

CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PFebruary 25, 2010

J= Jennifer Dunn
E=Edgar Pickett

Born in Lakeland, Florida on March 14, 1928

Lived in Florida for 81 years

J: Did your parents share stories with you of your heritage/roots?

plantation. They couldn't read or write, one went into Melvin, Georgia and the other to the Southern part of Georgia; that's when they got separated and it was many years before they made contact with each other.

J: What kind of plantation was it?

E: It was the Pickett Plantation, the John George Pickett Plantation.

J: They grow cotton?

E: They were farmers.

J: Do you know if you are linked to any American Indian heritage?

E: Yes, my great-grandfather on my mother's side was an Indian and my grandmother was an Indian on my mother's side.

J: Pure blooded Indian?

E: Yes, Cherokee.

J: Did your family live together as an extended family with your grandparents all in one household or was everybody split up?

E: Everybody was split up.

J: Did your grandparents take an active role in raising you or sharing your heritage with you?

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George Dickott from Virginia and

E: Yes they did.

J: Are there any stories of slavery beyond the ones of your twin uncles?

E: Yes, my father stated that when he was in Camilla, GA, where he was raised, he was working for a man by the name of Mr. Brooks – a furniture store- and he was allowed to go on the plantation

J: Was your father a leader in the civil rights?

E: Yes, he was. He organized the Negro Chamber of Commerce. They were not allowed to meet with the whites. He was instrumental in getting a group of men together and organized the Chamber of commerce. They wanted the school to have a band. He went out and bought some drums and a bugle and we had what we called a bugle course – at that time the school was named Washington Park High School.

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J: What other older relatives did you know?

E:

E: Yes, my mother was working in the store

J: Could you tell me more about how the depression affected the family?

E: My dad would not allow the government to give us anything. They had what they called commodities at the time and gave out food. He told us he would work for us and shouldn't receive anything from the government. He was a man of integrity. He meant for us to learn how to work and he carried me every day that he would go and I was out of school and I started out at 7 years of age. He would work all day at McKay Furniture, put the truck up because they didn't have insurance so he could use the company truck and he would walk to jobs at night with his tools and work and then come back in the morning time and go back to work at K. McKay. At that time, I would go to sleep on the job because I was in school. I'd come home,

J: What do you mean by “easy side”?

E: She was a laid back person.

J: What about her sister? Did she live in Lakeland?

E: No, she was living in Georgia and from there she went to Ft. Pierce and that’s where she is buried.

J: What did she do for a living?

E: She would go on the season – pick app(e) 57iving?

They made their own clothes and then a lot of times, the white people would give them hand

E: My dad was working, my mother be home. And she was cooking, always cooking and cleaning up. And she would wash clothes for the opposite race and they would come by and pick them up. But then we would go home for lunch because we never did go into the cafeteria because they never did have a cafeteria. Then after they put one on the campus I never did go because I only lived about a hundred yards from the school. So they allowed me to go home, our family to go home and eat everyday for lunch and then we had to come back.

J: So was then the Primer school a part of the elementary school?

E: Yes, all the schools together. You would go out of one classroom into another one. Then there was a old white building and that's where we had to that one. Then now after you get to the third grade then you move into the brick building. Then from third to sixth was in another in one building. Then from seven to twelfth was in another building.

J: Did you always have African American teachers?

E: Always.

J: So there weren't any white teachers at this school?

E: No whites.

J: No white students or teachers?

E: No.

J: And when you went into elementary school do you have any stories that you remember of either lack of facilities things that you may have needed or, do you have any memories of your elementary school?

E: Yes, we really didn't have anything like pencils and things. We would try to get a pencil; if you brake it you would just keep sharpening it and sharpening it because they didn't have the resources to continue to buy. Then we had old type paper I can't recall the name of the paper. But we didn't have nice papers, no typewriters. There was one typewriter the secretary had it and it had a left hand carrier. And so we never did learn how to type and so that when I got on the police department I bought me a typewriter and taught myself how to type.

J: That's neat. Ok, So then you moved into a middle school or was that part of the elementary school?

E: All of it was together.

J: All of it yeah? Ok, so, but as you grew older was there sports? What kind of extracurricular activities did they have?

E: They had basketball, football and softball. But I was not able to play any of it because I had to work. They finally got a band in 1942. That was the first band at the school.

J:

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E: No that's my daddy's.

J: Oh, ok.

E: I didn't have a brother at all I had three sisters.

J: When you got into high school you said there was a band but you couldn't play any sports. Did you join any clubs? Or was there anything like that available?

