went up then we see...



**MS:**

When I think of the times that I've been to College Park... so I'm assuming you're speaking of that, where, where there's Main Street and it kind of goes down to where College Park Elementary is now. Is that, is that the hill you're talking about?

**BS:**

Yes. That's Princeton. Yeah, that's going... yeah, that's exactly. And it doesn't seem like so much of a hill now that you're, you know, you're grown but then it was, it was, and it was a big separation that doesn't even seem to exist now. But going up that hill was something that we rarely did. We had our own doctor, Dr. Otis McCree, who was an extremely educated man, who could have been a doctor in a big hospital anywhere. But he set up his office in College Park on Harvard Avenue, so that all of the residents there would have medical care. And he had a nurse, nurse Gentry, who was just absolutely wonderful. She convinced us that we should not be afraid to go to the dentist, you know, because that wasn't something that we did. It wasn't, you know, for the most part in the Black community. Kids didn't go to the dentist. And then after a while, they started sending the health mobile down into the neighborhood. And it would be to get booster shots... and who wanted to do that? [laughs] Every now and then, the dentist would be on the mobile. You'd get your teeth checked. But if any major work had to be done, you had to go to his office, which was in Atlanta.

**MS:**

Which was quite a trek back then I guess.

**BS:**

Oh, my lord.

**MS:**

How'd you get there? Bus?

**BS:**

Bus, yeah.

**MS:**

Well, so when you were young, and you were at JF beavers, were there any... What were you thinking? You're thinking this, I want to be this one day. I mean, because it seems like every kid, you know, when there's it's like... the younger ones have the dream. And then with the teenagers like, I don't know. Yeah, what did you want to do?

**BS:**

What did I want to do? When I was at... Well, I thought I was going to be an excellent French horn player and play in the symphony one day, but that didn't happen. [laughs]

**MS:**

Still have your French horn?

**BS:**

No. It was uh, it was school property.

**MS:**

Oh, gotcha.

**BS:**

But that was so much fun. Mr.

**MS:**

Was this at Beavers or South Fulton?

**BS:**

This was at Beavers.

**MS:**

So you had you did have instruments?

**BS:**

Yes. We had instruments. And Mr. James Patterson was our band director. And he's now at Clark Atlanta University. But he was right there at JF Beavers. And I thought I wanted to play trumpet, because that was just you know, that was what my brother played. So, my big brother played trumpet. And that's what I wanted to play. But I didn't have the proper embouchure. And I learned that word from Mr. Patterson. Yeah. And so, he was like, "No, you don't have the right embouchure for the trumpet." My lips were too big. I found out what that meant later. But anyway, I'm glad, I didn't know what it meant. Sitting here nodding. Oh, I'm so glad, because I didn't know, and I had to find out. But I was perfect for the French horn. And that was great. And so, I learned to love the French horn.

**MS:**

Sounds like you're a musical family. Then if your brother played instruments, too.

**BS:**

Yeah, he did. And, and my youngest brother played drums, though, we should have had a band.

**MS:**

So, Beavers had a band? Did you all perform programs?

**BS:**

Yes, we performed like... Oh, yes. We had Christmas concerts. And we had May Day. May Day was a festival type thing.

**MS:**

What did that mean? So, I've seen a lot of pictures of Mayday programs where the maypole one of them is in front of Avery Elementary.

**BS:**

Oh wow. I'm probably in that picture. But we had, or was it in the in front of the extension of Beavers?

**MS:**

Now this one, you can see, you can see the school. I'm wondering if the pictures up here.

**BS:**

Okay, but if it was in front of Avery, then I wouldn't have been over there. But we, we learned the history of the maypole and that it came from Austria, I believe? And it was a celebration of springtime and the blossoms and all of that and when the snow was starting to melt, so we didn't know anything about snow melting. So, it had to have been from someplace. Yeah, but it was just a fun time that we all look forward to and you want it to be, if you wanted to be the little princess then you had to sell raffle tickets to raise money and, you know all that, and it was just a fun time. Yeah.

