

[0:00:00]

Moderator: Today's date is September the 27<sup>th</sup>, 1976. And I'm interviewing Mr. Harold L. Holliday, attorney. Good afternoon, Mr. Holliday.

Harold Lee: Good afternoon.

Moderator: First of all, can I have your full name, please?

Harold Lee: Harold, H-A-R-O-L-D, Lee, L-E-E, Holliday, H-O-L-L-I-D-A-Y.

Moderator: Where were you born?

Harold Lee: Muskogee, Oklahoma, on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of June, 1918.

Moderator: To your mother...

[0:00:35]

Harold Lee: James S. Holliday and [Eliza Bell].

Moderator: From where? Where was she from, first of all?

Harold Lee: My mother was born in Paris, Texas on a farm somewhere around Paris, Texas. And my father, I'm not sure.

[0:01:00]

Moderator: Do you know the location of the farm your mother was born on?

Harold Lee: No. She went to Mississippi from Texas.

Moderator: Do you know approximately what year that was?

Harold Lee: Uh-uh.

Moderator: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Harold Lee: One sister.

Moderator: What's her name?

Harold Lee: [Isola Olree]. Presently, her name is Richardson.

[0:01:28]

Moderator: And how old is she? Was she older than you or younger?

Harold Lee: She is 59. Will be 60 on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1916.

Moderator: Was she older or younger sister?

Harold Lee: She's older.

Moderator: And your father, give me a little bit more information about him. Where was he from?

[0:02:02]

Harold Lee: My mother met my father in Muskogee - no. In Eufaula.

Moderator: You said Oklahoma.

Harold Lee: And that is where they were married. And they left Eufaula and went to Muskogee, where my sister and I were born.

Moderator: Was there a midwife there?

Harold Lee: No. We had doctors.

[0:02:29]

Moderator: Do you remember what the doctor's name was?

Harold Lee: [Manbright], I think.

Moderator: Black doctor? White doctor?

Harold Lee: Black doctor. I got my birth certificate and I got my passport. So it's all over. My father and mother didn't get along too well in Muskogee.

[0:02:58]

And my mother separated from my father and came to Kansas City, where she had two brothers living. [Murray Bell] and Arthur [Gillespie]. Murray Bell was a full brother of hers, and Arthur Gillespie was her half-brother. My mother had two full brothers and one half brother.

Moderator: What was your father's occupation in Muskogee?

[0:03:29]

Harold Lee: My father, I don't know. But my father followed us to Kansas City. And he and my mother were reunited here. And from the time he came to Kansas City, he became a barber. Now, whether he was a barber in Muskogee or not, I'm not sure. But he was a barber all the time he lived here in Kansas City.

Moderator: Do you remember the initial address here in Kansas City?

Harold Lee: Where I lived?

[0:04:00]

Moderator: Uh-huh. When they moved to Kansas City.

Harold Lee: Yeah. Where we lived when we first came here?

Moderator: First came here.

Harold Lee: We lived with my uncle, Murray Bell. And that address is 33 something Oakley.

Moderator: Kansas City, Missouri?

Harold Lee: Mm-hm.

[0:04:27]

Moderator: How long did you live at that residence?

Harold Lee: We didn't live there very long. We moved up the street from him. And that address, I don't know. I know Murray's address though, because he lived there all his life.

Moderator: What was your age when you moved to Kansas City?

Harold Lee: I was about 1 going on 2.

Moderator: And how long did you live at that first address?

Harold Lee: Not very long. I really don't know. I know we came and lived with Murray.

[0:05:04]

That's the way we do it. We don't have any place to live, so you live with your relative. That's how you get here, because your relative is here. So we came to live with Murray, but I would say probably a week or two. And then we moved in a house on 33<sup>rd</sup> something, right up the street from where Murray lived.

[0:05:29]

Moderator: Thirty third and what, approximately?

Harold Lee: Oakley. And we lived there - that's out in the Leeds area.

Moderator: Leeds-Dunbar area?

Harold Lee: Yeah. And we lived there for about, I'd say, three years.

Moderator: In Leeds-Dunbar.

Harold Lee: No. It was that house.

Moderator: Oh, okay. That house. Then what happened? Where did you move from there?

[0:05:59]

Harold Lee: Then my mother decided that she was going back to Oklahoma. And we went to DePew, a little town called DePew, Oklahoma.

Moderator: You were 4 years old, right?

Harold Lee: That's where I learned to read, in DePew.

Moderator: You were 4 years old.

Harold Lee: I was 4 years old.

Moderator: And you learned to read when you were 4.

Harold Lee: Yeah.

Moderator: Where in DePew did you learn how to read?

Harold Lee: At the little old school there in DePew.

[0:06:30]

Up the hill from where we lived.

Moderator: Do you remember the name of it?

Harold Lee: I imagine it was called the DePew Colored Folks School.

Moderator: Is that what it was like?

Harold Lee: Yeah. It was a school in Oklahoma in those days. Might still be now in the rural areas.

