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INTERVIEWEE: Ricky Edward Wiggins

INTERVIEWER: Perry Lewis and Tiffany Timbers

TRANSCRIBER: Andrea Benitez

TRANSCRIBED: September 27, 2007

INTERVIEW LENGTH: 1 hour, 2 min, 7 sec.

Unknown1: Yes.

Wiggins: Alright?

U1: I'm just gonna explain to you why we're doing this, the purpose on why you're here today. This is kind of like our video archive, like, project that we interview-- we interview certain people about their childhood and the trials and tribulations they went through as far as integration and all of that. Now, you're a bit younger, so--

W: Well, thank you for saying that.

[all laugh]

U1: Well, you're younger than most of our guests.

W: Are you sure?

U1: Yes, positive.

Unknown2: Except for that one guy--

W: I see some guy with--

[audio cuts off]

Lewis: Hello, sir.

W: Good afternoon.

L: My name is (?) (Perry Lewis?) and this is our (?) interviewer Tiffany Timbers.

W: How are you?

Timbers: Alright.

W: Alright.

L: And I am at William H. Turner Te-- Turner Technical Arts School to interview--

W: Ricky Wiggins.

L: Ricky Will--

W: Wiggins.

[all laugh]

L: And we're here to talk about your personal history.

W: Alright.

T: Good afternoon, Mr. Wiggins.

W: Good afternoon, ma'am.

T: Can you please describe when and where you were born and a bit about parents and grandparents?

W: Okay, I was born in Hollywood, Florida- it's in Broward County. My parents were James and Lucille Wiggins. I had four other sisters and then an extended family membership because in our house, we had four other people that lived with us. And in that particular experience, it was quite interesting because we lived in a two-bedroom apartment and there were, I don't know, eleven of us that stayed there and the street I lived on was remarkably beautiful because most people who had major challenges economically and otherwise, never believed and never acted as if they were poor. We all seemed to work together as a community, especially through the street that we were on,

and we pulled for each other and we made sure that everyone collectively got the best that life would offer us and did the best that we could under those circumstances. In terms of my upbringing with my parents, my father was a construction worker, my mother did what was called 'day's work' - she was a domestic worker, she worked in a hotel on Miami Beach at the Olympia Hotel, right on the water, beautiful, beautiful hotel as a maid. And periodically, my sister and I would get the chance to go to work with her as we were growing up and it was always a thrill to leave the neighborhood because that was not always a regular occurrence for us. We were pretty much relegated to where we lived and it was a rarity for us to go many places, unlike what young people today probably experience- a great deal of ease. Being mobile was something not necessarily indigenous to my upbringing. Although we did have a car, my father had to use the car to go to work. My father worked very early in the morning into the late parts of the evening almost seven days a week, and so our family didn't necessarily get the privilege of having many outings of pleasure if you will for the exception of going to church and to of course, going to school. And in my neighborhood, of course, through that period-- we're talking about the '60s. I was born in 1960, and so I'm forty-six years old and I celebrated my forty-sixth birthday February 15- a few weeks ago. In my neighborhood, everything was black. All the police officers were black, all the vendors and entrepreneurs in my neighborhood were black. At my school, all my teachers were black, my principle was black. The truant officer, I'm sure you guys don't even know about that kind of person in that role, but he was the guy who went after people who didn't go to school or didn't get to school on time- he was black. The local little juke joints and hang out places that my parents went to was all black. And there was one particular club in my neighborhood

called 'The Palms' where the great entertainers of that era permeated and entertained before they would actually go over to Miami Beach where mama worked to entertain white audiences. That was another black experience. There were people like James Brown, Jackie Wilson, Diana Ross and the Supremes, The Temptations, Aretha Franklin, those type people, I was very much of aware of as a child because for the most part, my parents saw them. They came to that particular club- The Palms- on a regular basis and we had the great privilege one time-- I was a real young child and I don't remember it, but they tell me about it where James Brown actually came to our house, which was a huge deal. My mama got a chance to cook for him and he had a back-up group or the-- a contributing group called 'The Flames'. It was James Brown and the Famous Flames- they were like the dancing guys behind him and they did the little 'woo hoo' type sounds whenever James was singing, which was cool. And so, my neighborhood was filled with different experiences. Those things I just described to you were very positive and yet, there was a negative side, too. It seemed that during that time, there were people who were involved in a lot of illicit activity as well: drugs and prostitution, the selling of stolen good and that kind of thing, that existed, too. And yet, there seemed to have been a code in my neighborhood. The code was that when it was time to go to church on Sunday, all the foolishness ceased and that meant that if you were about something that wasn't right or wasn't good, you just couldn't be about that in the public. You had to go somewhere or be somewhere in a private setting where only you and those folks who were looking to indulge in that activity would do those things, but not necessarily in the public. And so, as a boy, I saw a varied kind of experience and learned things very quickly about myself and about the world. I spent a lot of time watching television,

