

FI07040610; S:\Turner Tech\Oral History Project\Batch_2\FI07040610

INTERVIEWEE: Talmadge Frasier

INTERVIEWER: Keila Pena and (?) Santos

TRANSCRIBER: Andrea Benitez

TRANSCRIBED: September 12, 2007

INTERVIEW LENGTH: 00:16:25

Pena: Well, hello, Mr. Frasier, my name is Keila Pena.

A: And I'm (Alonzo?)

Santos: (?) Santos

Frasier: (Nice to meet you.?)

P: We're here at Turner Tech in the (Virtual Apple?) and where Mr.--

F: Frasier.

P: Mr. Frasier, first name?

F: Talmadge.

P: Mr. Talmadge Frasier. And we're gonna ask him a couple of questions. Describe when and where you were born.

F: I was born in New York City. I am the second oldest of five kids. I'm the only child in my family that was born with a learning disability, who's complicated my life a great deal.

S: Can you tell us a little bit more about your childhood experiences?

F: My childhood was spent with an understanding that I was stupid. But because of my inability (to read?) -- but back in the '50s and the '60s, there was no such thing as, you

know, (?) like your mama (?) and you were born with some type of a disability. In the black community, if you had some type of-- something wrong with you, you were taboo, something to be afraid of. So, since I was (?) disabled and (retarded?), I had very little (interaction?) with kids my own age.

A: So, what school did you go to?

F: I went to a (split?) school between New York and St. Petersburg, so I got the mixture of the both types of the civil rights, (but as soon as the movement started?) in 1954, I was four years old at the time. The civil rights (didn't started bothering me – I say I couldn't quote get to know it?) until I started being around the ages of ten or eleven when (?). To me, walking to the back of the bus was normal because that's where my mother went. But when I came south from New York, it was more prevalent because in New York, you (go?) where you wanted to. But my big awakening to the Civil Rights Movement happened when I was about fourteen when I came to the south to live and visit my relatives in the south. I kind of found out what it meant to ride on the back of the bus what it meant to -- you couldn't go downtown and try on clothes. You couldn't go to a restaurant and sit down and eat. If you wanted to get something to eat, you had to go around the back. (?) "I ain't going." Kids today would probably say, "Well, I ain't going." Back in those days you would or you got a stick bounced off your head. So, you did what you had to do in those times.

P: Okay. When you were fourteen, that's when you said you finally had an awakening about what it really meant to, you know, be colored or-- to whites, what it really meant to be colored. Like, what were your thoughts and feelings about that (?)? How did you-- was that like, oh my god, I hate whites or were you like-- you were confused?

F: Well, see, I (don't care?)-- I'm mixed, I don't look it, but I'm mixed. My mother was half white and my father was black, so my mother taught us not to hate regardless of it. But I saw my mother go through a lot of hate because of the color of her skin. She wasn't accepted by either group- she wasn't accepted by whites, she wasn't accepted by blacks. So my mother said she wanna make sure that her children were very dark, so she found my father. (?) my father laid down on the road, (you'd want to move him?) because she wouldn't be able to see him, that's how dark he was. And the first three kids came out like my father- dark. The last two kids came out looking like my mother, so we had that balance in the house. So what we would do, if really want something nice from downtown, we would send my mother downtown to get it. And they would never notice she was white. (We got smart?), we'll send my mother's sister in the store to get stuff-- better stuff while they wait outside. So it kind of balanced itself out a little bit. So it's kind of like being in the middle of integration and I went to a Catholic school and most of the nuns were all white so I had like a mixed view of it. A lot of times, we weren't really exposed to a lot of prejudice because we lived in our little sheltered community. But it was there. We knew that we came out in the community, things that we could and could not do such as go downtown. You know (?) water fountain. The white water fountain was always nice and clean. The black water fountain was always dirty. You went in white bathrooms, white bathroom was spotless. Black bathroom, you had to stand outside [chuckles] (?). So I knew what it was and (how to do it?) but I grew up not hating anyone. According to my religious background between Baptist and Catholic, we weren't taught to hate. And I think that's one good thing because, you know, hatred is something that you teach one of your children, that child teaches their children, and before you

know it, you got a vicious cycle. So I was taught not to hate. This is the way it was, you accepted it, you dealt with it.

S: What else do you remember about the days of segregation?