Moderator: Mr. Holliday, you know what segregation is. What was segregation at that particular point?

Harold Lee: It was completely segregated. In Oklahoma, everything was segregated, including the train, busses.

[0:07:02]

Everything.

Moderator: What about Kansas City?

Harold Lee: Kansas City never had segregation of trains and busses, public vehicles, street cars. We had complete segregation of schools, and, of course,

segregation of hotels, restaurants, all places of public accommodation Blacks were permitted to, except those that were open to Blacks.

[0:07:35]

Moderator: At that time, do you remember who the teacher was that taught you how to read?

Harold Lee: No. I remember how I learned how to read, though, because they laughed at me, all the kids. I said I was in the first grade. My mama said I was in the first grade. I was 5 years old.

[0:08:00]

I went to kindergarten in Kansas City at 4. They would let you in at 4. My mother was working. My mother and father were reunited in Kansas City, but they lived together about two or three years after they came here, and then my mother divorced him.

[0:08:31]

They separated again. And my mother divorced him when I was 4 years old.

Moderator: This is when you went back to DePew?

Harold Lee: No. We were still in Kansas City at that time. And then I went to kindergarten. My kindergarten teacher was Mrs. Jackson.

[0:09:00]

Ophelia Jackson, who is Elmer C. Jackson Jr.'s mother. The lawyer in Kansas City, Kansas. You know Elmer C. Jackson Jr.?

Moderator: Mm-hm. I know him.

Harold Lee: Ophelia Jackson was his mother. And she taught me in kindergarten.

Moderator: Could your mother and father read?

Harold Lee: Oh, yeah. My mother was an eighth grade graduate. My father probably went to fifth or sixth grade. Something like that.

[0:09:34]

Neither one of them had any problem reading. My mother, as a matter of fact, gave some thought to going to [unintelligible] school after she...

Moderator: Where?

Harold Lee: In Oklahoma. After she finished eighth grade. But my mother's father, of course, died when my mother was quite young. I don't know what age.

[0:10:03]

And my grandmother remarried. My grandmother was married three times, to Gillespie and to Bell and to the last man that she married, whose name I don't recall right now.

Moderator: Is your mother still alive?

Harold Lee: Yeah.

Moderator: How old is your mother now?

Harold Lee: Eighty-three.

[0:10:28]

At the age of 5, you were going to Jackson School, right?

Harold Lee: At the age of 5, I went to Oklahoma, DePew. I went to their one little schoolhouse.

Moderator: What recollection do you have of the schoolhouse itself?

Harold Lee: It wasn't a one-room schoolhouse. It was a three-room schoolhouse. The first grade and the prima grade was in a little building.

[0:11:01]

And then there was a larger building for the other grades, all wooden structures with outside fridges and so forth.

Moderator: How long did you go to that school?

Harold Lee: Stove in the middle of the floor. One year. One term.

Moderator: Then what happened?

Harold Lee: We came back to Kansas City.

Moderator: And you attended what school here?

Harold Lee: Dunbar. We went back to the Dunbar area.

[0:11:30]

That's where my two uncles lived.

Moderator: Did your people have a garden and all that kind of stuff out there?

Harold Lee: Yeah. We had a garden. Had chickens. So I had to raise chickens.

Moderator: How many people were up there at that particular time?

Harold Lee: Where?

Moderator: In Dunbar, Leeds-Dunbar.

Harold Lee: More people than live there now. Leeds-Dunbar was a fairly heavily-populated area at that time. They had possibly 250, 300 kids in school.

[0:12:04]

Moderator: How did Black people go to Dunbar to live?

Harold Lee: My mother selected Dunbar because it was rural. The Leeds area at that time had no sewers, sidewalks, streets, paved streets. And people lived in houses. They could have gardens and they could raise chickens and things.

[0:12:32]

She felt that since she would have to work that we the children would be in a safe environment by living in a semi-rural area than we would by living in an apartment or something downtown.

Moderator: What kind of people lived in the Dunbar area at that time?

Harold Lee: Poor people. They were poor people. The first house we lived in had two rooms.

[0:13:04]

Shotgun rooms, if you know what a shotgun room is. That's two rooms, one behind the other. You look in the front door and you can look out the back door. And one room was a kitchen, and the other was the living and dining and bedroom. I suspected we ate in the kitchen. The other room was the living room and bedroom.

[0:13:29]

And one room was the kitchen and dining room. And there was my mother, my father, and us two kids who lived there. My real recollection of things, however, began when I was about 4 years old. I can't tell you too much about what happened 2 and 3. I don't ever remember, except vaguely, daddy being at home.

[0:14:00]

I remember, I know daddy lived for some time after they were separated. And I know daddy well before he died in 1928. I can recollect all of his features and things like that, and know he used to come around. He used to come out and visit us. When he and mother got a divorce, he moved downtown. And we stayed out in Leeds.

[0:14:31]

And when we came back from Oklahoma, and I had my 6<sup>th</sup> birthday in Tulsa, on the way back to Kansas City, we stopped in Tulsa to see my cousin.