E: No, they didn't have any clubs and I was working. Each day I'd get out of school I had to go straight to work.

J: What were the best memories of you growing up?

E: I guess the best memories is that we was a family. We all stayed in a two bedroom house and we just all had to get along with each other. And when the sun go down we had to be home. That's one thing I remember. Then at night I had to get the water, bring it in the house because we didn't have running water. And that was my job. And I had to cut wood to go in the fireplace and the stove. And my mother never wanted to run out wood. So that was my job . My sisters cleaned the house and washed clothes.

J: And did they work outside like you did with your dad?

E: No, they stayed home. They didn't have to go out.

J: So your family was kind of financially stable then because your father and you worked as hard as you did?

E: Yes, we were in better shape than a lot of the community, black community.

J: What were the worst: what do you think the worst memories were of you growing up?

E: I stayed sick most of the time with asthma and that just was very rough and that fireplace I uh

E: They like the older people say uh get uh this type of herb put it together take that, take uh different type of cough syrup and so forth like that. See we never did have a doctor to go to. You couldn't afford a doctor. They had them but you couldn't afford them.

J: So they didn't have a black doctor in the community at all?

J: Were there any special events that your school did or that your community did in support of

E: The same as theirs that we

said, “call us person to person. But we couldn’t accept a call but we will call you back” they said, “but don’t worry it might take us an hour to get that line because its only one line going in there.” And so, when I get on a case and I didn’t know what I was doing, I would call them. They would tell me what type of chemicals to make and so forth and they’d call me back to see if I had done it and if I needed more help. So it was very helpful. They were very helpful to me in that way.

J: When you started out as a police officer you had some problems with resistance that came towards your family and yourself could you tell me a little bit about that?

E: Yes, the children would jump on my children at school. Uh, one night a lady called up and cursed my wife out and uh, so, I went across the street and called the operator and she checked in on the line and heard the lady and told her that it was very nasty what she was doing. So, they disconnected my phone that night where I couldn’t receive any calls but I could call back out. And I found out who the lady was. But it took me about ten years to break her down but I broke her down.

J: Did you have a hard time during that time in realms of separating the fact that you were a part

E: Yes, I came into juvenile I stayed there and worked there in the time of demonstrations that they was having, and after the demonstrations left then they made me a detective.

J: What happened during the demonstrations where there any particular ones that stick out in realms of having to arrest people or violence?

E: Yes, there was demonstrating at the restaurant and so forth and they would have what they

J: You were very certain that he was a straight shooter-- a fair and honest man. What types of things did he do?

E: He came in and broke up that sensitive group. He just demoted and he promoted.

J: So when he demoted what did they do to him?

E: They went on to the Ledger on him just kept bickering till he finally had to come out. The

have your job because we never hired anyone and he said, "No he is better than I am, give it to him." and that's how I got the position.

J: Wow. Did you ever consider working for the FBI and the FDLE?

E: I did. They wanted me in chief **Herbert W. Straley** stopped me from going because I had to go to Tampa and I had to report to him by 5 o'clock one day and he kept me in the office showing me that the transportation of possibilities of having a wreck from Tampa there and he waited till after the 5 o'clock to release me outta his office where I could stay there.

J: You think he did that on purpose?

E: Yes, he did. He didn't want me to go I worked for every police department in Polk County I did all the work for Plant City police department they didn't have ID officers so I did the work for all of them and they couldn't pay me but I was on call 24/7 and anytime they whenever you make an arrest with a finger print you had to send it to the FBI. It would take them 6 weeks to send it back and say yes you have the right person but then with me I could look at it and tell them it was the print so you wasn't allowed to make a mistake because you make a mistake, you could never testify again so that was a lot of stress on me

J: How did you feel about being kept back like that from being able to go to that meeting?

E: Rephrase that

J: How did you feel when your superior kept you in that office past your meeting time because he knew you had to go?

E: I felt alright because then. I knew I was wanted.

J: Oh, ok, so you weren't angry with that?

E: Oh no. I wasn't angry he knew I would want it and I knew that I would want it at that time.

J: So you looked at it in that way rather than him trying to hamper your future in working in another field?