although there were three channels, I know that's hard for you all to believe. There was Channel 4, Channel 7, and Channel 10, and that was it. No such thing as cable, the radio, there were only about four or five stations- there was only one black station during that time where I heard black voices. I knew about black issues and there were very few reading or informational outlets that we had during that period. The biggest was *Jet* magazine and *Ebony* magazine and that's where I learned more about my own heritage and my own history, through those two mediums, espec-- in the print medium at least. And there were very few things in electronic medium about black people and what they were doing and yet, *Jet* in particular-- or *Ebony* in particular, I'm sorry, which show another side of black people who were doing so many things that were upwardly mobile. They showed people who were in college and who were achievers, people who were about serious businesses, people who were internationally involved. And those things really jumped out at me as a very young boy because I wanted to experience that for myself. And in spite of my own situation at home with all those folks in my house, I kept dreaming, I wanted to be them, 'them' being somebody who I never touched hands with. I wanted to be a part of the larger world, the larger society if you will. And at that-- in that period, there were certain things that happened with certain individuals that I remember. When I was eight years old, Martin Luther King was killed- he was assassinated in April-- I think it was April fourth if I remember, at the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis. And I remember as a boy on the day that Martin Luther King was killed how gloomy the day was, the weather was kind of strange looking, it looked like it was gonna rain but it never rained, it was just ugly outside and I remember how my parents responded to his death. I didn't know much about Martin King at eight years old, but I

remember how my parents looked. They were so despondent and they were so hurt. It was one of the few times I saw my father, who was a very-- a large man, my father was about 6'4, 6'5, about 245 pounds, looked like Jim Brown, if you remember Jim Brown the football player- my father was about that size. My father was a rough-looking kind of guy and he had an exterior, too that made you think that he didn't-- he was impervious to pain, that nothing really bothered him and he had-- on the day that we recognized that Dr. King was killed, I saw my father cry. That was a significant day to me because I knew that something important had happened that it would strike my father like that, and therefore, I wanted to know more about what Dr. King was about and what he stood for. And as I did do that particular process, I found out about things like Mahatma Gandhi and his whole idea about peace and the idea of non-violence and the idea and the issue of inclusion and recognizing people of different races and cultures and the importance that it would be and it would be from time forward that people, regardless of their backgrounds, that they would get together and embrace their differences but also embrace where they were the same. It was very important for me to see and understand that because as I grew up, I saw a lot of issues in areas that were so racist and so ugly and so detrimental to so many people. And-- I know you have other questions, but I had too much to say about that one, sorry.

[all laugh]

W: But, I just have to tell you that it was difficult for people during that time to get over that little hump-- or that big hump if you will as it pertained to people and differences. There were many issue and circumstances that I saw people struggle educationally, socially, and otherwise because of matters of race. And they were quite difficult for an

eight year-old boy growing up, trying to figure out who he was to deal with those things. And so, I'll stop there and let you ask another question.

L: Well, sir, what school did you go to?

W: Okay. I went Chester A. Moore Elementary School. And while at Chester A. Moore, it was the advent of what you all might know now as programs for kids who were emotionally challenged or EH-type programs. I was one of those kids and I think I was deemed challenged if you will because I was taught and it was drilled into me so strongly that I could not speak or I should not speak unless someone speaks to me first, being an adult. So I always spoke when someone spoke to me. If an adult said something to me then-- and they gave me that permission to return that, then I did it, if not, I kept my mouth closed. So I think people looked at me and thought something was wrong with me. You know, this guy-- this kid never says a word. It was just about being a part of the decorum that was set for me through my parents about speak only when you're spoken to, keep your mouth shut, don't say nothing, honor your elders, be sure to do exactly what you're told to the letter. In other words, it was very rigid, very, very to the point and there was no, like, flexibility that you had to be like that and for me, I took it to the-- I mean the nth degree about that and so, therefore, I don't think it had anything to do with my academic abilities, I think it was more so just about me honoring my parents (?) because that program itself was very new. Unfortunately, I was placed in a program where there were other kids who did have real issues, real challenges psychologically and otherwise and I was in some classes that (concept?) that those type things about me and I was never bothered by it, I didn't really care. I recognized that the school thought it was the best thing for me and therefore, my parents thought so and I went along with that. And so,

when we were in class, teacher asked me to read, I would read. She asked me to do something else, I would do that. And finally, the day comes and I get around fourth grade and this teacher comes up and says, "I want to test you." And I said, "Okay. Yes, ma'am", right? And in the test she found that I read on seventh grade level and I was, you know, in fourth grade. She says, "Oh, you can read." I said, "Yes, ma'am." She said, "I want you to write me a story. Just pick out a story you want to write." And I asked-- I remember asking a question, "On anything?" She says, "Make up a story for me." And I wrote about a boy flying on a balloon and seeing the world. And the story wound up being about two or three pages. And at the end of the story, the boy gets a chance through that odyssey of meeting all types of people who are different than him, of course some who were just like him, but people of other groups. And she looked at me, she asked me a question, she said, "Why are you here?" And I said, "I don't know." And I remember that was the first day that my life was about to change because this woman, her name was Ms.(Wooded?) at the time, she went to the principle and said that I have been misdiagnosed and I should have been in regular classes, whatever that meant during that period. And from there, C. A. Moore to (Lanier?) Middle School and the middle school experience was much like yours because it was time- this happened to be in the '70s at that point- where integration was happening. Integration was a very, very strange and a weird experience for me because unlike other locations in Broward County where there was busing-- the big issue was busing. Are you familiar with the Supreme Court decision Brown vs. The Board of Education.

Audience: Mm-hmm. Yes.