Moderator: Who was that?

Harold Lee: He was a big Baptist preacher there named Jose Owens.

Moderator: What church?

[0:15:01]

Harold Lee: He was pastor at that time of the First Baptist Church in Tulsa. Big brick church with a balcony.

Moderator: Is he still there today?

Harold Lee: No. First Baptist Church was urban renewed or something like that, that particular structure. He built that church, incidentally. And when we were there, they were in the process, I remember, of building the Baptistery, the baptismal pool, which was in the basement.

[0:15:35]

Moderator: What religion was this?

Harold Lee: We fell into it. Baptism.

Moderator: Was your mother a terribly religious person?

Harold Lee: My mother was a highly, very religious person. And she was originally a Baptist. And when I was about 4 years old, she was converted to the Church of God and Christ, which, at that time, everybody referred to as the Sanctified Church.

[0:16:01]

Moderator: When were you baptized?

Harold Lee: I've never been baptized - well, I was baptized as the Presbyterian. I never joined any church, and the Sanctified Church could not do so by saying,



“Okay. I'm a member.” Couldn't just walk up and shake the preacher's hand. You had to go to the alter and pray and get happy and have fits.

[0:16:27]

You had to speak in tongues and so forth and so on. And every time they had an alter call, almost, not every time, but very frequently, I had to go to the alter to be prayed through. They never did pray me through. And you couldn't be baptized in the Sanctified Church unless you had a fit.

[0:17:00]

Moderator: What were you doing between the ages of 6 and 10? What school were you attending?

Harold Lee: Dunbar.

Moderator: You did it all at Dunbar?

Harold Lee: All of it.

Moderator: What kind of a student were you?

Harold Lee: Except for the one year that I was in Oklahoma. I went to the first grade in Oklahoma.

Moderator: Do you remember your teachers' names?

Harold Lee: Went to kindergarten. And I get to kindergarten - yeah. I know all my teachers' names. I did kindergarten in Oklahoma.

[0:17:29]

I don't remember that teacher's name. I get to kindergarten in Kansas City under Mrs. Jackson, Ophelia Jackson. I get to first grade in Oklahoma. I don't remember that teacher's name. I get to second grade in Kansas City under a teacher names Anderson, Ms. Anderson.

Moderator: Who was principal there?

Harold Lee: John Ross.

Moderator: This is a good one. At that age...

Harold Lee: His son is the boy that stands down here and runs this [unintelligible].

[0:18:05]

My second-grade teacher was Ms. Anderson. I don't know what happened to her.

Moderator: Who was your best buddy back then?

Harold Lee: My best buddy right then was a guy, a kid named - when I was in the second grade and third grade, it was a kid named Jackson. James Jackson.

[0:18:29]

Moderator: Who lived down the street from you or something?

Harold Lee: James lived two, three blocks from me. But we were in the same grade when we were kids.

Female 1: Will you catch the [unintelligible], please? [Unintelligible].

Harold Lee: James was sort of...

[0:19:02]

...we thought at that time was a little rich boy, because his father died in World War One. And he always got a pension.

Moderator: How much was his pension, do you remember?

Harold Lee: I know. About \$50 a month.

Moderator: It was enough to do a little bit better than the...

Harold Lee: He got a pension. Nobody else got a pension.

Moderator: What was your mother doing right now to make a living?

[0:19:35]

Harold Lee: My mother was separated from my father, was divorced from my father before we went back to Oklahoma, when I was 5 years old.

Moderator: What was she doing for a living right now while you were in the sixth or seventh grade?

Harold Lee: She washed clothes in private homes. That's what she did all of her life, until she quit working about 20 years ago, 25 years ago.

[0:20:03]

But she went to the white folks' home and washed and ironed their clothes.

Moderator: What area of Kansas City was this that she worked?

Harold Lee: Out in Country club...

Moderator: The Plaza was...

Harold Lee: Country club area. Right up the hill from the Plaza. The Missouri side. Before you get to Johnson County. Johnson County was just opening up. And all of the rich folks lived in the country club area...

[0:20:32]

...which was the area south and west of the Plaza. And the old rich still live there. And that's between the Plaza and about Meyer Circle.

Moderator: Let me ask you this. When did you finally come over into the city, the city proper anyway?

Harold Lee: Never. We lived in Leeds all our life until I got married.

[0:21:00]

Moderator: When did you graduate from Dunbar?

Harold Lee: Thirty-one.

Moderator: Were you a pretty smart fellow?

Harold Lee: Yeah. I guess they thought I was, in Dunbar. I was about to say, John Ross, the principal of the school, died, was killed by a streetcar when I was in the third grade. And my second-grade teacher, Mrs. [Tallwater]...

[0:21:32]

...lived in Chicago. And my third-grade teacher, I was in the third grade at the time, Mrs. [Munis Baycott] to be president, who still lives here and just retired as a teacher a few years ago.