F: I (saw?) when they would lynch people and they would (carry it?) on the evening news that such and such got a lynching. You never really understand lynching until you actually see a body hanging in the tree. That kind of-- like in St. Petersburg when they hung this guy. Just for whistling at a black woman, they hung him. And I guess (that part?)-- at that time, I think I got a little bit (hatred going?) little bit little bit. But you just have to see it (and the viciousness of it?). It's not just something that the act is carried out, it's that love of it that frightens you. It's the love of hating a person. My mother told me once, she said, "If white and blacks are so different, then why can we share each other's blood?" And hearing the stories about white people dying rather than take black blood, I never understood things like that.

A: So, do you have a haunting memory of discrimination?

F: Okay, this one when my mother got sick in St. Petersburg and we were more closer to a white hospital than a black hospital. They took her. When they found out she was really black, they put her out and we had to go to the black hospital.

P: Okay. Your community. You said where you lived was very nice and tight. Where exactly did you live?

F: We lived in a place called St. Petersburg, Florida. And in St. Petersburg, everybody lived-- either you lived in Methodist Town or you lived over in we call the 'central part' where I grew up at. You had lawyers, doctors, teachers, everybody lived in the

community. Some of the teachers had some of the nicest homes, the doctors and dentists. We all lived in that one little-- (but then I guess by geographical to my area?)

P: Was it integrated or segregated?

F: It was segregated. White people lived out in North St. Petersburg. We actually lived in the central and whites lived way out by the water. We were like in the little middle buffer zone.

P: You said you were born in New York and you said that your first realization of the civil rights was when you were fourteen. So what year did you move to Miami?

F: We came to-- I came to Miami in about-- what was it? About sixty-- wait, let me think now. (?). I first came to Miami to live with my cousins about maybe like '69, something in that area. And I started working, you know, for the city and doing things. And Miami really, at that time, had went through a lot of turmoil, I think. I think there were a lot of people during that time (feeding?) into the frenzy, making money off stupidity. And what it was-- at the time, it was almost like a three-thing here going on in Miami. You had whites against blacks, whites against Cubans and blacks because in '62, you had an influx of the Cuban community coming in. And then that's when the Cuban / blacks started having problems because the whites were accepting the Cubans, so now we had two people we had to face: we had to face the whites and the Cubans, but the whites would tell the Cubans, "If you want to make it here in Miami, you gotta dislike the blacks." So they just got all these people fighting against each other. At the same time, while America was getting money off both of us because it kept us fighting against each other and they sitting up here, "Okay, let them fight it out." And then blacks, for some reason, the drugs came into the scene and blacks started getting (all?) on drugs, stopped going to

work, and (?) the Cubans taking over. No, the Cubans did not take over, we gave it to them. We stopped going to work, we stopped helping each other, and they did. The Cubans came over here and they took advantage of what black America was not doing. They built their community by coming together. When Cubans came over, you had five Cuban families living in one house, working together, so you know what? They bought the house. Now over here, you've got five blacks that can't stay five minutes together. They don't want to stop blaming each other. And now we in the situation where everybody start fighting each other and they start (teaching their?) kids (to do the thing?), so now that generation tell the next generation (before you know it?) now. Miami is still (split?). Miami has (?)- you have blacks, Haitians, whites, Hispanics, and (Korean?), all those people. Everybody should be working together, but they were taught by their fathers to fight against each other.

P: Okay. Touching back to segregation. What do you remember about local or national efforts to bring total civil rights to blacks?

F: A whole lot of talk. (If you really want to know to it?) now, blacks still don't have a whole lot of political power here in Miami. There were no intentions ever to give them political power. It was to do enough so the government would stop. And many blacks who were doing things to try to bring things up were doing it for their own good. Once they got what they wanted, (they don't care about anybody else?). There's never been- this is my opinion, of course- there's never been a system in place by blacks to secure their power politically. They just don't do it. Back in the '60s when you couldn't vote, "Aw, you can't tell me what I can do. I'm going down and I'm going to do it. I'm gonna fight to do it." Then when you got it, what do you do? Nothing.

S: What other memories do you have, like, about the changes in the 1960s?