W: Alright, you know about all that whole thing about 'separate but equal' and trying to integrate schools? Alright, good. In Florida, there were things in some instances that were very slow about that. Although the law became the law, it didn't mean that it was being carried out right away. Ultimately, though, it did get to where I lived in the community that I lived in and the county I lived in. And so, in Broward County, the big issue was busing black children into white schools. They thought that was gonna be the way to make the situation in terms of education equal, which was in my opinion, a mistake. But, nevertheless, that's what the attempt was. And so everyday on the news, you would see these incredible fights and these make-shift fences that kept the black kids on one side and the white kids on the other side and they were at each other, fighting and throwing rocks and chains, people rocking buses and-- oh, it was very ugly, a lot of people got hurt. And yet, in my neighborhood for whatever reason -and this happened to be-- um, I guess I was eleven, twelve- my neighborhood had the high school that was the only high school that bused white kids into a black neighborhood in Broward County. And so, I always wondered about why was that and I still don't know the answer to that fully, but I recognized the reality and I remember embracing the idea of white kids coming to school with us. And I remember the other black kids that I knew very well, on the first week or so of these white students coming into what we thought was our school, right? It was-- it was no longer just a school, it was our school now. And these white kids coming in and I remember how scared they were. They were horrified. First of all, just to take the ride from where they were coming from, because they came from an area in Hollywood and I'm in Hallandale and it's only like a couple of miles difference but it's a whole other

world when you consider the realities of Hollywood and a place Emerald Hills, it's almost like the Wizard of Oz, right? It was called Emerald City in the Wizard of Oz?

Unknown: Mm-hmm.

W: Okay. They came from a place that was just opulent and beautiful, big homes and they had people that worked inside their houses and cleaned up their houses, like my mom did on the beach. They had many people like that. And most of them had that kind of experience. And then, we also had another group of white kids who came from an area called 'Lake Forest' and in Lake Forest, there were poor white children that came to our school and they were as poor or worse than the majority of the black kids that went to the same school as I did. And so that mixture was very interesting because you had these real rich white kids, these poor or middle-class black kids, and then these very, very poor pockets of white kids who came to the same high school. And in those first few weeks, although there was very little fighting, there was just this tension. And I remember in classes where there was obvious mixture of students, the teachers were also on edge as well because they wanted to make sure that at some point the kids would embrace each other or just engage each other in conversation about who they were and there were different assignments that they were given by the sc-- I guess the school board to try to carry out. And I remember making friends-- one of the first friends I met was a guy named Michael Moses, who happened to be Arab from a descent standpoint. But Mike Moses was one of the best athletes I'd ever seen. He could play everything, and I was good, too, you know at that time in the sports experience. And so, we competed at P.E. and while in P.E., because Mike was so good and because I knew I was good, he and I, we hit it off and because other people watched us, we wound up being catalysts for our

school. He and I became the greatest friends. We ate lunch together, we sat by each other, which was huge because what you would have in the cafeteria-- and some of you still are dealing with that now at this school, I know this is true. You got a black section, or just black kids period sitting in one section, you got white kids or Hispanic kids now sitting in other sections. You know, that's just real. We-- because we only dealt with two groups at that point because there were very few if any Hispanic kids at all that were around. The only person that I knew that spoke Spanish was Johnny the ice cream man.

[all laugh]

W: And I thought that was so cool that he spoke like he did. I said, "Man, what you saying?"

[all laugh]

W: And he taught me some words in Spanish which was cool, you know? He was great. Everybody loved Johnny, he was just-- he was like-- "Why Johnny talk so funny?" I don't know but I guess it's cool, he gave us some ice cream.

[all laugh]

W: So, that whole separation thing kept itself up. It was out of fear and ignorance. Not ignorance in the sense that people were indifferent, they just didn't know. And fear kind of pervaded the situation, it just kind of got in there. But Mike Moses and I, we kind of broke a barrier I guess as I think about it now because Mike and I, we would joke about things, I would go to his house, which was, like, totally unheard of. And he said, "Man, come over to my house, meet my dad." His daddy was the athletic director at Chaminade High School, James Moses. And I would go to their house and I couldn't-- they had a

pool, right? Which was like, that blew my mind, I'm like, "Damn, a pool." And I couldn't even swim, right? But I got in the pool anyway.

[all laugh]

W: I stayed in the shallow part. And you know, we sat around and ate and talked about a lot of different things and we were just so familiar and such great friends that we were an example for so many other people who were just not sure. And then Mike would come to my house and my mother would cook for him. My father (who was?) a little different. He wasn't necessarily too warm to that idea of Mike being around us. I'm being honest with you. And yet, he would accept him enough that he, "Well, your in my house again, you may as well just bring your ass on in here."

[all laugh]

W: You know, "Come on in." But that was a great lesson for me in terms of my relationship with Mike because it made me understand that there were people who although they look different than me and although they had certain- at that time- certain obvious advantages that I did not have in life, that I was still dealing with other human beings. And that taught me a lot of things about tolerance. It taught me a lot of things about being able to see myself through challenge and circumstance. It taught me also about being courageous enough to recognize that there were things I wanted to do and wanted to be that were gonna be good in spite of all my other circumstances. So, from there, I went on to experience in high school, which was totally different because high school was-- you know, we had past that period in America where it was not so unusual for different races to mix with each other. There was this thing called-- this program

called '*American Bandstand*' - it was a dance show- and the guy that does-- his been doing it now for years but he's been ill, I can't think of his name right now.