[0:21:59]

And the three of them ran the school until the principal was appointed. That was a big job.

Moderator: Did you get to teach in the classes while you were there?

Harold Lee: No. I was a student.

Moderator: I know. A lot of kids, though - about what year was that?

Harold Lee: Thirties. I was in the third grade. This is in the 30s.

Moderator: Okay.

[0:22:28]

Where did you go to high school, then?

Harold Lee: Lincoln High, on 19<sup>th</sup> and Tracy.

Moderator: Was it called Lincoln High then?

Harold Lee: Yeah. When I went to school, Lincoln High was the only high - we didn't have a junior high. No, it was Coles. Coles took over the old Lincoln building when Lincoln was moved to Woodland.

Moderator: How did you get from Dunbar to Lincoln?

Harold Lee: Streetcar. I walked, I'd hop a truck.

Moderator: How long of a walk was that for you?

Harold Lee: That's a long way.

[0:23:01]

From 19<sup>th</sup> and Tracy to 34<sup>th</sup> and Colorado.

Moderator: Miles. How many miles?

Harold Lee: I don't know. But they were walkable.

Moderator: How much did it cost on a streetcar?

Harold Lee: We would walk in the summertime from out there to go down to the grade, we'd go swimming, just for the fun of it. So it wasn't anything - we didn't mind walking.

[0:23:29]

And then we'd hop a truck, steal a ride on the streetcar, jump through one of the windows or something.

Moderator: How much did it cost to ride a streetcar from there?

Harold Lee: Two for 15 cents. You'd get two tokens for 15 cents.

Moderator: Transfer?

Harold Lee: That's a round trip. And transfers were always free. We rode to 31<sup>st</sup> Street in the streetcar to Woodland, and got on the Vine streetcar. Vine did a little dinky streetcar.

[0:24:00]

Moderator: What did you do to make money, to earn money, the 15 cents to get there?

Harold Lee: I had an uncle. And I was about 8 and 9 years old, I guess. And he had an ice wagon. He had an ice.

[0:24:27]

And a wagon. And we used to deliver ice around Leeds area. And he would hire me in the summertime on \$3 a week. One of the best salaries I ever got, working for my uncle. He was very generous.

Moderator: Would you have mules pulling or houses?

Harold Lee: He had a horse, one horse.

[0:25:00]

Moderator: Were you athletic at all?

Harold Lee: No. I never made any athletic teams. A kid I met over to the doctor's office named Edwin Brooks, who played on the football team. He was asking me did I play. And I said, "No." I weighed 118 pounds when I graduated from high school.

[0:25:29]

And I went out for football and [Kempfer], Madison, think [Kempfer]'s still teaching, or was, as coach. Kempfer laughed at me. Said, "Go home, boy."

Moderator: What were you like, four years of high school? You remind me fantastically of your son, already.

[0:26:00]

What were you like in high school?

Harold Lee: I wasn't anything outstanding in high school. I got a transcript of my high school grades. They were mostly Ns. That's a C. The grades were E, S, N, and I and M. And my high school grades were mostly C. Very interesting.

[0:26:28]

Moderator: Who were some of your buddies that I might know right now around the city, while you were in high school? Those four years at Lincoln?

Harold Lee: I don't think there are any that you would know. My best friend during my high school days was a kid named John Ross. He lived in Leeds also.

[0:27:02]

Then there was another good friend of mine. Let me see. I wouldn't say John was my best friend, exactly. From time to time, we had friendship. I guess my best friend was a guy named [Adolfo Shelton]. Shelton left here and went to Texas a long time ago.

[0:27:28]

His folks died, and they left and went to Texas. Lived with some other folks. And John Ross, a kid named [Maurice Fink]. John and Maurice are both dead now. And I don't know where Adolfo is. I haven't heard from Adolfo in a long time. His sister was my first little sort of girlfriend. We started in kindergarten together.

Moderator: What was her named?

Harold Lee: [Odessa]. It wasn't a real girlfriend.

[0:28:00]

We went to kindergarten.

Moderator: What kind of things did you all used to get into, you and Adolfo?

Harold Lee: Everything, man. We stole. We broke windows for the fun of it. People had gardens out there in Leeds, and some had some rather expensive ones. And we sold stuff from them. We had raised enough to sell. We never did have any extensive garden. We just had a little backyard. But there was plenty of open land out in Leeds at that time.

[0:28:31]

Moderator: Who were you during the Depression?

Harold Lee: In the way of work, you mean?

Moderator: Mm-hm.

Harold Lee: We shined shoes. I shined shoes.

Moderator: Where?

Harold Lee: Twenty-seventh and Jackson at an all-white-folks country club.

Moderator: Who was on 27<sup>th</sup> and Jackson?

Harold Lee: Just a barbershop.

[0:29:00]

Moderator: Do you remember the name of it?

Harold Lee: No. I don't. I worked at two barbershops. One was on 27<sup>th</sup> Street, and the other was on Jackson. That one on Jackson, the guy that ran that one on Jackson was named Gaines. I worked there for some time. Then a man came and took my job.

