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INTERVIEWEE: Kim Sands

INTERVIEWER: (Angel Augustine?) and (Faith Inodero?)

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(Augustine?): -- (Angel? Augustine?)

(Inodero?): (Faith? Inodero?).

A: And we are at William H. Turner Technical Arts High School on February 16, 2006 to interview Kim Sands about her personal history.

I: Can you tell us when and where you were born and a little bit about your parents and grandparents?

Sands: Well, I was bo-- my name is Kim Sands and I'm from Miami, Florida. I was born on Miami Beach in a hospital called St. Francis which actually is no longer there. And St. Francis, interestingly enough, was a hospital on South Beach that never allowed [school bell rings] black people to have children there and because my daddy was in the war in 19-- in the 1950s in the Korean War, only the service-mothers were able to have children there. So, I was actually a kind of rare black case that was born there.

A: Can you tell us about your parents or grandparents?

S: As I said, my parents, you know, they're from Coconut Grove. They went to Carver. In fact, back in the day, Carver used to be elementary school, junior-high, and high

school. And my grandparents are from the Bahamas and other places and so we kind of had mixed people all in my family history.

I: You said in Carver, is it-- did they have blacks in there, you know?

S: Carver used to be all black, all African-American kids back in the '50s, '60s, it was-- it was back in the segregation days. Mm-hmm, that's where my parents graduated from high school.

A: What do you remember about the days of segregation? Is there a haunting memory of discrimination or separation of these races-- of the races?

S: Well, I remember specifically one incident being a little kid and my mom never drove a car and she worked in Coral Gables on Miracle Mile in a real fancy lady's dress shop and she used to take the bus-- two buses over there. And I remember seeing the seats empty in the front and she would always grab my hand when I was four, five, six years old and we would have to go to the back of the bus. And I remember being a little kid, very inquisitive kid that would say, "Why we going past all these empty seats?" And it's really heartbreaking to, you know, to remember something like that not so long ago where black folks weren't allowed to sit in the front. Colored people had to go to the back.

I: Well, were you motivated to do anything about it? You know, what was your thinking-- thoughts about it?

S: Well, very interesting question. In that experience and sitting in the colored section at Woolworth in the Gables and seeing the signs, it was really kind of weird, you know?

But, like I said, I was a little kid. But when I was growing up, I wanted to go to college and play sports. I was a very good basketball player where I ended up being in the Hall of

Fame at Edison High School for playing basketball. And in 1973, I saw a white lady play a white man in tennis and the winner made \$100,000 and I thought wow, that's lot of money, that's like millions of dollars today. I thought I could do that. Of course, I didn't realize how difficult it was. If I knew what I knew now about tennis, I probably would have quit. One: it was so hot here in Miami to being doing that every single day and-- but the money, the money inspired me. And then a lot of white kids were going to college on tennis scholarships, black kids weren't really going to school playing tennis and golf and swimming, they were traditionally white sports. But, for some reason, I continued with tennis and I ended up becoming a professional where I played Wimbledon seven times, I played the U.S. Open in New York ten times, I played in Paris, France, I played in China, then Australia and I'm from the projects of Miami. I went Edison High School, we never owned a car, and to know that I was able to go to the University of Miami for free; I was on a tennis scholarship. I was only one of two or three black kids in the country playing tennis at the University of Miami or anywhere in the country, or anywhere in the country for that matter. I stuck it out. Althea Gibson was a role model, Arthur Ashe was a role model. He would come to the park where I learned how to play tennis and give me private lessons for free. So, when I got a full scholarship to the University of Miami, I ended up being the captain of the team over there. I ended up getting my degree in education. There were less than one percent black kids on that campus, which was crazy to be so small of the few minorities on a campus so filled with other people, it's a journey and I'm very happy that I was able to enjoy the educational journey of it, the sports journey of it, to be successful, I've been all over the world, I mean, I've be in Sweden where there's so many white people and they would look at me as if I were foreign,

which I was, but just to see a colored person, they would stare. I would go to China to Hong Kong and the Chinese people, just as I stared at them to see a whole race of people that looked like that, or to go to Japan and see the Japanese people and to see how everybody looks at each other so funny like we just don't know each other. As a human race, we don't know each other well enough really to have any hatred or segregation or fear of each other because we don't even know each other, from my experience traveling the world.

A: You said that in sports it was a minority-- blacks were a minority and mostly white people was involved in sports like tennis and swimming--

S: And golf.

A: --and golf. What were some discriminate-- some discrimin-- acts of discrimination you encountered while pursuing your career in sports and going to school in an all-white school mainly?

