

University of Houston
Oral History of Houston Project
Yates Alumni Interview

Interviewee: Donald Dickson, Deloris Johnson, Thelma Robins, Thurman Robins, Samuel Taylor,

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Interviewer: Aman Washington

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Abstract:

In Fall 2016, Houston History Magazine interviewed five alumni of Yates High School to discuss the Turkey Day Classic football game that saw the competition between Phyllis Wheatley and Jack Yates High Schools. The group recalls the happenings within the Third Ward during the week leading up to the big game, and excitement surrounding those events. The group gives vividly imagery of attending the game, performing at halftime, and playing in the game. The group also reminisces on their school days, the lessons they learned, and the teachers, coaches, and individuals who made an impact on their lives. Throughout, pride in their school, neighborhood, and each other resonates through the enthusiasm shown in the conversation. Despite the burden of living in segregated, unequal circumstances, each former student discusses the unity of Third Ward and how it contributed to the success and popularity of the Classic.

AW: Thank you all again for coming and meeting with me today. And... I know you all have busy schedules so I am really grateful. And I would just like if each of you would just state your name and a little something about yourself. We can start with you.

TG: I am Thelma Robins-Gould. I am a native Houstonian, also a 1958 Jack Yates graduate and as well as a Hamptonian. Hampton University. And I worked in Houston Independent School District for thirty-three years and I'm now retired and I enjoy living.

TR: Okay. I'm Thurman Robins. The twin to Thelma. I'm also a '58 graduate of Jack Yates. I did some undergraduate work at Southern University in Baton Rouge and did I a Masters at Texas Southern and a doctorate at University of Houston. So, in Houston Independent School District for twelve years before becoming employed at Texas Southern University and I worked there for thirty-three years, retired. One of my friends Donald plays a lot of golf and I have gotten into that also so a lot of my spare time I'm doing golf.

DJ: Thank you for the opportunity, my name is Deloris Johnson and I am also a graduate of the 1958 class of Jack Yates, the original Jack Yates at 2610 Elgin street here in Houston. I too as Thelma went to Hampton, I am a Hampton graduate. 1962. I got my masters at Texas Women's University and then I did studies at the University of Guadalajara in Guadalajara, Mexico. I worked for HISD as a speech pathologist and also coordinated a speech pathology. My tenure there was for thirty-three years after that well just before I left HISD, governor Ann Richards appointed me to the State board of examiners for speech pathology and audiology, I stayed on that board for six years and retired. Since that time, I've worked as a docent at the Museum of Fine Arts; the House Museum which is Rienzi, and I am also a caregiver for my 102

-year old cousin. I coordinate the Jack Yates 1958 class and we have been together for over 60 years now.

TR: Fifty-five.

DJ: Well fifty-five as a graduating class but we all went into Yates together in the seventh grade so that's some sixty years now we've been together.

ST: My name is Sammie Taylor. I attended to Jack Yates High School graduated 1958 from there I attended Grambling College in Louisiana, played with legendary coach Eddie Robinson from there I left and went to San Diego as a free agent and as a walk on. And I made the team. I stayed there a couple of years and I was traded to the Houston Oilers and that's when I quit and retired. Oh, I worked industrial, for a steel company for seventeen years that's when I retired and now I just walk and do my exercises and try to eat properly and try to take care of myself.

DJ: And tell the history.

ST: Yeah.

DD: My name is Donald Roy Dickson. I just passed the house that I grew up in. Just down the street in the Cuney homes. Ya'll ain't say nothing about the Cuney homes. (Inaudible)

DD: All Thelma, Thurman, and myself, we grew up in the Cuney homes right down the street. And of course...

TR: Which is the projects.

DD: Yes, a low-income project. Uhm. Of course, we attended Blackshear Elementary School from Blackshear we went to seventh grade at Yates and we stayed there until the 12th grade.

While at Yates, Sammie Lee and I played on many championship teams. We didn't have a championship in football, but we had three consecutive state championships with Sammie Lee in baseball and with me in track. And after graduating as the rest of them did in 1958, which was the last class in the old school and incidentally was probably the better class, or the best class that ever came out of Yates.

TR: It was.

DD: And I received quite a few scholarships but ended up accepting and signing at Texas Southern University on a track scholarship and through it all I ended up with three degrees from Texas Southern and then I was employed by the Houston Independent School District. Some of my positions were, I went in as a teaching coach, Blackburn. And I moved into school security and worked with that department for three years and I left school security and went back into the school as assistant principal and I was assistant principal at Albert Thomas Junior High School and left there to become assistant principle at Pershing Middle School and left that in-school position and went back into the athletic department as one of the directors of athletics and the last ten years of tenure in the school district, I was director of Barnett Stadium. I retired after thirty-three years.

ST: again.

DD: Another thirty-three years. Me too. I retired after thirty-three years and became pastor for Bringing Hope Missionary Baptist Church. I retired in 1997 and at fifty-seven and became pastor of The Great New Hope Missionary Baptist Church where I am currently the Senior Pastor there. And I am glad to hear Thurman say that he took the sport of golf, because I play golf. That ain't

true he started playing golf because he found out he could play golf and that's kind of what we do for recreation purposes.

DJ: You also played Canadian ball, don't you?

DD: In the Canadian Football League Montreal Alouettes had to try out there and stayed around for about a year or so and began a season but didn't make the team, ended up on the Scout team

DJ: Played in the Army?

DD: Yeah, I played army football in Germany and made All-Army in '63-64 and that jumpstarted me, enabled me to have those tryouts within the Canadian Football League so uh yeah good experience.

DJ: So, what I've really done for this interview which you said is to be about Turkey Day Classic I've tried to bring in people who were all around as a part of Turkey Day Classic. As Donald and Sammie Lee said, they played the football. We watched them play the football. And at halftime the other three of us were watched by the spectators. Thurman was in the band and he was also captain of the band.

TG: Co-Captain

TR: I was one of the officers but I wasn't captain. Burnell Allison was the...

DJ: Oh right Burnell.