Teacher: Dick Clark.

W: Dick Clark! Right, right. He used to host when the ball comes down for the New Year. Yeah, and he had *American Bandstand*. *American Bandstand* was so cool where he would bring on the coolest groups or singers and they were the hottest thing happening at that moment. And if you made it on *American Bandstand*, we were like the thing, you know? And that's where you saw black kids and white kids dance. And that was incredible to see the mixing going on. And then things got really awesome when during that same period, Don Cornelius and some others got together and they came up with what was called '*Soul Train*'.

U: Mm-hmm.

W: Now *Soul Train* to me was incredible because it was a time where being in high school, it was still important to black kids, especially black males to assert themselves because you had no other opportunities to do such a thing. Where as white boys and white girls always had the opportunity to be rebels, to (whatever degree?), to be hippies or whatever that was. Black kids didn't have the opportunity to necessarily express themselves like that. And yet *Soul Train* was an integral part of the experience because you saw the freedom of the dance thing. You saw the expression of being just black and being strong and being vibrant and being intelligent and watching people articulate the language and your colloquial language or the neighborhood language and give legitimacy to that. Those things were very important to me that someone would give me that validation that, hey, you know, a lot of stuff your doing ain't that bad brother, it's alright.

You know, you can be you and still deal what the rest of the world and it's gonna still be okay. So that made me feel very strong and yet, I also had a longing still for more and so high school to me was like a flower being-- that's been planted that's now beginning to bud and grow up and grow out and by the time I got to be, like, a sophomore in high school and realize to what was happening, I recognized the importance of grades and the fact that my grades were gonna be paramount to my success. And so, with all that B.M.O.-- oh, you don't know what that is. Alright, 'big man on campus'- your teacher knows what that is- I was one of them. You know, I was a bad boy, right?

[all laugh]

W: Okay. And the girls, that whole thing? All that was important, you know, that was big, it was huge. You want to socially have a place. People could know who you were just by you showing up and you're going to places: "Oh, there go Rick right there." You know, that was awesome, alright? And you would use that-- or I would use that to my advantage on many occasions. And then because-- (we're in a?) school environment because it became such a big part of my experience and even socially, I would use that to my advantage a lot of times with a lot of grown people. You know, I would see certain teachers and they would say, "Ricky Wiggins, why haven't you turned in your assignments?" "Oh, Ms. Williams, I'm sorry, I forgot. Can I turn it in tomorrow?" "Of course you can." Right? And I would watch them penalize somebody else for the same thing, but they wouldn't do that to me because I had gotten that kind of rep, you know. But I understood- eventually though- that that wasn't so cool. That was like that tenth grade thing, you know, you playing football and basketball and you have decent grades

and you read well and you think you're kind of cool and the girls tell you were fine and all that kind of thing?

[all laugh]

W: You know, you think you got it made and that wasn't true. That was not true, that's was just talk. I had to make the connection in spite of all the things that were happening to with the nation- our country- socially, and I must go back to that. I remember Nixon was president and Watergate came down, that was a horrible time in this country--

Teacher: Nineteen seventy two.

W: Yeah, I was twelve years old. It really tore our country apart, the Watergate Scandal. And yet, if you read about, and you read intently about it, President Nixon was about to go for re-election and he was concerned as to whether or not he was gonna win, and to be honest with you all, he shouldn't have had no concern at all. He was gonna kill McGovern anyhow. But because of his own craziness, he got other folks involved in a thing that caused him to do some spying and then it got bigger and bigger and bigger and ugly things began to happen and just think: the first tip that something was wrong about that campaign came from a black man who was a custodian at a hotel called the Watergate Hotel. A brother just doing his job, right? And that was the beginnings of all the ugliness that happened with that. And then you had these two reporters from the *Washington Post* to began to write about it and hopefully you know the history from there. But, that was important still for me. This black boy living in Hallandale, Florida with eleven people, whatever it was, in the household with, you know, two bedrooms with one bathroom and we sleeping still at that point on the floor with the-- you know how you have a sofa, you got the thing you sit on, whatever that is?

L: Mm-hmm.

W: That was my-- you know, you took that out and I put it on the floor and my mother made me a pillow out of just things. That was my bed until I was ready to go to college and I'll get to that in a minute, but that was how I slept. Didn't bother me. It didn't bother me because I recognized what was really happening. My parents were truly doing the best they could do under the circumstances. And it was no-- there was no room for me to like, gripe and, you know, like, complain like, "Oh, mama or daddy, I need my bed!" Man, if I would have told my father that, (he would have?) looked at me like I was crazy because they beds were already taken by my sisters and I told you I had two cousins and two uncles that stayed with us periodically and they were older and so they got whatever that was there for them comfortably. I was like the last on the totem poll to get whatever was left. So, there was no need for me to gripe about that. My thing was to do what I was supposed to do as well as I could do, you know. And in my own little world, my world was at school because eventually, with my friendship with Mike Moses early years and into high school, I had recognized that if I would grasp the realities of school, I could be whoever I wanted to be. And in spite of all the racial issues that were still going on in the '70s, it was a volatile time all over the world with varying things that took place. Black and white, white and Asian, black and Asian, whatever you wanted to call it, it was happening. And then the advent of the push that women began to place on this country about being recognized, all of that thing, women's liberation, all those things were going on and then (I was?) experiencing some of that and trying to retain as much as I could in terms of that the factual things were, I still had to stay in touch with who I was and who I was trying to be. Very powerful period. And music again was so important and so