**MS:**

One thing I want to ask you, is it. So obviously you're going to school. Schools are very segregated. I mean, we can take that just from there being Black and white schools. Do you remember when you were a child, when you came to realize, hey, you know, there's differences and how that may have affected or impacted you?

**BS:**

Oh, sure. And that was really very early on, because I'm in, in fourth... fourth grade, maybe? We had a teacher at Beavers, Miss Hattie Ruth Chandler. And she was, oh, God bless her soul. She was extremely stern. If that's the word strict; maybe mean, but not mean. [laughs] But she was the kind of person who always pointed us out, away from our circumstances. She always pointed out the world to us. She always told us that there was something more out there. She was one of the ones who organized trips, when we were in the... when I was in the fourth grade, I went to Washington DC. We had trips, to go to the Capitol, and stay and visit the monuments and all of that. Yes, we definitely knew the differences. And we knew that there were some things that we were being denied. But it wasn't... she didn't do it with malice of intent, or, or hatred. She created a desire in us to want to see more and do more and be more and, and she was a component of the fact that if we put our best foot forward, that we wouldn't be denied. That it was going to happen. And she knew that even before, you know, integration actually took place. I don't know what it was about her. But she was great in that respect. And we would do things like... they would take us to the Atlanta Symphony, once a year. Those people in the band or the chorus, we would go and do things like that. So, we always knew that there was more and that we were going to be a part of it; we were going to be incorporated into the bigger world. And so, it was not... and you know what, and it just seems like there would have been resentment or, or... I don't know, a festering of ill will. But there wasn't, you know. This was our school. This was our place. We were privileged to have the things that we had, and we were going to be allowed to have more. And that's the way she made us feel all the time. Yeah.

**MS:**

It's harsh, but inspired, I guess a little.

**BS:**

Yeah, yeah. And in other words, don't show your butt. Don't act up. Don't do these things, because you're representing, you know, a people that have been working and struggling hard to get to this point. And you're on your way to something else, and don't mess it up when you get there. That was the kind of attitude, yeah.

**MS:**

So, you're, once you're finished at Beavers Elementary, you move on to South Fulton at this point, you're in eighth grade?

**BS:**

Eighth grade, uh huh.

**MS:**

So, what's... what's it like your first day at South Fulton? What stands out all these years later? What stands out?

**BS:**

Oh, the big girls who were mean, mean. They didn't want us to do anything and kept telling us that, "You're just a, you're just a freshman and you..." but, you know...

**MS:**

Did they call you sub freshmen?

**BS:**

You know, they just you know, they didn't... they didn't welcome us. You know, we were like we didn't count. So, I think that's the way what all kids. And that might even be the reason that they broke out and did middle schools, you know? Because that straight from elementary to high school was harsh. And that's all Black, Black and white or whoever. That's just a kind of a territorial thing more than anything. But I ended up feeling a little bit more welcomed at South Fulton and started to make friends.

**MS:**

Is it because your brother was already there was...

**BS:**

Probably.

**MS:**

Makes a difference.

**BS:**

Yeah, probably because he was... goodness. Oh, my goodness, he was something else. He was one of those brainiac type people and all the teachers loved him. And so, they would look at look out for me like so, "What do you know?" [laughs] So? "Can you do this math problem? Your brother could." Give me a break, you know.

**MS:**

"Why can't you be more like..."

**BS:**

I know, why can't you... Do you know how many times I heard that statement?

**MS:**

I know because, I have an older brother.

**BS:**

Oh, wow. And why can't you be more like him? Mike, shame on you. But South Fulton became a whole new area for me because it was high school. And we were exposed to so much more. And the basketball team got on the bus and went up and down the state and all the way down to you know, the bottom of the state and to the top of the state. And we were champs, and we were, you know, always everything. And so that's when I decided that I wanted to write and cover things. And...

**MS:**

Sports actually kind of inspired you to want to write about it, or is it?