Moderator: Came and took your job. Took your gig.

Harold Lee: Yeah.

[0:29:30]

He was a hustle - he knew about shining shoes, and was more - put on more. He went over to customers and made over them and acted a fool and carried on and on. And he just loved doing what I was - and [unintelligible] sort of selling nigger, you know. I [unintelligible] with white folks. Never did.

Moderator: How much did a shine cost?

[0:30:00]

Harold Lee: A dime.

Moderator: How did you like shining a white man's shoes?

Harold Lee: I didn't like it worth a damn. Matter of fact, Horris, truth is, that's when I decided to go to college.

Moderator: Was you shining shoes.

Harold Lee: [Unintelligible] and say, "Hey, [Rastas]. Come over here boy and shine these shoes."

Moderator: But this is Missouri, right?

Harold Lee: Yeah. This is Missouri. Sure. Then I worked for Crown Drug Store as a bicycle delivery boy.

[0:30:33]

We all did that.

Moderator: Did you know McKinley O'Neil at all at that time?

Harold Lee: I didn't know, no. McKinley wasn't here at that time. That was a job that everybody did. And that was about the best job you could have. If you got up to the point where you wore uniforms, some of those guys wore uniforms. Green uniform. [Unintelligible].

[0:31:02]

When you got that uniform, you'd make about \$12 a week.

Moderator: Status symbol. Green uniform. Did you have a uniform?

Harold Lee: No. I never got to that. And I got fired there also. And the reason was, I guess, complaints. When somebody would make a joke, I'd laugh at it, about me.

[0:31:32]

And they did all the time. And not only that, I was working at the Crown Bank, and [unintelligible]. I could not make a living [unintelligible] and doing that kind of work, because you also had all these bogus suggestions. "Hey, boy, how much you take, you sucking my Peter?" That kind of crap. Oh, God. Man, I was so bad I didn't know what to do.

[0:32:00]

But I never jumped on anybody. I cursed everybody out, but I gave them the look to let them know that I didn't appreciate it.

Moderator: Where was this Crown?

Harold Lee: Forty-seventh and [Trost]. That's the one I worked at.

Moderator: Where were you at the break out of World War II?

Harold Lee: The breakout of World War II, that was December the 14<sup>th</sup>, 1941.

[0:32:32]

No. World War II started in 1939.

Moderator: Where were you in the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

Harold Lee: December the 14<sup>th</sup>, 1941, I was at the University of Michigan.

Moderator: What year were you? You were in college?

Harold Lee: Let me get this right.

[0:33:00]

No. I was here.

Moderator: You were in Kansas City.

Harold Lee: I was in Kansas City. The draft had begun. That's what it was. I was drafted first in February of '41. I was at the University of Michigan.

Moderator: Where did you go to undergraduate school?

Harold Lee: Lincoln University, Jefferson City.

Moderator: How many years did you do down there?



Harold Lee: Four.

Moderator: You did four years. How'd you go?

[0:33:30]

Who paid for it? History, we got to know these things.

Harold Lee: The summer before I went to the Lincoln University, John Ross, the fellow I mentioned - who died just last year - it may have been this year. Been dead not very long. It was in the wintertime. Could've been in December or January.

[0:34:00]

Anyway, John Ross and I sold vegetables. I was talking to John's brother just past Sunday, who lives in California now. And he was talking about what a change had come over the area. We used to sell vegetables, which was the area generally between 31<sup>st</sup> street and 35<sup>th</sup> street, from about...

[0:34:33]

...Jackson to Prospect.

Moderator: White neighborhood.

Harold Lee: It was all white. And very nice too.

Moderator: It was very nice?

Harold Lee: Oh, yeah. Matter of fact, my mother worked for a lady who lived at 37<sup>th</sup> and Indiana for a long time.

Moderator: Remember her name?

Harold Lee: Mm-hm. [Liance]. Sure I remember it, because they had a boy named Willard, who was my age.

[0:35:02]

We went to college together. And she got fired when the old man found out about it. He later found out about it.

Moderator: That you were going to the same college?

Harold Lee: No.

Moderator: What?

Harold Lee: The going to college. I was going to college. He went to Park College. They were Presbyterian. And he was a Big Ben in Southeast Presbyterian Church. And it was in a framed structure at the time my mother worked for him, during most of the time that she worked for him.

[0:35:31]

They went into the process of raising mine to build this brick church, which is up there now, which they finally got enough money to build this brick church. And when they found out that I was in college, she got fired. She told them I was in college. And they didn't believe it. She said Negro school like they did some kind of...

[0:36:03]

...little wonderland structure that we call colleges, which is the way most of our colleges started. And son of a gun came to Lincoln University - came through Jefferson City and visited the college to see what kind of college it was. That's all he came for. And of course, he being white, they gave him a royal treatment, the niggers did.

[0:36:32]

Moderator: Was he somebody...