validating for me because although I couldn't and didn't have the money to go to a concert, I fell in love with music on the radio. Marvin Gaye was my favorite singer and it still is my favorite singer of all time. Marvin Gaye in 1972 put out an album called 'What's Going On?' and I'm telling you right now, if you've ever had a chance to listen to it, if you get the album or CD-- golly, I'm still talking about albums. If you get the CD and just listen to it, you would think that Marvin (made?) the album yesterday-- that CD yesterday and it was about the '70s. He's talking about war and violence. He's talking about the ecology and what we're doing to our Earth, you know, global warming and all those things. He's talking about government and social issues. He's talking about the issue of saving the babies, meaning we gotta start working on trying to save our children, we gotta take care of our kids because if we don't do that, we're gonna lose in this race-- the unfortunate race that the human kind have with each other about who's gonna be smarter the next one-- the next time around. He sang about all those things in the '70s. And if you get that CD, you will know what I'm talking about. He also, of course, he sang about love, he sang about relationships and family and so, that whole time became very powerful to me. And to sum the rest of that experience up, there came that final year of high school after you have spent four years of quote unquote 'being the man', right? Now, there was no FCAT, you guys are about to do that, some of you I guess. There was no FCAT during that period but there was the advent of what became the (functional?) literary tests. And they were using the senior class that year as the experiment to see how they do on that test but it wasn't going to count. And I remember I got to take the test and when I saw the test, I wasn't intimidated by the test but I was concerned about what the results would be and how people would construe what I do on it and I had the luxury of

refusing to take the test so I told them no, I wasn't going to take it and they said, "Okay, fine. We got somebody else." But there were other kids who took the test and they did okay but the whole idea of testing and then getting out of high school was the thing of the day, that was getting ready to come. The following year, my sister who was a year behind me and she hated that because obviously, you know, her brother was like, like I told you, he was the man and people would say, "Oh, your Ricky Wiggin's little sister." And she said, "No, my name is Sherry." But, she had to take that test and she had to deal with all those things, which is to (make up skills?) or do them over and the reality behind that, ultimately, was testing became a big part of the experience for young people. If you wanted to advance, they would give you a test. Now, you can feel any way you want to about the FCAT and all that stuff and I had my own personal views about that, but in some cases it's not anything new, it's just more, it's gonna continue to be more. I think it's very unfortunate that we would use a test the way we're using the FCAT, but that's another conversation. I think that if you go to school for twelve years, and you've mastered classes enough where you're passing them with at least a 'C' and that you have all of your credits, you should be able across (somebody's?) stage and get your diploma.

U: Mm-hmm.

W: I believe that, I really do. And at the same time though, I do recognize that there is a connection to testing because as you go off to college or wherever you go, there will be tests and they will determine what happens to you as far as you going forward is concerned. But as far as high school experience, those are my feelings. But let me get to my senior year, let me finish that and we'll go on. In my senior year of high school, I didn't-- I didn't know what it was like to do anything different of what everybody else

was doing in my neighborhood. In my neighborhood, the biggest thing you could do was get a job at Winn Dixie being a worker. You work at Winn Dixie, man. My thing was I wanted to be in the produce section and working in that section because they was spraying the little vegetables, you ever see that--?

[all laugh]

W: I wanted to do that. And it was inside in air-conditioning, I was like okay, I'll work the inside, that's certainly cool than being outside. And they had white jackets on. Man, I thought that was definitely cool, right? White jacket, you're spraying the little vegetable things and the pretty little honeys coming over with their mothers so hey ("Hello there"?) and you're getting paid, right?

L: Yeah.

W: So, I was like man, that's what I wanna do. (?) I'm going to Winn Dixie to get me job and I had been an athlete throughout the time and so, my basketball coach said to me, he said, "You know, Ricky, you should go to college." I said, "Man, I don't know nothing about no college. Nobody in my family go to college." He said, "No, you can go." I said, "How do I do that?" He said, "You can get a scholarship." I said, "What's that?" He says, "That's when people who have money and they pay for you to go to school." I was like, "Who's gonna do that for me?" And then I remember him taking me to my counselor and they looked at my grades and they saw that I had good enough grades to qualify for a lot of different scholarships. And I-- I certainly still didn't make the connections still. I kept thinking, oh yeah, you be kind of smart but that don't mean nothing. And there I was, seventeen years old about to be eighteen and my life was in front of me. I was balking at the idea of doing exactly what I thought I wanted to do all my life, which was seeing the

rest of the world. I was scared. I kept (saying?) you're that beautiful story about being in the balloon and seeing the world and now you have a chance to go see the world as a college student, now you scared and you just want to be back in the neighborhood doing that cool thing, (being with?) the honeys at Winn Dixie and you want to settle for that. I had a big conversation with myself about that. My coach was a tough man, he said, "No, you gonna take your ass to school." And I said, "Well, where would I go?" You said, "Where do you want to go?" And I remember looking in the college catalogue- you all should already be experiencing that if you're juniors- and I remember there was this thing on Ohio University in Athens, Ohio- it looked like it had my name on it and I wrote out an application, I sent it to them, and they accepted me within a week. And I remember they were actually-- (?) recruiting-- they were recruiting me to come there. So I flew my first little flight on a plane to Athens and it was in wintertime and it was so cold, it was snowing. I had never seen snow before. So, as I was getting off the plane and looking back out at the snow, I knew I wasn't gonna come to school there. Man, ain't no was in hell I'm gonna be out here in this cold-ass weather.