E: Yes. After I looked at it. It would've been a lot of stress me driving from Lakeland to Tampa. Then come back through all that traffic and so forth so he couldn't make me um he couldn't give me a promotion because they told him I was the only one that was in that department and I didn't have anyone to supervise so they couldn't gave it and I asked them to pay me different between the sergeant and the lieutenant pay if I couldn't be a sergeant but the city manager wouldn't do that. So, I had to remain with the patrolman salary until later on when I determined I wanted a rating because when I go to the conference and everything everyone was sergeant lieutenants' and captains and that's the time that I went then to an attorney and he told me I had a good law suit and he went to Karol Odman was the mayor at the time and he

and so he said go see the chief. So when I went to go see the chief, the chief said, “the city manager really love you and he wanted to know that I have enough money in the budget to make you sergeant.” So, that’s the way I got to be sergeant.

J: What was the name of your lawyer?

E: Ken Glover.

J: Oh, that’s awesome; can you tell me something about him can you tell me something about Mr. Glover how did you pick him as your lawyer?

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J: Ok, so to recap, you started as a police officer, than you went to a juvenile over juveniles and then you went to a detective than you went to a sergeant?

E:

J: So, did things start getting any better at any point? When did you start seeing a difference,

E: Same thing.

J: They would say he'd never be able to testify again?

E: That correct.

J: What would you say the best part of your job was in all the different positions you had what time did you?

E: I enjoyed the crime scene and the finger print. I loved it. It just was a part of me. Like a person that plays a piano. I just enjoyed looking at prints and identifying.

J: Was there ever a case that was hard to crack or that you never got to finish?

E: Yes, it was a case that I had was over in Plant City. They had given this case to the FBI and the FDLE and they could not identify the print. I did it and so I was tense because I knew the boy had a good attorney and they had said that the FBI had turned it down and FDLE but before we went to court the attorney had plead him guilty. It was a Plant city case but I've testified in Hillsborough County, Polk County and Orange county in different cases while working for all the departments.

J: How did your superior officer do with, your chiefs do with you going around to different jurisdictions testifying?

E: They didn't have any problem.

J: Because they didn't pay you?

E:

E: Yes, I was paid that salary and was able to get the social security because they were taking it out. Then when I left the department I was a consultant and I had cases out of Fort Myers different things the FBI agents knew what I could do and they would tell the different agents and they would send me the information for me to look at it.

J: So, Plant City would pay you with strawberries. Is that right?

E: Yes.

J: (Laugh) But the other ones weren't that nice they wouldn't even give you any vegetables, just a letter of thank you?

E: Yes.

J: Any other fond memories as for the best parts of your police work that you did?

E: No, but worse I can tell you, I could tell you the worse part of it.

J: That was my next question? (Laugh).

E: The worst part was when I was shot in 1964. December 31st at 2:30 p.m. At JM Field Service Station. There was three of us shot at that time. They left me last to pick me up because they thought I was dead. The bullet went into my left shoulder. Went up broke my neck. Came down in my right shoulder. And the doctor said," it missed my spine, by the length of a nats eyebrow." I told him, "I didn't know a nat had an eyebrow." He said, "Well that's how close it came." And from here all the way now I feel all of this down to here. And uh, I guess you call it shell shock because I had to have thirteen shock treatments. And I didn't carry a gun for about five years because I couldn't stand to hear it. A gun or even a vehicle backfire. So that was the rough part.

J: What was the surroundings behind you getting shot?

E: It was a traffic violation. And I went to JM Fields. I was a detective at that time. And when I entered the building I didn't know who I was looking for. All I knew was it was a black male. Then I saw three white males in there taking inventory. So this white male was easing around t he corner and I saw the white people looking at me real hard. But they didn't tell me he was coming. So he reached up and he snatched my gun, tore my pants off and uh that's when I turned myself to the side and he shot me. And the officer didn't hear it and when he opened the door, he shot the other officer. Then he shot the sergeant four times.

J: So the other office was that your partner? Was it a black man?

E: No, It was the captain, I must correct the Sergeant Lacarpus and it was Inspringer. We all was in different vehicles.

J: Did everybody survive?

E: Yes.

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J: And were they able to capture the man?

E: Yes. He was they stopped him on the riffle range road.

J: For a traffic violation?

E: Yes, he had a traffic violation and he did all that.

E: He ran from the officers and we went there to get him. He was working for JM Fields.

J: So how long were you out of work?

E: About a month. But then I was, I knocked a whole year of 1968 out of my life. Because I was in taking those shock treatments and I don't know what happened during that time. As to say, I had thirteen of them.

J: Ok so you were shot, you were shot in 1964, and then you had some reoccurring medical problems in 1968 is that right?

E: That's correct.

J: And in 1

E: You had to work twice as hard. IN other words they could do a little and get away. We had to do a lot even when we was in patrol. They had the opportunity to go get hot coffee, different things at night, sandwiches. We didn't have any restaurants open. We patrolled strictly in the

E: I was working with the police department.