**BS:**

Yes, yes. And then I got interested in radio, because at that time when I was in ninth grade, in Atlanta, there was a radio station. WAOK. It was AM, you know, didn't have FM radio stations. With Black music on it. There were FM radio stations. But I started getting interested in that because they had a teen show on WAOK at... on Saturdays, but you had to get there. You had to get downtown. And nobody from South Fulton, you know, was interested in going to represent us. I was like, "Wait a minute. We need to be there. We need to be on the radio too," just like Washington and Carver and Price and Turner. You know, I said we're schooling, we're winning basketball games. So, I ended up going down and volunteering for that. And there wasn't any pay or anything. And you had to get your own bus tokens and everything, transfer. Because you had to get off one bus and get on another one. I had to learn all that. So, I had to learn big Atlanta. But that was great. And then you know, I got the bug. I ended up in the entertainment industry for 37 years.

**MS:**

What did you do in the entertainment industry?

**BS:**

I managed artists, singers and bands.

**MS:**

Care to name any?

**BS:**

Well, goodness who? I started out my very first job was with Mr. James Brown

**MS:**

No way

**BS:**

Yeah, I was I met his manager, his actual personal manager at WAOK. And I used to get tickets to the concerts and stuff. And then when I'd get back on the next weekend and talk about the concert where I was and everybody was saying, "Wow, you were there? You were there?" And it just kind of got me in a real thing for that. But I did put it aside, went to college and blah, blah, blah. And then it came back around that I met the guy who ran the radio station when I was a kid.

**MS:**

WAOK?

**BS:**

WAOK. And he had become the general manager of the radio station. And just... you know, it was a good meeting, blah, blah blah, but all said and done, he introduced me to Mr. Brown's then promotions and marketing manager. And they were like, "You know, you talk so much, you'd probably be a real good... [laughs] promotions person." I was like, "I don't think so." Anyway, long story short, I was. And I became that, and they moved me from Atlanta, to Charlotte, North Carolina. And I lived there for 13 years. And then I met another guy at another record label: Warner Brothers. Mr. Brown was at Polygram... and Polygram moved me, Polly door[?], moved me from Atlanta to North Carolina, and then Warner Brothers moved me, hired me and moved me back from Charlotte, North Carolina back to Atlanta. So, I came back home.

**MS:**

So, it all started with South Fulton... WAOK...

**BS:**

South Fulton Lions at WAOK. Yeah.

**MS:**

Speaking of... this is before your time. This is their 1958 yearbook.

**BS:**

Oh, wow. There's the school. There's the gym. Oh, look. Oh, nice.

**MS:**

It's, oh, here's the gym. Here's another picture. Inside the gym. I don't know what year it is.

**BS:**

Oh, wow.

**MS:**

Have you heard of the Rosenwald Schools? Have you heard that term before?

**BS:**

No.

**MS:**

Okay. It was Booker T. Washington kind of teamed up with a Sears and Roebuck magnate back in the early 1900s. And his name was Julius Rosenwald. And his idea was to provide funds for communities to build their own schools or provide funds to school systems to help build schools for both Black children or rural children that might not have good schools, right? That would be in the one room kind of shack. Anyway...

**BS:**

Rosenwald.

**MS:**

Rosenwald. So, this Rosenwald Fund helped start South Fulton back when it was first built. Right. It was actually called East Point School at one point, and it was built using Rosenwald money. But anyway, I didn't know if you had a sense of that kind of history of that school. I think it had changed a lot by the time you went there, because you said, you told us it was just it was a high school by the time you were there. It was not an elementary.

**BS:**

Right. It was only high school eighth through 12th. And...

**MS:**

Was McClarin the principal when you were there?

**BS:**

Yes.

**MS:**

Tell me about Frank McClarin.

**BS:**

He was a big man. [laughs] He was a big man. And he walked down the halls with such intensity. He was a proponent, a proponent of us going to higher levels, even within the high school realm. He wanted us to participate in the national science achievement programs and see if we could get you know, certificates and

things in that. And the national math... and the Who's Who... first time I ever heard of Who's Who in America for high school kids was from Mr. Frank McClarin. He wanted to be sure that we had... he wanted us to have a great education. He was just so I know, he was he had it... he was an imposing figure. You know, when you saw him, you just shut up. And for me, that's a big... [laughs] That was a big thing. He was a... but I think he was a pretty good teacher. And I mean, you know, administrator and our assistant principal there at South Fulton, Mr. Gilbert, ended up coming to Eva Thomas. Yes, to be principal.