S: Well, on the college level, kids can be cruel. From elementary through college, it never changes. And I think basically because we just don't know each other well enough. You know, kids might look at your hair funny or look how you talk. I mean, I never really talked different from anyone. However, people do kind of placate to the fact that you may have a little bit of what you call 'ghetto sound' or your ways may not be quite the way they are, which is-- I don't know if they [chuckles]-- you know, I mean, kids just do whatever they do and obviously, you know, different races and cultures gravitate to what their culture is about. So, certain things about me culturally, those kids found different but in reality, I needed water, I needed food, I needed air, I need to be clothed just like any other person.

I: It's interesting when you said, you know, you (maked?) it back then, you went to different countries and stuff like that--

S: Mm-hmm.

I: --you know? But you said a word: 'money'. Can you tell us, like, back then, what was it like, you know, the economy for black folks back then? Can you tell more about that?

S: That's a great question. I remember because we lived in government housing, my mom paid, like, sixty dollars a month. Not that that's not happening today, I met someone the other day at the park that pays eight dollars a month and they're actually late all the time. But needless to say, you know, obviously the economy is a lot different today. I mean, you could buy a Snickers bar for ten cents or sodas were ten cents or twenty cents, I mean, everything in life just has evolved. However, you know, my mom never owned a car, she never really made enough money to get anything extra. She had four kids, there was no husband and times are not far-fetched from now where black men are just not staying with the females or females are not staying with the men, so that leaves black women to struggle to raise these kids to try to have their own lives, pay the bills. It's not far-fetched economically from the past except just through times and things being much more expensive. I mean, poor people now are living in houses worth one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. You know, housing is so expensive to buy a home, where, you know, when I was a little kid, you'd get a home for thirty thousand dollars which was a lot of money back there. And when I'd left the University of Miami, I wrote a letter to a lawyer that was the lawyer for Mohammed Ali and Leon Spinks. I was a college student, I wanted to play the circuit and I wrote them a letter and I asked if they would sponsor me and I said it would probably cost about thirty thousand dollars which is like, you

know, God has blessed me on so many levels to think that they would have called me back and said okay and they did. They called me back and they called my mom's house and said they would sponsor me, that they wanted to see more African-Americans out there playing tennis. And when I was a pro, Venus and Serena were little kids and they used to come watch me play, they were five, six, seven, eight, nine. Their dad used to corner me by the locker room and ask me and several other pros- Chrissy Everett, Martina, Tracy Austin. They would just-- he would just corner us and ask us tons of questions about the strokes and how to hit the serve and how much did it cost and it was very expensive and how much were the lessons everyday and actually what would it take and obviously he stuck it out and the rest is history- those girls are worth over a hundred million dollars each, hitting a tennis ball. Who would have thought?

A: How do you feel that being one of the few black African-American tennis players and succeeding in such great heights and that allowed you to make-- allowed you to inspire other black African-Americans students who were raised with less-- lesser-- fewer opportunities than many white people, many white students?

S: Well, like I said, you know, Venus and Serena were little kids running through the L.A. Forum. The L.A. Forum is the same place where the Virginia Slims would have the tennis tournament for women, which is the place where Kobe Bryant and the L.A. Lakers play the basketball games. They would just put a net down on the court, put a carpet down and I vividly remember those girls running through the bleachers and the umpire would say, "Can somebody stop those kids from running through?" [laughs] But by being out there, there is no greater lesson or teacher than to have somebody that looks like you who's a success. So, in order to achieve, it's not mandatory, but it helps to see somebody

who's a scientist who's black to know that blacks have invented the computers, have been a part of the computer age. To know that's we've-- that we as a race of people have been a part of, you know, the blood transfusion- Charles Drew, to know that we have done so many things in Congress like Carrie Meek, to know that we are astronauts, you know, to know that's we're at Stanford University, that we're at Harvard, it matters. To hear us and to see us, it matters, and that's my humble opinion. I mean, it matters to see all races do their thing, but when we don't see people that look like us, achieving, doing great things, doing wonderful things in plumbing and science, in culinary, it matters.

I: Let me go back. You said something about ladies living without her husband. So you're saying you didn't live with your father?

S: That's correct.

I: So what was it like, you know, living without a father and being segregated-- segregation back then and not living with your father? What was it like?

S: It's no different than today, not having your daddy, except that times were so hard back in the '60s and '50s, particularly for black men and it's really-- that's such a great question and I really don't know the answer except that I wish I had-- I wish my dad had had a lot more confidence in life where he didn't feel the need to leave and do the Chicken George type of thing from *Roots* where people separated us. They separated us and people don't realize that it is very difficult (generationally?) to forget how people did that. They sold us, they put children in different families, they put moms and fathers, and the ghost of the past sometimes still lingers. And I really did believe that and I think my daddy has a very-- I think he's remorse about the road that he took, the path, but the path that so many of our ancestors have taken over three, 400 years, it's frightful and it hurts

and it's not over yet. And it's not necessary so the other races haven't had crazy journeys like the Holocaust, you know, like in Biblical Times when people were slaves, you know, it hurts and I don't think the ghosts of the past really leaves until people start really learning about each other through education and listening and being truthful, being truthful about times that nobody talks about and before Egypt-- before Egypt was Egypt, you know, the Greeks named Egypt, not the Africans. It's northern Africa, there were races of people in Africa that we probably have never even heard of called, like, the (Khoisan or Phoenician?), the Nubians, these were successful people that we don't know nothing about and we go to school, we go to educational schools for years and never have heard of the (Khoisan or Phoenician?). It's virtually impossible for anybody, really, to really join forces as a human race if we really don't dis-- just share, share the truths. The truths are so important.