All: Burnell

DJ: Another classmate Burnell was captain and Thelma was captain of the Ryan Cadets which was the drill squad and I too was in the drill squad I was captain of the drummers I made the music for the drill squad.

TG: She started off with the cadence *noise* then we'd give the signal to go.

DJ: So, I think, I hope what we have for you today will make an outstanding interview for your concern.

AW: Thank you well we can just talk about memories, if you'd like to share your specific memory of the turkey day game as a football player or as a band member in the squadron or cadets, you can...

DJ: Well I think we have memories that are far beyond high school or Turkey Day Classic, since I lived right there and they lived just two blocks below me, we were involved with the Turkey Day Classic way beyond our high school years because that was the main event of the year for blacks in Third ward, Fifth ward, Fourth ward and all over Houston. But I live right down the street where I can see TSU to my right when I stood in my drive way and University of Houston here. And at that time, it was segregated where by our games were, are different games, they were segregated to the point that we didn't play with each other we didn't even sit together at that time. And I think Thurman might want to really give you some more insight.

AW: Well, I have a question. Even at the all black or the black games they would have segregation? Like a separate seat for whites? At the games?

TR: Yes, they did. They had a reserved section for whites. At every game. And the reserved section were some of the best seats in the house like the fifty yard, for whites. And we had many whites! I mean many whites would attend the game. So, you know...

DJ: Turkey day classic.

TR: In the Turkey Day Game, Classic book that I wrote, in terms of doing the research and all. In the early years like in '42, I think it was that was the first year they played the game in this Jeppesen Stadium was in 1942. There were like 18,000 people attending that game in 1942 and you go on up through the sixties....

DD: That's right

TR: I think 1961 was the game that had the largest attendance which was like forty thousand plus, forty thousand plus. But 25 to 30-35,000 was the average, almost, attendance every year. As Deloris said we lived in the Cuney homes. We lived in Cuney homes for the first eight years of our lives I can remember just as vivid as it was yesterday, I was about five years old and I was playing outside in the yard and all of a sudden you hear this noise, this big roar "Woo!!," I'm turning around and I'm looking..."What was that?" And then it would die down. And a few minutes later you'd hear it again. So, I went in the house and I asked my mom, I said, "What is all that noise!" She said, "Oh, they're playing that game over at the stadium that's the Yates-Wheatley Game" At Jeppesen Stadium. Well at the time it was called High School Public Stadium.

All: Yeah.

TR: High School Public Stadium, so that was my earliest introduction to the thanksgiving game between Yates and Wheatley.

DJ: My earliest introduction to it was the man next door to me, Mr. John Small. Zelda Small's uncle, played for Yates and he would always talk about them playing in that Thanksgiving game. But as a little girl I would stand in the window and watch the people walk down Alabama street going to the game at Thanksgiving. And when they went to the game they were really, really dressed...

SL: That's right

DR: They were dressed in their finest. Suits, hats, furs

TR: Shoes!

DJ: Anything, walking down the street because we didn't have busses that ran down here like we have now. The closest bus was almost to the old Yates school where you got off there and if you came from Fifth Ward from the other team which was what? About five or six miles away

DD: A little further

TR: Bout ten miles away. They would have to get down the bus and walk down too, and the other part of it was... We had our own school colors and those of us who went to Yates, naturally we had on crimson and gold and those who were Phyllis Wheatley had on purple and white. But there was what should I say? Madam, Miss Noma but... there was precedence. If you went to Yates, you didn't wear purple and white and if you went to Wheatley you didn't wear crimson and gold. Nor would you be caught in Fifth Ward wearing crimson and gold and you

dare not be in Third Ward and wear purple and white because you were going to get a killing! It was really bad.

TG: But there was always so much enthusiasm and excitement about the game. It was as they've attested to being introduced when they were still in grade school. It was something you look forward to; once you got to Jack Yates you looked forward to going to those games every year from seventh to twelfth grade. I mean this was just excitement people just didn't just do hardly anything on Thanksgiving Day

TR: But eat!

TG: Until after their game they couldn't eat their big turkey dinners! The excitement was there. Everybody was excited! Parades, each school had parades prior to it. You heard radio programs about it and some had dances going up to that event and then those of us who were in the squadron the Ryan cadets, we practiced every day except for on weekends, because that was a performance you had to get out there at halftime and you just couldn't do anything, you had to perform your best.

DJ: You had to beat Wheatley's performance too!

TG: Yes, yes.

DJ: We were different; we had been rivals ever since I can remember. And I don't know how long they were rivals before our time but we have been very competitive in sports, in academics whatever.

AW: Was the rivalry more just of a love for your school or was it a hatred for your other school?

DJ: It was all three. Love for your school, hatred for the other school, and competition to be the best that you could be.

TG: But the hatred wasn't murderers-type hatred it was just...

DJ: "If I can beat you," hatred.

TG: It was extreme competition. That's what it was.

TR: One of the other things I wanted to mention about this game... Yates came into existence in 1926; Phyllis Wheatley came into existence in 1927. The pride of both of those being established... the first school; black high school in Houston was Booker T. Washington, 1893. So, when the two schools Yates and Wheatley came into existence they played that very first year and the year first year that they played, it was not on thanksgiving. It was on another date. Wheatley played Washington on Thanksgiving for the first game

DD: That's right

TR: And then over the years, the next succeeding years, they start to rotate the game between Yates and Wheatley on Thanksgiving or Wheatley and Washington on Thanksgiving until 1946. I think 1946 was the last game that Washington played Yates on Thanksgiving. Thereafter it was always Wheatley and Yates.

TG: And they drew the greatest crowd. More people attended with Wheatley and Yates.

TR: That was the reason that they designated it as the Yates-Wheatley Thanksgiving classic because every time they played prior to that, they drew the larger crowds. When Yates played Washington, they had a nice crowd but it wasn't like they played Wheatley. When Wheatley played Washington, they had a nice crowd but it wasn't like when they played Yates. So HISD officials with some lobbying by some of the schools said "Oh, this game is a money maker and they play on Thanksgiving, let's make it every year that they play on Thanksgiving." So, 1946 I think was the last year that Yates played Washington on thanksgiving and from then on, it's been Wheatley and Yates.