**MS:**

Well, that's a great. That's a great segue, because let's talk about Eva Thomas. And I do want to, you've been here about an hour, and I want to be respectful of your time. If you have a few more minutes, I would like to ask you about Eva Thomas.

**BS:**

Oh, yes, I would. I do.

**MS:**

So how old were you when you moved to Eva Thomas? Or what grade were you in, I guess.

**BS:**

Tenth grade. And at the we were, there was an 11th grade class and a 10th grade class, there was no senior class. The seniors, they did not force them to leave South Fulton. So, they stayed to graduate from South Fulton. So, I was in the 10th. And then the class ahead of me was the 11th. But we did not have a senior class the first year. So, we had a graduating class the very next year for, you know, our juniors. So, I guess I was what 16? Yeah.

**MS:**

Do you remember when they were building the school?

**BS:**

Do I?

**MS:**

Do you?

**BS:**

Yeah.

**MS:**

Tell me about that.

**BS:**

It was somewhat heartbreaking to me that they moved out people that, you know, we knew that we'd grew up with, a lady that used to fix my hair. You know, and her home had always been right there at the bottom



of Ross Street. But they moved her out, and they moved all of those people out along... the street to clear out that whole area to build the school. And I hate to say that, I mean, you know, that's progress, I guess. But it just kind of changed the community. It was the beginning of the change of our little nucleus world that was called College Park. For us that was called College Park for us... historic College Park for the Blacks, which is not the historic College Park that the signs talk about now, you know. But yes, I remember. And they built it so quickly. I remember when the law took place, and segregation was banned. And the law was specifically stated that a child could not go past a school in their community to go to another school. So, you thought that what they were saying was, they can't ship us out of College Park, past College Park High to go to East Point to South Fulton. But what it did, it gave the white community the impetus to turn up land and build a school right in our community, that we couldn't go past, to go into College Park High...

**MS:**

Eva Thomas.

**BS:**

Eva Thomas.

**MS:**

Interesting.

**BS:**

Yes. And it became, you know, the first Black high school in College Park.

**MS:**

That's very interesting. I did not know that. Do you ever remember... we have on file these... we call them choice forms. They sent these forms home. I don't know if they sent them home with students or mailed them to parents that gave families, students, parents... This was part of when the like the federal government was pressuring the Board of Education to desegregate. This was their answer to send home forms, with the knowledge that nobody would choose a different school. Did that make sense? Do you remember that?

**BS:**

Yes. And a part of the choice would have appeared to be ignorant on our parents' behalf, if they had chosen not to send us to a school that was right down the street, and brand new. And, you know, I'll bet so they, they put all of the things in place to kind of void the choice.

**MS:**

Right.

**BS:**

[laughs] You know, it's just you would hate to... you would hate to say, "No, I'm not sending my child to a brand-new school with brand new equipment and brand-new books and all of that," you know? It would

make you appear to be kind of stupid. So, they voided the choice that they set in place by building the school right in our neighborhood. So yeah.

**MS:**

It's... it's one of the things that I've been, I've come to learn... and I've learned by being in proximity to all these records and your stories like this and all these things. Though, if I had to convey the story to somebody, I would say it's so complex, because here in Eva Thomas, and you see this later with the sit-ins. This is a community school. This is a school, you've talked about community, the church, the school and all the families, the village, you know, that, that raising all the children together, kind of... so, there's a sense of pride in having that school. Right?

**BS:**

Yes.

**MS:**

...that you don't... because for years, you may have not had a great school to go to or you may have had textbooks that were recycled, or what have you. So now you finally got this great thing. So, it's very complex, because that great thing was put there to preserve a status quo.

**BS:**

Yes, exactly.