[all laugh]

W: I'm from Florida. And so, I got back home and I talked to my counselor. I said, "Well, are there other schools I could go to where the weather is like what I'm accustomed to?" She said, "Yeah, there are many." She said, "Why don't you apply to something that's closer to home?" And so I was thinking maybe I'll go to community college (?) which would have been fine, right? She says, "No. You won't be able to get a scholarship with (a lot of the?) community colleges because you- although you get some- you can get more if you went to a four-year school." I'm like, "Okay. What are they?"

And she talking about Barry, St. Thomas,- which was another name at that time- and the University of Miami. Now, I knew the University of Miami because they had some popular things going there athletically. I said, okay, well, maybe I'll apply to the University of Miami and got the application in not thinking they would ever accept me and got accepted and I was scared because I had-- I knew they wanted-- (I was doing stuff for them, them grown people?), you know? And I got accepted at UM and so now, here I am in the real moment of truth now because you've been accepted, you got the letter and now I gotta go. And I got all the scholarships, financial aid, and stuff like that and I remember my father in his wisdom, he who had a very limited education of his own, worked on a farm most of his life- his young life. And we talked about school. It was maybe about a thirty second conversation. My father said, "So, this scholarship thing, boy let me ask you now, you going to school down there at Coral Gables?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Do they give you a place to stay?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Everyday?" I said, "Yes, sir." He says, "You have your own room?" I said, "Yes, I'll be in a room, yes, sir and there'll be somebody else there- my roommate." He said, "You have a place to put your clothes?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "What about food? You'll be able to eat down there?" I said "Yes, sir, they have something called a meal plan I'm gonna be on." He said, "You can eat everyday? How many times?" I said, "I think it's three times a day." And he said, "You don't have to pay for that?" I said, "No." He said, "I don't have to pay for that?" I said, "No, sir." He said, "You're gonna go to school?" I said, "Yes." And then my father looked at me and he said, "Boy, let me tell you something: you better go down there and do exactly what those people tell you." He says, "You go down there and you do your absolute best." He says, "If it means that you ain't

gonna come home for awhile, I don't want you to come home." He said, "You stay down there- I know it ain't that far- but you stay down there as long as they want you to and do exactly what they say and if you do that, you'll be alright." He said, "We'll call you sometime when we need to call you and sometimes you can call us." He said, "But you stay your ass right down there and you go to school." And I said, "Yes, sir." And that was the beginnings of my association with the rest of the world because when I got down to the University of Miami in 1978, I guess when I graduated high school, that's when I met really up close and personal where the rest of the world was. I met students from all over the world. My roommate was from Pakistan on one side; my other roommate was from Uruguay on the other side. I was on a floor with pre-med students and they were from all over the globe and yet, in a general sense on the campus, I met people from truthfully every country there was on this planet just about. I met people from Africa, I met people from all over the Asian continent, I met people from everywhere and what was so incredible to me was the beauty of every person that I met and it made me know that we had a chance as a society to do better than what we had done. Not to be so mad and so angry that we couldn't, but that we as young people with our own experience, had the chance to make it better. If there was anything I wanted to communicate to all of you today is that by virtue of who you are, what your doing, you still have that greater chance with what your doing today to make it even better than what it is. It is better. Is it great? Absolutely not. Can it be much better? Absolutely. Will it take you guys to do it? Yes, because most of the people who are my age and older are tired, consumed with other stuff that means nothing, and yet, you're fresh, you have the energy to make it happen. And so,

I hope I've met some of your questions. If there are other questions, I'll go ahead and do that.

T: What was it that you were studying at the University of Miami?

W: Oh! Okay, I was an industrial psychology major which got into the intricacies of the business world because I double-majored in business and in psychology and that was an interesting experience as well because I got a chance to learn a little more about how companies worked and how workers worked and how to make things better for people as they worked.

T: Okay. During the 1980s, you were in the University of Miami, correct?

W: Yes.

T: Okay, do you remember anything about the riots during that time?

W: Yes. There were two major riots, a riot is a riot but there were two experiences. One-- the first one was the Arthur McDuffie riot. I remember that was in May or June 17, 1980. And this guy was on a motorcycle- he was an insurance man- and he was beaten to death by I think it was City of Miami Police Department (still?) for no reason other than the fact that he was black. And you look at the pictures of Arthur McDuffie's body when he was in the morgue, his face was twice the size, his body was beaten beyond recognition, and yet, he was the one who was charged with doing something wrong. I remember leaving the campus of UM with three friends- another young man and two young ladies. We were going to Metro Justice Building to protest like everybody else seemed to have been at the time. And cars-- if you know 836 turns to where Jackson Memorial Hospital is, there were cars who were stopped on that road-- on that highway. You had to actually walk. (?) get out of your car and walk because there was no more traffic, all the cars had