A: What do you remember about local or national efforts to bring full civil rights to black Americans?

S: Can you repeat that question, please?

A: What do you remember about local or national efforts to bring full civil rights to black af-- black Americans?

S: Well, I was a kid, a little kid in the '60s, I'm not that old. And I remember, you know, reading about Malcolm X and Dr. King and Coretta King and Athalie Range and all these people who are fighting for civil rights and trying to get people where we would have, you know, new books instead of always hand-me-down books from the white schools, people who fought for better teachers, people who fought from, you know, where we can sit at the counters and be proud of ourselves and not have to go to 'Colored Only'



restrooms. I mean, I remember it so well, unfortunately. And then, people want to know why black folks are always frowning or still so angry. And it wasn't that long ago, you know? I was a little kid and to know that my parents were subjected to such violence and hatred just on the color of their skin and not given the opportunity, really, to go to school, you know, like they should have been. And to see how educated-prone we are, it hurts.

I: Um, just-- I want to ask you the question, like, do you remember going to Virginia Key Beach? Where did you family go swimming?

S: Exactly. Of course, I'm from Coconut Grove. Virginia Key Beach is twelve minutes from my house in the Grove and I remember having to go to the beach and I remember my mom-- my parents only twenty years older than me, they're young people. And I remember them going to the beach and I remember them going to that beach and I remember the signs, you know? And we had a great time, we-- you know, because the cultural-- you know, segregation on a lot of levels brought the races a little bit closer together as oppose to kind of now-- I mean, I rather it now than before, but if we could take the good that the past had and amalgamate it and put it together, I think we'd probably do better in 2010, in the twenty-first century because there were some interesting things that-- where people cared a little bit more about each other. Like, if you go to a black school as opposed to a mixed-race school or a white school, you know, you just tend to have a little more comradery, you have more of a cultural togetherness even though there's races and within the black race that is just still so-- it's hard to fathom that we constantly hurt each other so bad, but, you know, that's hum-- I think that's a human problem, not so much a colored people or race or black person. You know, people kill people, people just hurt people. But, to know that Virginia Key Beach was there, that

there was a place where we can go and frolic in the ocean and meet little boyfriends and little girlfriends and go and have corndogs and stuff like that, it was better than nothing, I guess.

I: You said 'signs'. What else about the signs? Can you tell us?

S: What's the question?

I: You said 'signs', like--

S: Science?

I: Signs. In the--

S: Signs?

I: Yeah, in Virginia Key Beach. Like, when you go there, you see some of the signs. Can you tell us what are the signs?

S: Well, 'Whites Only', 'Coloreds Only'. Basically, those were the main ones, I mean, that said it all. [laughs]

A: I know this tape has been kind of short, but is there any final thought you would like to leave us with about your life or any, you know, anything you want to share to--?

S: Well, you know, I think I've pretty much said a lot in a short span of time because it's been such an incredible journey to come from low-cost housing, a little black girl, to being in Australia and China and Overtown, [laughs] all over the world. And to get my education was so invaluable. It wasn't just valuable, it was invaluable. And to come to a school like this and to see you guys and I'm being very honest and it's just my opinion, I've been-- I've done these types of speaking engagements- as you see, I'm very comfortable- often, all over the country. But to come to a school like this and to see you guys look so interested and so good and youthful and healthy and-- it really-- it surprised

me, I'm very surprised, I'm very happily surprised to see what the future has for us and it's gonna take you guys to really understand how to value education, how to value your independence, how to not bring children in the world when you're not absolutely ready. You cannot-- it's imperative that you guys understand that, you know, it's hard enough for you as an individual. And to bring children in when you know you're not ready and economically stable, it's very important. And on a final note, on a final note, without manners, without manners, we're nothing. I don't care how beautiful you are, I don't care how beautiful you are, you're still ugly. I don't care how much education you think you are-- have, or how smart you think you are, you're still dumb. Without manners, you're dumb. I don't care how wealthy, how much money you got flowing out of your pockets, you're poor without manners and knowing how to treat other people and it matters.

A: Thank you.

I: It was a pleasure.

[audience claps]

**END OF INTERVIEW**