DJ: And speaking of competition the competition that day wasn't only between the football players there was competition as far as the halftime was concerned.

DD: Yeah.

DJ: When they presented when Wheatley presented their Miss Yates uh Miss Wheatley, I'm sorry. And when Yates presented our Miss Yates, some years they were on floats, and one year Miss Yates came down in a helicopter and what else? What else did they do? Oh, they had the finest of cars they could ride around the stadium the different half time...

DJ: Yeah they would try to find the finest cars to go with the floats and they would have just dazzling floats you know competing against each other and I think that the spectators competed with one another in their, in their....

TR: Attire.

TG: Attire yeah, yes, because they had been planning what they were going to wear from one year to the next and putting it in layaway, at that time that was a plan in the stores that you could put something up and pay on it all along until you could get it out!

AW: So, the turkey day outfit might have rival the Easter outfit?

TR: Oh yes. Exceeded, it.

DJ: Christmas too! Oh, you had to look good for thanksgiving game! Men too.

DD: Talk about looking good when we when my family my momma, my daddy and my two brothers when we moved out of the Cuney home, moved into what is known as “the bottom” right down

TR: On the other side of UH.

DD: About five blocks from here growing on the north side well just a street beyond University of Houston. Well we lived at 3607 Elgin. And Thelma and Thurman’s auntie lived next door to us who was also a Yates graduate and we would have to assemble in and I would have to be at our coach’s house on thanksgiving morning about 9 o’ clock. So, when I left home, the game didn’t start until two o’ clock, so when I left home to walk to Coach Patterson’s house, who lived on Alabama and Brierley, for our nine o’ clock meeting, their aunt who was named Annie Mae but we called her Honey Bunch. She would be dressed and ready to go to the game. She’d be standing outside in her red and yellow, I mean she’s got on red shoes, she’s got on red suit.

TG: Red stockings!

DD: Red stockings, yellow purse, yellow hat, and listen her words to me was “If you, if y’ all don’t beat Wheatley today, don’t you come back home!”

All: Laughter

DD: And uh and she lived next door to us and I mean she would be ready at nine o’ clock, she was ready to go to the game.

TR: And she went, she finished from Yates, too

DD: She finished from Yates!

TR: And their mom finished from Yates, too. All the sisters.

DJ: Finished Yates in 1935.

DD: Yeah and so, so, so anyway talking about Turkey Day Classic you may want to look at this the I was inducted in the...

ST: Thanksgiving.

AW: Thank you.

DD: In the Turkey Day Classic Hall of Fame. I guess somewhere around 19- 1985?

ST: Or eighty.

DD: Something like that. And a great accomplishment for me and I wear the ring everywhere I go just about. Let me tell you something about this fellow right there, we were preparing for...

DJ: And what’s his name?

DD: Sammie Taylor. We were preparing for the Thanksgiving Game our senior year and our quarterback was injured. Sammie Taylor was a running back in the back field with me, but when our quarter, our regular quarterback got hurt, Coach Andrew “Pat” Patterson and we need to mention his name.

TR: Definitely.

DD: One of the greatest coaches who ever said hello to a football. He took Sammie Taylor who had these kinds of skills, he was a pitcher on the baseball team and he pitched three, if I’m correct, three no hitters...

ST: Three

DD: ...on the way to the state championships. Two consecutive years but they won it three years but he had shut out his junior year and senior year. Coach Patterson took Sammy Taylor, put him at quarterback, never played quarterback before and when we stepped on the field we beat Wheatley that year 7-6. He threw a touchdown pass I fumbled a ball down inside 20 or somewhere like that, and they got it and they scored! And we came back we were nipped and tucked the whole game we nipped and tuck and Sammy Lee spotted Gilmore and he threw about a sixty-yard pass to Gilmore, performed a dead run and Gilmore scored on that pass, catch, and run and we beat Wheatley 7-6. Sammy Lee had never played quarterback before that game but he had those kinds of skills plus the fact our coach knew how to include plays that were not confuse him, so that he would know, he knew plays from running backs situation

DJ: That’s why he had the “Black Lightning”.

Inaudible

DJ: Coach was well known for having played in the old Negro baseball league,

DD: Negro league, yeah.

DJ: Pat Patterson was very excellent as a baseball player

TR: He was an outstanding player in the old Negro Baseball League

ST: When he played in all those different league, professional leagues. See he was from of course Chicago.

DD: Chicago.

ST: He found a ride to Wiley College, where he finished

TR: That's right.

ST: After Wiley days, he came and started coaching at Jack Yates.

DJ: So, he knew all of those other famous Negro players, Jackie Robinson, all of them

DJ: Yes Coach Patterson all of them because he had played in the league. But he was an excellent football coach, too.

DT: My dad played in the Negro League. Coach Patterson knew my father. I asked my father, "Do you know?" he said "Yeah I know Pat, boy." Said "I've been knowing Pat". But anyway, when we used to go to the stadium a lot... Today you would think we would be riding a bus to Jeppesen stadium from Jack Yates. We would roll in cabs and we had forty boys, it would be three or four in a cab that's the way we went. We had to have thirty-two cabs we would go down

Holman street just blowing, make the cab driver just go “boooooop booooooooooop” they knew that was Yates coming from the school, the high school.

AW: Did they charge you all?

DD: Huh?

AW: Did they charge you all to take the cabs.

DD: No

TG: No, no, no!

DD: No, they did that was good publicity for the cab company

ST: Yeah.

DD: ...and they always used square deals

ST: Square deal cabs!

DD: You know square deals?

Inaudible

DJ: Square deals on the corner of Tuam and Dowling!

ST: The whole football team... Every player would be in a cab, be three or four players in one cab and every cab would be blowing their horns coming up Holman Street, see our school was near Dowling on Elgin

DJ: About a mile away from here

ST: And we rode we'd come up Holman, you could hear cab horns just blowing and blowing and blowing till we got on this, the parking lot.

TG: That school though is still located where we went to school there but it is now called Baylor College of Medicine at Ryan. 2610 Elgin.