covered the entire 836 and you had to walk down to the Metro Justice Building where the protests were started. And I remember someone had climbed up to where the American flag was and took it down and they burned it. (Now?) I saw people turning over police cars and it was the first time in my life where I saw someone get killed right in front of me. There were people who were screaming and not knowing what to do and it was chaotic. It was just people just expressing themselves in a very, very tough way. And I saw a man get stabbed by another man and he was dead. I saw a woman get killed by a bunch of people that trampled her running to one place to the next-- from one place to the next. And I recognized then that we had to get out of there and I told my friend let's go. Had the two young ladies with us and we made it to the car somehow but all the roads were being blocked by the police and the local members of the National Guard and we wound up on this road where we thought it was clear and we just trying to make it back to the campus [clears throat]. And low and behold, these National Guardsmen come out and they these M16 rifles and they're running to the car with their rifles. I'm a passenger in the front seat and I remember this very young, very scared National Guardsmen pushing my head like this [points to his temple] with the rifle and there was another man-- another officer standing behind him asking us where were we going. And it's funny, I didn't anticipate your question but that was an incredible experience for me not just because of that but because what was also happening to me. Here's my first real conversation with God. As I sat there in the car and my friend on the-- he was driving, the two young ladies, they were hysterical in the back seat just screaming, it was so crazy and chaotic. And I said God I know you're not gonna let me die like this right here, you know. I know I'm gonna die one day but you're not gonna let me die like this right here,

so I'm gonna be cool about it and I'm gonna answer his questions. And he asked me where are we going and I just said, "We're trying to make our way back to the University of Miami. We're college students and we'd like to get back to the campus." And the guy kept pushing my head with the gun and who-- this other guy who was the member-- a member of his group came over to his and took the end of the gun-- the-- the-- the rifle (and?) the gun and pulled it down and he said to me, "Do you have any ID?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Show it to me"-- no, he said, "Where is it?" I just said, "My pocket." He said, "Show it to me very slow." I said, "Okay." He said, "Use one hand." And I remember reaching into my pocket like this, pulling out my wallet with my hand up like that and doing this and then going in here and pulling it out, you know, my ID and showing it to him like this. And when we did that, he turned to the young office-- other guy, he says, "They have to go through, they have to get back to school." And he said, "We're going to help you" talking to the men, because the guy was trembling. He was a young guy like me, he couldn't have been that much older than me if he was older than me. But he was doing what he was told to do. And that night, a lot of people died, one way or another. It was ugly and it was just the beginning of days of that kind of behavior because people were angry, people felt like they were zeros in Miami. Miami was such an ugly place during that time and it stayed that way for a very long time, and the remnants of such still exist today in Miami. You know, whenever people show- the travel agencies and (other things?)- pictures of Miami, they always talk about South Beach. It's beautiful over there, it's pretty; very expensive and pretty. You can go over there and have a hell of a time, but that's just a little bit of the reality of Miami and of Florida. We

have a lot of work to do here and it's gonna take you guys, again, to step up and be a part of the solution.

L: Okay, sir, well, how did you get started with the I Have a Dream Program?

W: Oh. I Have a Dream was an accident for me. I was writing the educational program for Dade-County Schools and for what's called 'Citizens' Crime Watch' and I had a rule about me and working. Until I got into entrepreneurial activity, I was gonna be working and therefore, my rule was I wasn't gonna be any place at all no more than six years and I was gonna move on; six years was gonna be my limit. And I was at my sixth year at Citizens' Crime Watch. My good friend, who knew that, called me on my lunch break and said, "Man, I just saw the job for you. You need to go and call these people about this particular position." I called, nothing thinking very much of it but I talked to a bunch of secretaries and whatever. Just so happened that the actual sponsor herself answered her phone and I told her I was calling in reference to the ad that was in the personnel section of the paper and she said she had so many resumes and applications already that it was closed. I said, "Okay, well thank you. At least let me tell you what I think you should do with the position." You know, I started telling her a whole bunch of stuff. Our conversation, which should have been about five minutes, turned into fifty minutes and she finally said, "Can you come over to my house and we could talk?" I said, "Sure", never thinking that, you know, I was going to be hired but ultimately I was. And thereby my-- the beginning of my relationship with I Have a Dream. We started in 1994 with the official launching of the program. Nineteen ninety five, we started with the kids in March when I came on board. March 15, 1995 and now we're-- this is the eleventh or twelfth year. And those kids, of course, went through Dade-County Public Schools as you all are

and ninety-seven kids. Of ninety-seven, eighty-six of those kids are in college somewhere around the state and around the country in vocational schools. One (young lady?) is in the military, (who I saw off?) to (leave to?) Texas today, she's married with a beautiful little baby. And that's my experience with I Have a Dream.

T: Are there any requirements in order to be part of the program?