**MS:**

But we also... when it, when there's pressure and that school has to be, well, that school didn't have to be closed, but it was chosen to be closed. So that's when the community rallies. It's like, you can't take this right.

**BS:**

You've given it to us, we've chosen it. We've embraced it. And now you want to take it away. And that to me was the ultimate insult. That was worse to me than segregation. I don't care if you don't want me to go to your school. That, okay, so I'll get on a bus, and I'll go to South Fulton. And I don't care if you don't want me to go to your school and you build a school in my neighborhood. But now that you have, and now that you've named it after one of the most esteemed women in the community... Oh, my Lord, Miss Eva Louise Thomas? Huh! If you didn't learn piano from her, you didn't learn. Yeah. She was just absolutely amazing. And she was a stickler for people going to school in the civic education league that I talked about. She was one of the founders of it. And they made sure that if a kid made Bs, sometimes even Cs, they were going to college. They were going to go to somebody's college somewhere. She helped people fill out applications and apply for college. She got recommendation letters and things, things that some of us didn't know about. She was just gung-ho on that. And to put her name on a building, and to let us finish off our education there. And then to say, after all that, we've accepted all that, now you want to add insult to injury and close the school and take her name off of it. And not just close it. I mean, they tore it down, brick by brick by brick. And, you know, now it's a beautiful edifice there, standing there, I drive by it, sometimes now in my melancholy state, just to reminisce. But the fact that they changed a community's life and lifestyle, and then

denied them the privilege to hold on to that. That was horrible to me. And we had, with the help of Morris Dillard, God rest his soul. God rest his soul. He taught us how to do it in a more educated fashion, in the fashion of Dr. King... where we were just mad, and we were going to be down there and not... "You can't take this school! We're not going to let you." But he organized us, helped us get organized, and him and Miss Lottie Miller, you know, they help get the students organized. Of course, I was away at college. I had to come back.

**MS:**

Where you, were you... so you graduated in '67... these sit-ins took place two years later.

**BS:**

Yes.

**MS:**

Did you come back during the sit-in?

**BS:**

Yes.

**MS:**

Participate?

**BS:**

Yes, I came back. A lot of us did. Oh, yeah.

**MS:**

I had no idea that alum came back.

**BS:**

Oh yes.

**MS:**

I knew there was some parent participation and many of the students of course involved in this sit-in. Were you in the gymnasium? We have, I've seen old newsreel. clapping and singing

**BS:**

Yes. Voices. Yes. I'm one of those voices. Yes.

**MS:**

What stands out to you... Go ahead. I'm sorry.

**BS:**

Jessica Allen

**MS:**

...Allen. Now Muhammad.

**BS:**

Oh, yes, that's right. I forgot that.

**MS:**

No. Well, I'm saying that because I've we've talked to her already. And I want our researchers if they engage in both interviews...

**BS:**

She was wonderful with the students. She was, you know, she was a leader. She was, she was a leader in her way in, and I just admired her. But we just, we stuck it out. There were there were times when we had to be interviewed. The press came, you know. They couldn't believe that we were complaining. We had to get people down there. I'm still looking at these pictures... [laughs]

**MS:**

She's looking at Paul D. West. He's the superintendent of Fulton County Schools at the time. So you knew kind of who was doing what?

**BS:**

Yes.

**MS:**

Were you aware of the HEW, the federal government's pressure and all, all this push and pull going on?

**BS:**

Health, Education and Welfare. They did not understand why we were protesting. And even they, you know, it was like, "Well, you don't have anything to do with this one," one gentleman said to me. You're not even a student here. I was, I graduated here. This is my alumni. I am not just here to be here. I'm trying to tell you guys that you're ruining the lives of people, who you're taking away our history. It wasn't important enough to you, in the beginning to come down here, when we were denied access to College Park High. And now that we want to hold on to our own memory, you're saying that we're wrong, and we're not wrong, and we weren't wrong, then. It was just... it was really... you know, it was really bad. But we stopped them for a while. You know, we were able to stop them for a while.