AW: I think I've passed it

TG: That's the original Jack Yates! And that's the one we relate to more than the one on Sampson

DD: Yeah, yeah!

TG: Because all our six years were spent right there whereas the majority of students who came to the Yates here on Sampson, were three years or four years at the most, so we formed a great bond with one another having been to elementary, grade school together and started there

Inaudible

DJ: We are family even in our age today, we are still family all over the years

TG: So, what you're hearing is pride. You're hearing a lot of pride.

DD: And we went to kindergarten together.

TR: We went to Kindergarten together!

TG: In the Cuney homes!

DD: Thelma, Thurman, and I, we still have our picture from our kindergarten days, the program.

AW: But you said the entire third ward was a tight knit community?

All: Oh yes!

TR: All those communities were tight-knit. The Wheatley community was as tight-knit as the Yates community, as was the Washington community. Yates was in Third Ward, Wheatley was in Fifth Ward and Booker T. Washington was in Fourth Ward and each one of those communities was a real tight knit community and really supported our school.

AW: Was it the Black community type? Like, did y'all get together, all three wards?

DJ: No, no.

TR: No.

DD: No, no never.

TR: No. But we supported one another just like the, the other functions.

DJ: We were just like tribes.

TG: In the communities. We supported from another in spite of the fact you were from a different ward and just, there you see the pride that was in the black communities at that time, that motivated people and kept them wanting to achieve and do things that had never been done before.

DJ: We had Third Ward pride, they had Fourth Ward pride, and the others had Fifth Ward pride.... but a lot of the black business communities started in Fourth Ward.

TR: Yes.

DJ: A lot of us

DJ: Because that was the first community, the fourth ward.

Inaudible

DJ: That's where the first... and reverend Jack Yates himself was a pioneer as far as the black community was in Houston, because fourth ward he had a lot to do with the development of Fourth Ward he had a lot to do with education, black education here in Houston. Because the church he, the first church that he started which was Antioch, that's where the academy started for education that he started, that later became Texas Southern University which at that time was a Houston College for Negroes so that's how far he goes back in education but there's one thing I'd like to point out as I sat here and listen to Donald and Sammie Lee talk about the football team. Yates had a glorious and fabulous football team. But they had no practice field at the school. They had no practice field at the school.

DD: We had to walk from Elgin and Delano to the Emancipation Park, which was about eight blocks away. We had to walk there in uniform.

TR: Every day

DD: Without shoes, we couldn't wear our shoes we had to wear, we had to wear just our socks. We didn't put our football shoes on until we get to the park but that's where we practiced. We walked to practice.

ST: Walked or run.

DD: Six years— or ran. Eight blocks away, and then we walked after practice we walked back to the school.

TR: I'm glad you mentioned that because in the band we didn't have a place to do our marching and performances for practice before games. So, every day we would march,

DJ: In the street.

TR: From the school to the Emancipation Park while they were practicing,

DD: That's right.

TR: They didn't practice until the band got off the field because they practiced after school, just so happened that the band we were all scheduled after sixth period which was the last class of the day, which was two o'clock. So, we would assemble in the band room and then outside the band room, and march to Emancipation Park where we could practice our drills and our formations we were going to do at the game

TG: And we practiced in the campus, we the Ryan cadets

DJ: Yeah, the Ryan cadets which was the drill team we parked, we practiced in a small space behind the school behind the gym which was behind the school. Behind the gym, which was behind the school. It wasn't it wasn't any bigger than from here to across the street right there I don't think we had more than two hundred yards.

TR: Oh, no it wasn't two hundred yards because you had so many...

DJ: Temporary buildings. Right, right.

TR: Because the school was overcrowded.

DJ: But in our practice whatever formation we did it ended up being from one end of that stadium to the other. The whole hundred yards, and that's what we went through for practice for the football team for the band and for the Ryan cadets drill squad.

AW: When they had the Public School Stadium was it on UH campus

TR: It was right there

DD: We owned it

AW: You owned it though

DD: I mean HISD owned it

DJ: The Houston Independent School

DD: ...and U of H borrowed it from the school district and it became theirs

DJ: Look!

DD: Before it was a Public School stadium

TG: Right there where the stadium is, they tore the old one down and built that one right there and see our games were mainly played in the weekdays whereas the white schools had theirs on the weekends. But we all played in that stadium and this...

DD: Yeah.

DJ: This is something else I want to say about the different race, well the white race and the black race attending football games I think... Thurman said it well when he said how the fifty yard seats were reserved for the whites, but when we went to the white games where did we sit?

ST: In the corner

DJ: We sat way at the top in the far corner way over there. Cause we went to observe...

ST: You could tell who it was, you didn't see nothing but black faces.

TR: Our sponsor of the drill squad took the Ryan Cadets one night to observe one of the white squadrons so we could see how they did and we had to sit way at the top

DD: On this end.

TR: On that far end over there.

DD: And Sammy Lee just reminded me we didn't have a track at Yates. We walked from high school all the way to Texas Southern University to practice track and Stan Wright who was the track coach at the time at Texas Southern would allow us to come from the 7th grade to the 12th grade. We all practiced there and at Texas Southern along with the Texas Southern Universities track team. But, which was a plus for him because we were, we were sprinters and distance runners who really had unique talent starting in the seventh grade. We won four consecutive state championships and we still right today, we still hold the record for scoring the most points in a track, in a state track meet. We scored our senior year, 107 points to win the championship and nobody had broken that yet but I'm just saying it was a blessing to Stan Wright because he started recruiting us when we were in the ninth grade. And so there were five us of, of those state

championship teams that were recruited by Stan Wright at Texas Southern University and so it was a blessing for them and for us but we had to walk... and how. Let me tell you how many blocks it was. We see, one two, had to be about twenty-five blocks and sometimes we caught the train if we got there at a certain time we knew when the train would be coming down the track. So, we would...

All: Oh, ha ha!

DJ: Hitch riding. Jump on the freight train!

DD: We would hitch a ride all the way down to TSU.