W: You just have to have been the right person at the right time and it had nothing to do with anything about your grades. You just had to be someplace at the right time. Those kids had no other requirement. And from that has come now nine other programs-- eight other programs around Dade County and hopefully there'll be more. But I tell you, I Have a Dream Program is (like the eight others is?) very necessary because we recognize and you'll recognize that as you apply for college and you are in need of financial aid, you're gonna see that financial aid is going to be more and more of a challenge for you to get because the moneys available for it are dwindling quicker and quicker everyday. And so you have to really be about your own grades, that you can do the best you can, that you qualify for scholarships or other means of financial assistance because it's getting harder and harder even when you want to go, unlike I'm-- what my situation was, I didn't really want to go. But if you really want to go to college these days, it's going to be tougher and tougher for you not just to get into school, but to be able to pay to go there. It's extremely expensive and it's unfortunate that it's that way. I mean, look at the realities of other countries that make college a non-expensive endeavor for young people. Our country seems to think that college had to be for certain group of people or a certain type of people, when really it should be open to all of us- financially and other wise.

T: In your position, what is it exactly that you do?

W: Everything.

T: Everything. [laughs]

W: I do a lot of counseling. I've had a lot of counseling. A lot of intervention when it becomes-- it just always was that. Family intervention, meaning that you had to have home visits-- do home visits on a regular basis. I deal with parents and the issues that you all create between you and your parents, I have to deal with all those things with my kids. It wasn't easy at all. One of the biggest challenges for me was as my kids got into high school-- and (I'll say?) my Turner Tech kids because I had seventeen kids here.

T: Whoa.

W: Yeah, they (probably did?) a lot of stuff. And they were smart, yeah they were real smart. And they were smarter than their parents, which put their parents at a disadvantage because they knew a lot of things and their parents didn't know them necessarily and so the parents felt like, you know, "I'm gonna show you" in some cases. That was to your parent and these kids had to-- they struggled with that because they didn't want to condescend necessarily to their parents (to any great way?). But those were issues like relationships, being out on your own because they had some kids who lived on their own, had some kids in foster care, had some kids who had nobody, who were living on the street for real. You know, so it was a mixture of young people who went through I Have a Dream in the public school experience and can now move on to other things. I'm so proud of them because it didn't have to happen the way it did because all the odds were really against them. People told us that it would not work and yet it did. It had nothing to do with me, it was those kids saying, "I'm gonna make it happen for me." I am so proud of them that they drive me to tears on a regular basis. Today I was crying before I came

here when I saw one-- oh, I should have brought the picture-- when I saw one of my girls, Crystal, uh, I forget her new name now because she's married and she has a little baby girl and the baby is gorgeous, my God. And she's very happy, she is very productive, living in Texas and her husband's a great guy got a great job. You know, life is going very well for them. And truthfully, I wish that for all young people: that you would have the chance to enjoy life, that you would do the things necessary that can assure you that your life will be fruitful and productive enough that you can be not necessarily dependant, but independent. That you can make things happen for yourself when you want to and not be held or bound to any situation that will relegate you to a particular lifestyle. That's so important. That's why this class is important or this academy. It is important because what happens here really is an introduction to another standard in life that other people who are your age don't get. So I hope you don't take this class for granted, nor your teacher (?), because she didn't ask me to say any of this. I hope that you take what you do in here very seriously, that you get out of it all you can, that you exhaust her. She's already tired, I'm sure, with the craziness that goes on. But I'm saying with the other things, I'm talking about the important things like asking her more questions about what you're doing, what you're trying to do. Pick her brain and ask her more and more that you can find out more that you can use more for yourselves.

L: Well, sir, since you grew up in an all-black section of Hallandale--

W: Yes.

L: --can you describe some of your family outings?

W: Well, our biggest-- our biggest and-- it was like going to Disney World and there was no Disney World during that time. But our biggest family outing (to be honest with?) you all, it was on a Friday night going to get big castle burgers at Royal Castle.

[all laugh]

W: I'm serious, I'm not-- When my father used to come home- I told you he came home late- and he would holler from the car, "Alright, let's go!" Man, I don't care what was happening. My sisters could be doing their hair-- ya'll know what a straightening comb is?

Audience: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

W: Alright. Well, my sisters could be doing one sister's hair and it'd be halfway done, they didn't care. "(?), let's go!"

[all laugh]

W: And we'd run to the car. And my father would take us to Royal Castle and you couldn't tell me that I was not on some incredible excursion with my family. When we walked to Royal Castle and I'd watch my daddy go in his pocket and pay for whatever, he'd say, "Get what you want." I'd say, "Oh my God, get what I want? I need a milkshake, daddy!" "Boy (go ahead and get a?) milkshake." That was incredible. On top of the times that we would travel further of course, we'd go-- my grandmother and grandfather lived in Blakely, Georgia and we'd periodically in the summertimes go to Georgia and I never did want to go. I didn't want to go because it was so far and riding in a car was never a thrill of mine. I hated to go to Blakely. I remember getting there and I loved my grandmother- she's deceased now, my grandfather is, too. I remember

embracing them and being happy to see them and at the same time I'd be looking back at the car saying okay, that was enough--

[audience chuckles]

W: -- I want to go back home now after that long ride. On those type trips, you saw all the representations of our society and leaving Hallandale, Florida and going into Blakely, Georgia which was most certainly at least ten, twenty years behind what was happening here in Florida was also scary because groups like the K--Kl-- Ku Klux Klan, they were definitely around. I remember all the stories that my grandfather would tell about the Klan and the number of times they'd come on their property and he and my great-grandfather having to shoot at folks and shoot at the Klan and I'm sure they probably killed a few of them, too because their lives were in danger and how I'd lost some other relatives in my family who were hung--

END OF INTERVIEW