Harold Lee: Hell no. He was president of Chapman's Dairy Company here at the time, named Chapman. So he was the president of that outfit. He was making a living.

Moderator: But they fired your mother.

Harold Lee: And when he found out that I was going to a real, genuine, accredited college, they told him all about [unintelligible]. Showed him all over the [unintelligible].

[0:37:04]

And they assured him all the buildings, we've got this brick building, this is the apartment - this is the - this is the dormitory, this is the this and this is the that. And our teachers have these kinds of degrees. They went to these schools.

Moderator: They're selling him.

Harold Lee: Yeah. "He's a dead man." He says, "Get that damn woman out of here."

[0:37:28]

Moderator: So what impact did that have on you at that age? Did you understand...

Harold Lee: How white folks are. Sure. I understood very well. My mother still thought highly of them. My mother built a house, a little four-room house out in Leeds.

Moderator: She built this washing clothes?

Harold Lee: Yeah. My mother was a giant of a woman. I mean, a giant of a woman. My mother would have been a millionaire if she had been white.

Moderator: Are you saying personality wise?

[0:38:04]

Harold Lee: I mean in her strength and determination, foresight and principles of life, and what she taught us and instilled in us. I don't know if I've ever met a person with her strength of character and her knowledge. Undoubtedly, a brilliant woman and so forth.

[0:38:35]

She decided to build this house. So she built it for almost nothing. Our house burned at 17<sup>th</sup> and Tracy. Our old house. Our house may be 100 years old. And she bought the remains for \$25.

[0:39:04]

And she hired a man together with me to tear that house down. I'm about 11 years old.

Moderator: Were you a big fellow? You were under 100-and-some pounds.

Harold Lee: No. I wasn't big. I could knock down a [unintelligible] and knock out - the nails had square nails in it it was so - I never saw a square nail.

[0:39:33]

And we would bring a wagon, we had a horse and wagon. The man that did it had a horse and wagon. And we would bring a wagon load of that lumber home every day. And I'd work all night knocking out the nails and classifying, stacking the two-by-fours over here, the one-by-six's over here, and so forth and so on.

[0:40:04]

The [Lions]' loaned her \$300 to complete that house.

Moderator: Who?

Harold Lee: The people she worked for who fired her when they found out I was in college. They loaned her \$300 to finish that house or to get it into shape for

her to move in. She didn't finish the house for years. And finally she finished it while I was in college. The house was built while I was still in grade school.

[0:40:32]

And it finished when I was in college. And they let her have it without interest. And she thought they were the greatest people in the world. They came out and looked at the house and they saw she wasn't building nothing but a hut. I said if she had been building a real house, they wouldn't've loaned her the \$300. But they thought they were being great white folks, because the niggers are entitled to live in a hut with outside toilet and so forth and so on.

[0:41:05]

But as soon as they found out that a nigger was trying to be the same thing as they were, they decided it's time to get rid of that nigger. The nigger's got too big of ideas. Mama never did see - she still thought those people were pretty good.

Moderator: Two dates that I didn't get from you, number one, when did you graduate from high school?

Harold Lee: Thirty-five.

[0:41:31]

Moderator: Okay, 1935. And from undergraduate school then?

Harold Lee: Thirty-nine.

Moderator: What type of a person was Harold Holliday at Lincoln University? Were you a serious student?

Harold Lee: I would say that at Lincoln University, I decided when I finished Lincoln University I would have to be on my own and support myself and my family, if I was going to have one.

[0:42:03]

And I was going with a gal at that time that I was kind of fond of. I thought I was kind of fond of.

Moderator: What was her name?

Harold Lee: Georgia [Hollins].

Moderator: When you met her?

Harold Lee: She and I were still going together my senior year in high school.

[0:42:30]

Moderator: From Kansas City?

Harold Lee: Yeah. She lived at 2300 Lydia.

Moderator: She's still in Kansas City now?

Harold Lee: No. I don't know where Georgia is, bless her little sweet soul. I sure would like to see Georgia too.

Moderator: What were you doing while you were in those four years in college, really?

Harold Lee: I was a son of a bitch in college. I was doing a whole lot of things.

[0:43:05]

Moderator: You pledged? Did you pledge in undergraduate school?

Harold Lee: Oh, yeah. I'm an Omega. I joined the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. I was on the newspaper. Wrote for the newspaper. I was sports editor to the journal.

[0:43:33]

That's what I wanted to do, because I always wanted to be an athlete. And I couldn't be that, so I said I'll write about it.

Moderator: Can't participate.

Harold Lee: So I wrote sports editorials. Then later on I decided I'd be a columnist, sort of a political commentator and analyzer. So I wrote a column called Politics. And it was concentrated primarily on campus politics.

[0:44:04]

Moderator: Who was your favorite instructor?

Harold Lee: Oh, [BT McGraw].

Moderator: What'd he teach?

Harold Lee: Economics.

Moderator: That was your man.

Harold Lee: Yeah. BT McGraw. Next to my mother, was the most influential person in my life. BT McGraw was the first teacher I ever had...