TG: To TSU

DJ: Oh, my goodness

DD: And the same thing when we left track. 5:17! That train would be going back and we would catch that train and get off

Inaudible

DD: And walk home or to school which was about six or seven or eight blocks from you know from the train track.

ST: During the Thanksgiving classic... each ward, Fifth Ward, Third ward. They would have their parades, Wheatley would have their parades up and down Lyons Avenue. Yates would have their parade up and down Dowling, all these things would be happening before the game and if you would come up to Jefferson stadium that parking lot would be full of people.

TR: That's right.

ST: Be full of people at nine o' clock of the morning, 10 o' clock in the morning that lot would be full.

DD: If you didn't get there early,

TG: You didn't get a good seat!

ST: A good seat

TR: I want to comment on that because Coach Jackie Carr, who was famous basketball coach at Phyllis Wheatley, he told me the story he said "Coming from Fifth Ward, you had to leave home early that morning..."

ST: That's true

TR: "... if you wanted to get a seat in the classic." He said he had an auntie who came from California, one year

AW: I remember reading this.

TR: And said that she wanted to go to the game he said she wasn't too particular about taking her to the game but she just insisted that she wanted to go! And he said "ok we'll have to leave early" said by the time she got dressed and all it was after 12 o' clock, when they left fifth ward he said when they got here, to Third Ward. They got off the bus at the corner of Scott and Holman. He said it was after halftime before they got in the stadium. They didn't hardly get a chance to see the game, much of the game, because they left too late! It was just that many people trying to get in the game.

DD: That's right.

TR: But back to the parades Yates parade started on the corner of Dowling and Gray

DD: That's right.

TR: Dowling and Gray. And they played in the band and I was in the band from 8th grade to 12th. So, I marched in those parades every year.

DD: You weren't in the band in the seventh grade, because we were in the band together.

TR: Well I was Beginners band when I got to Eighth grade, when we got promoted to Eighth grade, I got promoted to senior band. It was about five or six of us that got promoted to band.

TG: Benard...

TR: Yeah Mr. Benard was a fabulous band instructor well everyone called him

TR: I forgot you played in the band.

(Inaudible)

DD: We played trombone. Thurman and I played trombone! You know I don't know if you remember when Thurman's.... collarbone broke.

Inaudible

DJ And by the way they used to play prairie football right over there where the University of Houston

DD: Where they practice right now

DJ: Practices right tow that's where they played prairie football

ST: inaudible

DD: And so, and so we were we in that and we didn't have trombones, horns of our own. But they the school would allow us to borrow trombones, and we were Thurman was trying to play that trombone with that broken collarbone and he was the funniest looking thing in the and that thing was hard!

-Laughter-

TR: Don you're something else

Inaudible

TR: Absolutely right.

DD: No! No! I was out there when you broke your collarbone!

TR: You were?

ST: Thanksgiving game that we played again? They had to rope that field on to keep from the people to keep going on that edge

TG: They would be standing right around the edge

DJ: They would stand all around the track. All around the track.

ST: They would have security to keep them back

DD: When we came out of the dressing room that was the last time we could hear anything

ST: Right

DD: Once we came out of the dressing room and came to the field you couldn't hear anything it was so much noise.

ST: The fans were so loud, the stadium was so loud

TR: The people were hollering!

DD: We had to just get in each other's ear to know what the play was called, you know

AW: With all those people did the schools make a lot of money?

DJ: The money! The money didn't go to the schools.

ST: It didn't go to us.

DD: It went to the district.

DJ: It went to the school district, not us! But tell him about your uniforms! They didn't get new uniforms. Tell them about your equipment, out of all that money that was spent that was brought in from year to year to year by the blacks for that game...

TG: Turkey day classic

DJ: Tell them what kind of uniforms and equipment you had

DD: We played in hand-me-down uniforms, but we had new shoes. And the reason we had new shoes was because Abe Cross who was a friend of Coach Patterson who made all you don't remember? Remember Abe Cross?

TR: No, I don't remember

DD: Abe cross was a Caucasian fellow who had an equipment repair in Fifth ward on Jensen.

Inaudible

DD: uh huh. And he made all of Coach Patterson's and our shoes and so Abe cross had a contract with Spalding, and Abe would get a lot of shoes from Spalding and he would give them to Coach Patterson. But they were smaller shoes and I had small feet so I was the recipient of those ...

TG: Most of them.

DD: ...and I had about three or four pair of shoes but all of it was all because Abe Cross and I had an opportunity to meet Abe when I was in athletic department, and when Abe became ill his son took over and used to come and do all my work at Barnett but yeah.

ST: Shoulder pads and pads that went into the pants we would get hand-me-downs from Lamar High School.

DJ: The white schools.

ST: And we didn't we didn't get new shoulder pads because we could always tell because the white boys would have their name and schools in there, their name in the shoulder pads.

DD: Yeah, inside.

ST: They had their names on them.

AW: Same for the books and other things?

ST: They were hand-me-down

DD: Yeah books.

TR: Books as well! We didn't have new books we got hand me downs

ST: We got old books from other schools

AW: So, the district was both black and white district

TR: Yes!

Inaudible

DJ: But it was segregated

AW: And all that money went to the white school's majority

Majority

Yes

TG: Even though we were bringing it in! The crowds were bringing it in.

DJ: Look, let me tell you something. None of the white schools brought in money...

TG: Not like this

DJ: ...like we did. None of the white schools had a game like we did

TG: None of them

DJ: there are few schools all over the united states that had a classic like the turkey day classic am I right Thurman

TR: It was the thanksgiving classic in Houston the largest attended high school game in America, period. They had one rival game in Chicago which began in 1935 but it was a, it was a

High School game but it was an all-star game it was an all-star game between the public schools and the Catholic schools it wasn't between the same teams it was an all-star team of public schools and an all-star team of Catholic schools and they played in Chicago. But this game was the largest attended high school game in America.

DJ: And this game was a regular football game it wasn't a play-off game

TG: a regular scheduled game

DJ: ...it was no kind of play-off game. It was a regular scheduled game

TG: And Yates graduates all over America agreed to have their vacation at the time this game was going on so they could attend the game.