F: I think the '60s (were actually made to?) go out and buy a house where you wanted to. With (your dollars?) and stuff, (that you could start moving out?). And you go back and look at the early-- the late '60s and early '70s, a lot of blacks started moving out of the Overtown area into Liberty City. It was-- first, it was Liberty City, (then it went out?) to Browns-- (?) Carol City, so that was the progression. Whereas blacks moved outward, whites began to move even further. So, it was like-- [audio cuts off] -- house is one thing. Being able to acquire land and do things, that's what I really like. (?), we could buy them. And then blacks in my generation started doing it: buying houses, going to school, but then things started (taking off?).

P: Do you, like-- how did your community feel when integration started? When schools were beginning to integrate and blacks and white were beginning to live together?

F: In one sense, we hated it in a sense. I did, because we lost our schools. And they say they wanted to integrate the schools, make it equal. But equal is not busing me to a white school (then tearing down all of my?) history at my other schools. So it was like, you took me over here, you say it's gonna be better. You gave me some textbooks, but they did very little to change their mind-set of the people that were teaching me. Integration can't make people teach you. Some teachers-- for instance, if I took a-- [audio cuts off] -- blacks substandard and I give you an 'A' on it, am I helping you? Yes-- no, I'm not. If you're gonna make integration work, it has to be equal for everybody. It is not equal. (?) whites didn't want to go to black schools, so all of a sudden, our schools became dilapidated, unsafe for white kids to come in. Then when they moved them out, they tore them down. When you tore down that, you tore down the history. Like, for instance,

when integration came, black kids had no history in Miami. My (?)-- when we integrated, the first activity from us is that we would stop playing black schools in football; we had to start playing white schools. And then we try to bus there, white kids throwing bricks at us. You know, you go on the field, you score a touchdown, referee take it from you. You know, (?) the unfairness of it is what I really remember about integration. The (?) the schools, they taking away all of our history, and put us in a situation where people didn't want us there and they treated us like they didn't want us there. You know, you had fights. You had one side- it's still segregated- the whites sit on one side of the cafeteria, the blacks sit on the other side of the cafeteria. You got the same thing now- blacks have their little groups, whites have their little groups, Hispanics got their little group. So, what has changed? Nothing.

A: So, when you in school when they integrated, did you have some racist teachers?

F: Yeah, we had some real racist teachers. We had some teachers (?) call you 'boy'. You know, (?) call you stupid, you ain't gonna make it. They did very little to encourage me, especially having a learning disability. You know, I (?)-- I had one teacher, I got to give credit for her-- that one teacher named Mr. Hernandez. (It wasn't all sorts of?) white teachers-- you guys don't-- black teachers gave me problems, too. I had one teacher that believed enough in me to work with me and that teacher was Mr. Hernandez. Everybody else didn't have time for me.

S: Do you remember Virginia Key Beach?

F: (?) what?

S: Virginia Key.

F: Virginia Key? Yeah, I remember. I remember Virginia Key Beach. We went there and (like every other town?), that's was the black people's swimming hole. That's what it was. I mean, that's-- as a matter of fact, now (?) preserve it, but (?) airport. The history, they don't care nothing about. It's the mere fact that they didn't care (nothing?) about it until they wanted to take it away and build condos on it. In St. Petersburg, we had what we called Moe's Hole- that was the swimming hole. Here, it was Virginia Key. So, my thing about Virginia Key is that the history is there, (?) there, but we got to go a little bit more beyond that now. You know, most blacks, (they didn't go?) to Virginia Key (in that part of it?). It's all about being accepted. What Virginia Key need to be used for is to have-- to build something there that (you going to serve?) -- get you about fifty or sixty of these young kids that's having serious problems and build a center where they can come and (?) themselves, do something (themselves?) because right now, they need help.

P: I know this taping has been short. Very informative, but short. So do you have anything else you would like to add?

F: Yeah.

P: Like memories or views?

F: (I would like to leave?) one thing on this tape is that black America needs to re-identify who they are. (Dressing up for twenty-eight days?), then turn around and stab each other in the back, the rest of the month is not black history. You need to understand where we are and what we're doing to ourselves. And that one thing that I'm gonna leave today: the biggest problem with black America today is black America. We are our own worst enemies. For black kids in school that's trying to make it, everyone that's in this

school that's trying to make a difference, I can give you sixty that ain't doing nothing with their lives and guess who they blame for it? The white man.

P: Thank you very much, Mr. Frasier. It has been a pleasure.

F: Thank you.

[audience claps]

END OF INTERVIEW