[0:44:35]

...who told me that I had an exceptional ability and could go and do whatever I wanted to do.

Moderator: What year were you?

Harold Lee: Sophomore. He was a PhD from Harvard. And I figured if Booker said that, he must know.

[0:45:02]

Moderator: Did that inspire you to get up at that point?

Harold Lee: Oh, yeah. I was up already, but I was an outstanding student in economics, of course.

Moderator: Is that what you...

Harold Lee: That was my major.

Moderator: Your undergraduate major was economics.

Harold Lee: Yeah. And my master's degree is in economics. After training under McGraw, McGraw said, "You're capable of going anywhere you want to go, and you'll do as well in any university in this country."

[0:45:30]

He told me. And I did at Lincoln anyway. "You'll do as well. I've taught you." And I went to the University of Michigan, which is one of the really great universities in the country, if you know anything about universities. Probably was the best of the publicly-financed universities in the country, with the exception of the University of California in Berkeley.

[0:46:05]

Next comes University of Michigan, I'd say. Harvard and Yale. Probably ahead of them, Chicago. Maybe ahead of the University of Michigan, but not far. But it's certainly ranked among the top ten universities in the country, no question about it. I went to the University of Michigan from Lincoln University. And my friend and I enrolled three weeks late.

[0:46:33]

Got my master's degree in June. I went there in October. I just had to stay here and work. I was working. I stayed out of school one year to work, to accumulate a little money so I could go to the University of Michigan. And I had to stay here until I got my next paycheck. I couldn't leave until I got my last paycheck.

Moderator: From the Crown?

Harold Lee: No. I was working for the welfare, state.

[0:47:00]

I had finished Lincoln, you see.

Moderator: Oh. You were working at the state welfare.

Harold Lee: Yeah.

Moderator: Who was your supervisor at the state welfare at that point?

Harold Lee: Mildred Richardson.

Moderator: A Black woman?

Harold Lee: Yeah. She still lives.

Moderator: Were you at all involved in local politics at that particular point in life? Were you cognizant of it?

[0:47:29]

Harold Lee: At Lincoln University, the Gaines decision - you know the Gaines decision?

Moderator: Mm-hm.

Harold Lee: Involving a kid named Lloyd Gaines at the University of Missouri came down. And if I'm not mistaken, it was 1933 when the Supreme Court decided on it. And incidentally, the Gaines decision was argued in the state supreme court.

[0:48:05]

A Black lawyer named Charles Houston out of Washington D.C. and Sidney Remond, a lawyer out of St. Louis. Sidney Remond was local council. Charles Houston was the general counselor for the NAACP at that time.

[0:48:30]

And he argued the case, which I attended. And that's when I decided I would be a lawyer.

Moderator: What year were you then?

Harold Lee: I was about a junior in college. Charlie Houston was absolutely brilliant and devastating. He was a son of a bitch. He made those white lawyers look like fools.

Moderator: Did you get to meet him?

Harold Lee: Yeah. I met him.

Moderator: He was that good.

Harold Lee: Oh, he was out of sight.

[0:49:02]

No question that I don't know.

Moderator: What's the best attorney you've ever seen?

Harold Lee: Charlie Houston.

Moderator: He's the best.

Harold Lee: I believe he's the best. Hasting was related to him. Judge William [Hasting], who became judge of the court of appeals. Thurgood was still a kid. At Howard University, Charles Houston served as dean of Harvard Law School and various other [unintelligible] past his round of the country.

[0:49:31]

A Harvard lawyer. So was Hasting. Thurgood, of course, is a Howard lawyer. He trained under Hasting and Houston.

Moderator: Hasting taught at Howard?

Harold Lee: Yeah. And was dean there at one time, for a short time. Houston died young, years ago. And my evaluation of him may be exaggerated because of my first contact with him...

[0:50:00]

...as a very unknowledgeable person about law. So as far as I'm concerned, the greatest Black lawyer in the past century was Charlie Houston.

Moderator: But you say that was the reason why you decided to go to law school. But you left Lincoln University, went right on into the field of economics. Why was this?

Harold Lee: Because law school took three years. A masters took one.

[0:50:33]

And I didn't have sufficient funding to do three years, so I decided that I would get a masters and get better employment and save money and get my law degree later on.

Moderator: Where did you want to go?



Harold Lee: To law school?

Moderator: Uh-huh.

Harold Lee: Oh, man. Harvard.

[0:51:03]

That's the best.

Moderator: Why didn't you go to Harvard?

Harold Lee: I never was able to. When I came out of service, my intention was to immediately go to law school.

[0:51:32]

I applied to the University of Chicago, Chicago being another great law school. May be as good as Harvard, but Harvard has a better reputation and so forth. But Chicago is an excellent law school. [Unintelligible] Chicago law school. Attorney general of the United States got out of there.

[0:52:02]

And is probably the most brilliant attorney general we've had in a long time.

Moderator: How did you get into the military?