DJ: And not only that all over the world wherever you were on Thanksgiving Day you had some kind of feeling, comment, or whatever about the Turkey Game, Classic here in Yates even the men who were in the army they talked about how they revealed all of this miles away from the United States on the other side of the world. But there's one other thing I'd like to bring up that I feel is very significant. When our football players were hurt on the team on the teams at their games we had one ambulance that was parked out there to help our boys and it wasn't a city ambulance, it wasn't a county ambulance, it was an ambulance from Collins funeral home

TG: Yeah.

DJ: Who was a parent of students at Jack Yates high school. He had that ambulance stationed out there for every game that was played in that stadium. And you know I would want Mr.

Collins to go on record for that because that was an awesome thing for me to see that little black ambulance on that corner right on that side over there never failed.

DD: He was not he was the assistant principal

DJ: In another district

DD: At carver

DJ: I never knew that

DJ: Aldine district

DD: Yeah, yeah, he was assistant principle many years

TG: So, the thread that goes through everything that we've said is still to me pride. Pride in our schools, pride to be able to demonstrate to our teachers and those who cared about us we were gonna make them feel good too in our sponsors that worked with us and if you noticed we had many kinds of activities to be a part of in the school besides just football and basketball, we had all kinds of clubs. And we so it was a pride that existed then that we don't see today even though it was a time of segregation

DD: Right. Right

TG: It was still at time that we bonded together, we worked, we encouraged one another. we worked hard at achieving and our Principal would give us those good words of inspiration every day over the public-address system telling us what we could do who we could become and anytime anybody made some type of achievement he would bring that to the body to let

everyone know about it. Whether you had graduated or not, to give everybody that inspiration to say I can be that I can do that. So, that pride just radiated in everybody's lives during that time.

ST: You know back then a community like Third ward, Fifth ward, all the people in those communities they would cook cakes and pies and they would welcome the, you know they would all be communicating and sharing and peace giving helping with each other.

TR: Right

ST: Blacks then were really close.

TR: Mhm.

DJ: ...and everybody had something to give

ST: We'd go by her mother's house she'd give us pie and cake

All: Laughter

TG: Yeah!

ST: Going to this lady's house, she'd give us pie and cake

TG: Oh, right that was a big turkey day dinner too after the game you had some dinners!

Inaudible

ST: Everybody eating and, enjoying themselves

TG: You had dinner. Celebration was real good. Real celebrations.

DJ: You had lots of food.

ST: You know, look like when they segregated schools in Houston

ST: Houston,

DD: Integrated

ST: Our relationship among each other.

DD: Yeah.

ST: Went away.

TG: After integration started.

ST: We were close knit. Long as we were all to ourselves but once they integrated the schools

DD: We lost

ST: We had our own cafes, our own barbeque places, our own chicken place, but when all this McDonald started coming into our neighborhoods barbeque they killed all our community.

DJ: Killed the barbeque pit

ST: We had restaurants that cooked soul food we could go and eat a good home cooked, greens and cabbage and okra.

DD: Pork Bone.

ST: Pork Bone. But after they integrated, all these different fast food places come out of the neighborhood, just killed all our black businesses.

DJ: Well speaking of integration, integration killed the Turkey Day Classic don't you think?

TR: It did

DD: Absolutely

TR: It did

ST: That's right.

DJ: Integration killed turkey day classic.

ST: See, we had something going for our people. It seemed like it killed that game, when they kill our game at Jeppesen stadium, turkey day, this city was without something. The black neighborhood was without something.

DD: Yeah.

TR: What brought about the demise of the classic primarily was the fact that integration came about. At the time, all of the black schools in Texas played in a league called Prairie View Interscholastic League, which was an organization out of Prairie View that controlled all of the...

DD: Aspects

TR: ...Aspects of all of the competition whether or not being athletics or music or was in debate, whatever. But at the same time the white schools had an organization that controlled their competition called the University Interscholastic League, UIL so when they integrated the PVIL league became defunct.

DD: Yeah.

ST: That's right

TR: So, that means that all of the black schools now had to be a part of the UIL Universal Interscholastic League. There were so many schools in the UIL as compared to the black schools that their playoff system in terms of the after your district play you know you wanted to get to be a state champion, had bi-district and had a regional and had a state championship game. Well those that playoff system started in the first or second week of November. Which meant that all of your district games had to be complete by the second week in November which means that the Classic Yates was gonna play Wheatley, they had to play before Thanksgiving

DD: That's right

TR: Because the playoff system had come about and so that killed the Thanksgiving Game

AW: Do the two schools still play today?

TR: They still play today they play they have never stopped playing they still play but it's just not on Thanksgiving.

DJ: And there's no crowd.

DD: Yeah, I, let me tell you this, I brought the Yates and the Wheatley game back when I was at Barnett. And we played it out here at Jeppesen stadium. And what happened was when we came together we sold tickets and they sold tickets and we had a big, we had a big count I don't know if you remember that?

DJ: I was on the committee.

DD: That was that was in 94 or 95.

Inaudible

DD: And well see I could I went back to the athletic department in '90. So, that game was played and Jim Ashmore who was the Athletic director said "Do you think we can pull it off?" I said "We can make money off it." so we played that game here at Jeff and we brought it here, we brought it back here because that's where we used to play it anyway

DJ: Donald that was the second one, the first one Al Edwards did it

DD: No which one no?

DJ: The Turkey Day Classic when they

DD: Well yeah but...

DJ: No, no I'm talking about the Turkey Day Classic when they had the old football players

DD: Oh, no I'm not talking about that, that had nothing to do with the district

DJ: I'm not talking about the district there was one before that, is what I'm saying

DD: Yeah.

DJ: They didn't use the high school football players. Do you remember?

DD: Yeah, I remember that.

DJ: They didn't use the high school football players.

DD: The old former.

DJ: Former football players and there was one fellow that was in the, I think, 1949 class or 50' class.

DD: Yeah.

DJ: Who was the oldest fellow played on that team

TR: He was out there playing that day?

DD: Yeah, I could tell you who it was Herman Reese.

DJ: No, it was another light skinned fellow. Herman Reese was out there too.