**MS:**

Is there any specific memory you have about the sit-in? I know, there was also a sit-in at the Office of the Superintendent at some point. I know that... I think there was a march to the Cleveland Avenue building.

**BS:**

Yes.

**MS:**

Did you participate? Were you... or was that while you're still in college?

**BS:**

I didn't participate in that particular march. Yeah, I was. I was away college. But that was I mean, you know, just right up the road.

**MS:**

Were you at Spelman or...?

**BS:**

Yes. yes. I went to Spelman. And, you know, it was I think the most significant thing that I remembered about it was that... all the students, you know... the ones that didn't do well, the ones that might have flunked out... they still had a pride... we had a pride in keeping... in keeping it alive. It was something, that I don't know, we just seemed to be so strong together. You know, the bullies, the basketball stars, the... the choirs, leaders, everybody from all of the little nooks and crannies of College Park. You know, it wasn't so much that we were all wonderful and the school was all wonderful, but it was ours. It was ours. And we did good. Okay. I'm sorry.

**MS:**

No, no, no.

**BS:**

I didn't mean to get emotional.

**MS:**

No, it's okay, I had a box of tissues. I'm the one that should apologize.

**BS:**

You know? That's okay. I'm sorry.

**MS:**

No, not at all. Wow. So yeah, I got the I've gotten an impression when talking to all of you who have participated, how organized it was. And I'd imagine I don't know how much you saw the news media, newspaper or news accounts like on the TV. I mean, they were following it.

**BS:**

Oh, yeah.

**MS:**

Daily.

**BS:**

Oh, yeah. Oh yeah, they were.

**MS:**

Well, what do you take away from that? You know, as you look back at it? And what would you tell maybe our students or somebody younger about that? I guess the best question is, what do, what do you take away from that? What impression is it left? As you look back now? Is there a lesson, or...

**BS:**

I think that... probably the biggest lesson for me personally, is that it is always good to speak up for what you believe in. It is always good. No matter the final outcome, it is important to speak up for what you believe in. And there's somebody that is listening. It might not be the Paul D. Wests of the world. But somebody is listening. There was an... I don't remember this man's name, but he wrote a wonderful article about the resilience. And I remember that word forever. The resilience of the students, when they threatened to bring the police down, to move us off the campus... we stayed, we stayed. And we just kept telling them that we just want to be heard. And I think it's always good to speak up and speak out for what you believe in. And you know, even until this very day, even with every brick torn down from Eva L. Thomas High School Bearcats ground, even with that, people still remember that we didn't let it go easy. We didn't let it go and just shrug it off. We did let them know that that was wrong. And I think for that I'm proud. I'm proud of each one of my classmates, each one of the students that came after me that just spoke up. I'm proud.

**MS:**

The cool thing is, is that now we're here and you're sharing this, and our hope is to you know, that the that lesson that that message is going to be out there now it's preserved. Yeah, you know, yeah. Well, thank you. What else? Is there anything else that you want to share while we're recording that maybe I haven't talked about? I mean, you mentioned in the hallway, knowing the Kings, correct me if I'm wrong.

**BS:**

Yes. Dr. King's sister was my teacher at Spelman. Miss Christine. She's a very stately and elegant woman now. But she could crack the whip in school. [laughs] But that I definitely remember with great joy, being there. And another of my teachers had a very famous family member: Julian Bond's mother. Yes, she taught at Spelman. She was the librarian, and I had my first job under her. I was, you know, to clerk at the library. Got to make money, you got to eat. You know, scholarships are one thing, but they don't cover it all. So, that was all good and all that was a result... my going to Spelman was a result of Dr... I told you about Dr. McCree... his nurse, Nurse Jennings went to Spelman, and she introduced me to the Board so that I could get my scholarship.

**MS:**

And so, you went there on scholarship?

**BS:**

Yeah?

**MS:**

And you studied?

**BS:**

Yes. Psychology. Yes.

**MS:**

Wow.

**BS:**

Yeah. With double, a double major psychology and sociology. So, wow. But this has been...

**MS:**

Well, thank you.