Harold Lee: Drafted, like everybody else.

Moderator: You was drafted.

Harold Lee: You're damn right. You think I volunteered?

Moderator: Do you remember the date that you were drafted?

Harold Lee: Sure, I remember when I went in. I know when I went in. I went in on September the 26<sup>th</sup>, 1942.

Moderator: Right before the war.

[0:52:31]

Harold Lee: The war was going on.

Moderator: Where were you stationed?

Harold Lee: I went from here to fortunately Leavenworth. That was our induction center. And we stayed around there for a day or two and then we went on - I went to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. They put us in a railroad car and pulled all the

blinds and told us not to look out. And the train traveled and traveled and traveled, and I decided it was going south.

[0:53:00]

And that's where I'm going, somewhere south. When it stopped, it was at Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

Moderator: [Unintelligible]. So tell me about Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

[0:53:27]

Harold Lee: I don't know whether anybody will believe this, but I'm telling you, it is the truth. My mother told me if I went south not to leave the post.

Moderator: Because you had this attitude anyway.

Harold Lee: Right. She says, "Nigger, you will sure get killed. They will lynch you for sure." We are always talking, we don't like white folks.

[0:54:01]

I had an uncle, Arthur [Gillespie], that I admired a great deal. And he was the only person in my family that I think wanted to be free, really. My mother went along with white folks, and then more or less, I would say, accepted her place and kind of...

[0:54:34]

...played up to them. Though she wasn't what you would call exactly an Uncle Top-of-mind, but she kind of played up to them a little bit to get a few little crumbs here and there, a little favor here, a nice Christmas gift there. And she played the job well enough that she got remembered in one of her people's will for a small sum of money, about \$2,000. Something like that.

[0:55:01]

And she gave the rest of it to the cats and dogs. She was worth over a quarter of a million dollars when she died. She gave her mama two and gave the rest of them to cats and dogs. How's that?

Moderator: That's right in there.

Harold Lee: That's really love. That loves the hell out of you, doesn't it?

Moderator: The rest of it to cats and dogs. So what happened? What'd you do down there?

[0:55:35]

Harold Lee: I stayed on the post for about two months. It got too solitary there, and I finally decided I was going to take my chances in Hattiesburg. I went to Hattiesburg looking for a little fun.

[0:56:00]

And so I started going there, but on Christmas Day, this is what I wanted to tell you. We went to the Black section of Hattiesburg and USO. Picked up dates there and went on to their place or someplace and then went on back to the post. That's what we did when we were there. I never went uptown. It was the white folk's part of town. Don't know what that looks like. Stayed out of it. I got off. We got off the bus and started to the USO.

[0:56:32]

A nigger, a Black man, there was a man in the gutter of the street, dead. We inquired around and they said he'd given some lip to a bus driver, and the bus driver killed him, kicked him off the bus, and went on. I didn't see this happen, but this is what they said happened.

[0:57:00]

Bus drivers were armed in the south. They carried a pistol on their hip, just like the cops. And that's for the purpose of being sure that you keep your damn seat on that bus, which is in the rear.

Moderator: This carrying pistols at that particular time.

Harold Lee: Yeah.

Moderator: As you rode in the rear of the bus.

Harold Lee: Yeah. The bus driver was armed, like a cop.

Moderator: How did this hit you?

[0:57:28]

Harold Lee: The man was laying in the gutter in front of a [unintelligible] home. And I said, "Why don't somebody take him in the [unintelligible] home?" And everybody said [unintelligible]. I went on to the USO. The USO was about a block down the street.

Moderator: Was he a soldier?

Harold Lee: No. He was a civilian. We went on to the USO.

[0:58:02]

Stayed down there until dusk, about dark. I got in there about midday, around 12 o'clock. Hot, 80 degrees. Beautiful country, Mississippi. The nights, full moon, it's beautiful. Wrote my wife, if it wasn't for the white folks down here, I'd live here. This is the most beautiful country I've ever seen.

[0:58:30]

I went to the USO. And when I came back, the man was still in the gutter. He'd been there all day, in front of the [unintelligible] home. Nighttime came. They picked him up. And then came a carload of MPs, white, who we had never seen. Black MPs patrolled the area.

[0:59:03]

But here comes several dozen white MPs. And they came down the street hitting people just indiscriminately. Nothing had happened. They just jumped out of their buses and started beating up on people. And I just prayed that they didn't hit me.

[0:59:32]

Because here is where I die. One of those motherfuckers hit me with that club - and I haven't done a damn thing, I've been in the USO all day. And nighttime came. We came out to get drunk. Although Mississippi is a dry state, was a dry state, plenty of whiskey. We came out to get some whiskey, get drunk. And here come these cops, beating people on the head.

[1:00:05]

They didn't touch me.

Moderator: Did they get your buddy?

Harold Lee: No. We didn't get hit. They couldn't hit everybody. It's a beach full of people. And then that night, we went to get on the bus. They sent a bus for us to bring us back to camp, the military people did.