DD: Hermann Reese was out there.

TR: Because he just passed.

Inaudible

DJ: But that was a Turkey Day Classic that they brought back where all the old players who played years ago, played in that game.

TR: Yeah but your game that you're talking about Donald, was it played on Thanksgiving?

DD: No no it was not on Thanksgiving it was played at night.

DJ: But this was played on Thanksgiving.

DD: Yeah, that's one you talk about but I'm talking about one that was played where we made money and that was district wide, big crowd.

DJ: Well they made money on that one too but they also had the band consisted of old band players and the drill team consisted of old...

TR: Well let me ask you this and I've heard this many times I wasn't aware of the time that was going on, but they said that they had a Wine Bowl that was played in the Cuney Homes.

TR: Cuney Homes. Power to the game!

DD: On Thanksgiving! Thanksgiving morning.

TR: Former players would play in that game.

DD: Yeah, yeah, yeah!

TR: I heard about that!

TR: And the Cuney homes is a pride to us. You go behind that street you'll see the Cuney homes red brick buildings, they called it the "brick canyon".

DD: Johnny rocks.

DJ: I'm going back to this inspiration from Mr. William Holland not only was there inspiration from him every teacher under Mr. Holland was inspired to do the same thing, encourage the students, let them know what they could become what they could achieve. The counselors did the same thing in recent years I've heard people saying their counselor told them they couldn't be nothing "Oh, you'll never amount to this" we didn't hear that growing up

TG: We were expected to be somebody!

DJ: Expected to achieve and we had teachers that encouraged you along with the principal of the school constantly told you what you could become. When you have that kind of encouragement you can't help but want to do something.

DD: That's right

TR: And achieve

DD: That's right

DJ: Whereas the young students that came after integration, they didn't hear things like that.

TR: Kind of piggy-backing on what she was saying about the motivational guidance given to us by teachers and principal, I can vaguely remember Mr. Holland on the PA system he would tell the students, "You've got to prepare yourself. You want to be the best you can be, whatever that is, but you have to prepare yourself, because now everything is segregated but there's gonna come a day and it is going to be very soon where you're gonna have to compete with that other race of people you won't just be competing against blacks you're gonna be competing against everybody so get prepared and be the best you can." and that was very inspirational to me

AW: Do you all, was there, like an I'm trying to think of the word... resentment towards desegregation at the time

DJ: Huh?

AW: Or how do you all feel about desegregation when it happened, integration?

DJ: We were glad because we knew! Well. I can say this from my standpoint, I felt after coming from Jack Yates, I felt that I could compete anywhere I went, and to be very blunt about

it, I told my daddy I wanted to go to Switzerland to school. Okay, he told me you can go anywhere you want to go just do you go and finish but when I read the story of Hampton and its history I tell everybody I went to the water, but I didn't cross. I went to Hampton for my home by the sea and her home by the sea. But if felt very good, I knew I had done my homework. We had the push that we needed, we covered materials that we had to cover, we were well coached by our teachers, we were well convinced by our parents. Mister Holland was our daddy away from home. Mr. Holland was the man, we looked up to him and he wrapped his arms around us and it was just like we were his children.

TR: I can recall after attempting Hampton, Deloris can attest to this while I was a junior Hampton had a program called an exchange program with several white schools in Ohio. Five of us were selected to go to one of those schools.

DJ: To help integration.

TR: To fight the civil rights movement at the time I chose to go to Muskingum College in New Concord, Ohio. The reason I did I could hear mister Holland in my head saying the education you get here at Jack Yates should take you anywhere in the United States and you ought to be able to achieve. You're getting an excellent education here at Jack Yates and it's going to prepare you for any other place you go. So, it was in my head I never attended an integrated school this was your time even Hampton was not integrated at the time. This is your opportunity to test what he said, that your education you got there ought to take you to Ohio and bring you back to Hampton and true enough it did. So, I was a living testament of that and having been a student under Mr. Holland from 6th, 7th to 12 grade then going off to college for four years I went back to work under Mr. Holland for eight years as a teacher.

(Inaudible)

TG: Yeah I did

DJ: Hampton was always integrated but we it was predominately black when we got there but his is what I want to tell you mister Holland instilled in us. Every day when he got on that PA system, as Thelma said and encouraged us these were his words, last words. “You are today, you are tomorrow.”

TG: Yesterday

DJ: “What you were yesterday plus the few changes you made today, you are tomorrow what you were yesterday, plus the few changes you made today” and I live by that right now. That has always stuck with me.

ST: You know

DJ: He was an educator

ST: [Coach Patterson] I think [is] one of the best high school coaches in the City of Houston. He was a father, a coach, he would follow us around like we were his children, that's true.

DJ: Would be like he was your daddy.

ST: And to show you how much players on the team loved coach Patterson. If we were doing wrong they would go tell him, and he would get in his car get out of his bed and find us. That's the kind of person he was. One night we was being bad drinking a little wine, you know one of the guys he slipped off from us and went got Coach Patterson walked to Coach Patterson's

house, woke him up and he came down in there and we ran, we were scared. Cause Coach he disciplined us he made us run till we passed out.

DD: All that wine they had, came out!

Laughter

DD: During Baseball season.

ST: Yeah.

DD: Let me tell you something about Mr. Holland I was in my typing class and somebody asked me to go and close the door. So, I got up and I grabbed the door and I pulled it and I turned it loose and the draft, we were in Miss People's typing class and the draft from that hallway, it slammed that door. And we had we had transit windows above the door. But they could only come down so far, they had chains on them. But some of them didn't have chains on them, they had a stick that the janitor would, they had a little clicking thing on the end and they clicked the lock and let it down and then put it back up. Well that thing fell and hit me at the top of the head and that's scar's still in my head. But what happened it was on a game day, and our nurse Miss Desiree Williams wasn't on campus and Mr. Holland took me in his office and took care of my wound, and they were asking if I was gonna be able to play that night he said "Sure you're gonna go play" But he cut all the hair around the wound and put a butterfly on it. I also cut my tongue when that thing fell on my head and I played that night but I mean he did all that because he was a coach before Coach Patterson.

TG: Tell the story of what happened when the boys beat this big team in Beaumont and came back to school that Monday morning with the “Tomahawk” haircuts and Mr. Holland got on the public-address system.

TR: I’m trying to remember

DJ: He said see all those football boys you know what I mean that tomahawk hair.

TR: Yeah.

TG: Just a little hair here all this shaved, well everybody was crazy laughing, it just caused noise and momentum all over the building! Chaos

DD: Yeah.

TG: He just got on the PA with a calm voice congratulated the team from the big win over the weekend.

ST: You know Jack Yates one of the

DJ: Did you finish?

DJ: I’m not finished. Congratulated them but told them that they wouldn’t disturb education because that was the number one reason we were there, for a good education. And you can’t create havoc in the school because of this and he knew that in order to get some calmness back in that building for the rest of the week and the rest of the days leading up to the Thanksgiving Day Classic, “I just don’t think nobody is going to play in that game with those Mohawk haircuts.”

TG: Mohawk haircuts they all went in and had their hair shaved next day

TR: I'd like to read this to you from this book of screenplays by Lawrence P William says a Coach's coach: the "Pat" Patterson story the story of the legend. The Pat Patterson story is a story of the father of all-Texas high school football from a coaching standpoint; now I know that some people will say come on don't you mean Black high school football? Coach Patterson had a record that would stand up anywhere on the planet sure you can remember the titans but Coach Patterson created the Lion King or is that the Lion's Kingdom? That being the Jack Yates lions of Houston the rock bed of football during his coaching reign. He dominated the hardest and toughest and most talented district and area in football. Houston, Galveston, Beaumont, and Port Arthur, case closed.

TR: Would believe it or not, that's Lawrence out there on that computer.

ST: Now can I say something?

DJ: Green!

DD: Who Thurman?

TR: Lawrence Williams who wrote that book.

[Inaudible]

TR: He's a Yates graduate

ST: We didn't normally have rivals in Houston, we had them in Galveston, Beaumont and Port Arthur. We played all those schools but Galveston was a school that when we beat them or when we lose to them or they beat us, it was always a fight. We go to Galveston to play Galveston in Galveston, and we beat them they knock the windows out our bus. Yeah and we

didn't hurry and get on the bus, they would jump on us. That's the way it was, it was, and nobody liked the Jack Yates Port Arthur either.

DJ: And the same thing happened on Turkey Day Classic. Wheatley had to get out of Third Ward that's right. On Turkey Day Classic, you better out of Third Ward after dark, if you had on purple and white.

ST: Before dark, you better be gone

DJ: Better be gone.

ST: Don't be caught at the bus stop with the purple on.

DJ: Purple and white, that's right. Or you'd get beat up.

AW: Mr. Robins? Anything you would like to add or anything you want to say about the book

TR: Other than only thing I could say about the book was it was a starter this first edition was kind of like a starter to describing what went on during that period of time. Subsequently in fact I'm in the process now of finishing the second edition to this book which includes a lot of more information about various events and things that went on in relation to that particular game.

Having written that first book I had so many people to tell me "You left this out! You could have included this dadadadada," From both Wheatley students and Yates students and as a result of that I've talked with any number and have interviewed any number of individuals along with doing some additional research such that the second book is gonna be a lot more comprehensive than this one it should be out within another six months or so it should be published.

AW: Anything that any of you would like to? A last memory or something you want the game to be remembered for? Or even Yates?

TG: May I piggy back on what he just said about the book?

AW: Yes

DJ: He attended, he was invited to Wheatley a teacher invited him there to speak to their students about the book and he attended, they were so excited. They did projects about the book and presented that those projects to the mayor of the City of Houston. My thinking is, this is a book that should have been in all the High Schools in Houston and especially Yates and Wheatley high school they should have, every student who attends those schools should have that book to know about their history and to learn about that pride.

[Inaudible]

TG: should be assigned to the district should have purchased a book of this nature so that they could show what happened during that period

ST: Where we come from

DJ: And what impact it had on the lives of the people at that period of time as well as these because the students that he talked to most of those were the grandchildren or great grandchildren of those who had been

DD: Yeah.

DJ: So, I'm saying this is something to me that to those of us who lived it will never let it

ST: Never forget.

TG: We'll never forget it. And all of us who lived it and had the book said, wrote back "Thank you Thurman for taking me back through those memories and that journey again" it just meant so much to us because no one had ever done that about that game, yet everybody knew about it who lived at that time and really looked forward to it every year.

TR: One other, many of the students making a presentation said to those classes at Wheatley... this lady that was an English teacher and she had a senior group about twenty something students in the class and she asked me to come over and present she made each one of those students purchase the book and they had to read it so when I came I had to do a presentation and they started asking questions. Well believe it or not she said "Can you come back another day because I have some other classes and there are some other classes in the school that would like to have..."

ST: A conference.

TR: Would like to they'd like to hear what that presentation is about. Well I said "Well I can come back that was on like a Monday I can come back that Friday" and I went over there Friday rather than just talking to her students in another class they took me down to the library presentation down in the library and there were about five different classes of students it was about 200 students in there and I had a PowerPoint presentation and I presented and they start looking at all of those photographs of things that went on they said "Well look at this band! Look at how many people are in the band, seventy, eighty people in the band our band has about 20 people"

TR: They don't have many

TR: Drill squads and the band! They said where's the stadium where's that? I said its Jeppesen stadium "We don't have 2-300 people at our games you had thousands?" they couldn't believe it, it was a real eye-opener for them

AW: I've got all my time that I needed so thank you all for spending time with me and talking to me about the game

DJ: There is just one thing I'd like to say about this. In terms of that part of history being recorded. We at one time had filmed the football films from the games that were played and we went back to see if we could get them. And all of that has been destroyed, what I heard when the new school was taken over they destroyed all of that and I think that's really, really a demise for us. So, Thurman. Thank you, thank you.

TG: Thank you thank you

DJ: Now Aman how did you get interested in it?

AW: Honestly in my Houston history class...

[end of interview]