J: Oh ok,

E: So he told me to go to the city manager and he asked me. "Well what do you want to do?" I say, "We don't have any jobs and these children are on the street and I want to see what could we do." Well he showed how

E: No they didn't it was only the African Americans. The only thing they would let us do was clean yards and things and the children wanted different type jobs and that is the reason why we went for it.

J: How did the general public react to that?

E: We didn't have any problem when we went in to that.

J: And was there any problem with African American workers in the department stores?

E: Some of them said they wouldn't work with them. And we had a florist shop and she determined that she wasn't gonna hire any. And she had her place in the black community. And she wouldn't hire them.

J: (laugh) That's funny. Well we have been talking about all of the different things you have done to accomplish and you are evidently an overachiever. What is your stance on what we were

I have two children that go to McKeel Academy but to this day they still have two categories African American and other and they pull so many children out of each category as to balance the racial.

E: Yeah they say it balance them but I don't think because a lot of the schools have more whites than they have African American. Uh my great grand that lives with me that I am raising , he go out to the airport to the Air Academy and out of a hundred and some children there is only three minorities.

J: Why do you think that is?

E: I don't know if, well they put you in there by your grades and you have to go on what you say waiting lists so really the percentage wise is way off at that school. And it's the same way with the other schools that the percentage wise the same way with the teachers that it is not. They out of their ...

J: Do you think they are just not able to compete? I mean are there contributing factors as to why they can't compete in the African American community vs the white-2 (r) -1 -20 0 Tm /TT51 tea(o) -4 (u)40 g

E: Just ball players because really I worked so hard I didn't really have any my father was about the best role model because I never heard my father use the word damn, I never saw him smoke he never drank um he never danced and he was my role model.

J: That's neat, one of my questions I was in regards to your encounters with the white supremacies groups, other than the KKK thing was there any other like that when you were growing up?

E: Yes, when I was growing up once in the morning when I got up they had the paper I saw where they had taken out a pastor we had a church there at Florida and Memorial Blvd. a red brick church that use to be a land mark and the pastor was living in the parsonage next to it. They came there, woke him up 3 o'clock in the morning, went down and got a group of people and marched them down Florida Ave. The 5th and Florida and they burned a cross at that location and they had their pajamas on and everything and it was really hurting for me to be a child and look at my pastor standing up under a cross with his pajamas on at that time in the morning so that was my 1st

E: No my granddaughter lives in it now.

J: Isn't that cool, I love it what year was that?

E: 1950. When we first married it took us about two years to build it and out of the \$13.50 we gave my parents, we live with them, we gave them \$5 a week and my wife and I lived off of \$8.50.

J: Can you comment of any white officials that you remember that were particularly supportive to you in your career?

E: The Mayor Pat Flanagan Jr. was the major one. He was very good. And Mr. Wooton. I can't think of his name, first name but he was Major Protate and he was with us. And that's when we was made policemen under their administration. And my mother worked for Pat Flanagan and also I did too. He had a paint store and I would go there and work for him.

J: So, he was major and he owned a paint store?

E: Yes, but he, was one that said we should be able to arrest whites. He had an article in the paper that he could not understand why that they say that we cannot arrest white people.

J: What year do you think that was around?

E: That was the year that was around 1954.

J: So the paper was printed in 1954?

E: Yes.

J: What like the Lakeland Ledger?

E: That's correct.

J: What did they do to advance you in your career?

E: He didn't do anything only thing he was just there to get us on. And once they hired the mayor doesn't have the right to tell anybody how to work their...they are not supposed to do that.

J: Ok how about any people, any officials that were abusive towards you?

E: I didn't have any. Not commissioners or anything. None of them was abusive.

J: Do you think it was the way you looked at things? Like when you told me the story of your chief keeping you after hours so that you couldn't join the FBI. I looked at it as well that's really

- J: So you don't feel like you had anybody that was like any of your chiefs or any of your people that were abusive towards you?
- E: Yes, Major Simpson he was very abusive. As I said I made a report to him and he failed to do anything about it. Then the Lacopolus uh, after Herb Straley came in and demoted him he would always do a lot of profanity. And he was even with me when I got shot. But he was very abusive. Not only to me but any of the rest of the whites after he was demoted because they had to asked him to leave the department.
- J: How did he react when you got shot?
- E: He didn't. Well I felt like I was responsible for all of them getting shot because it was my gun. So they wouldn't allow us to be in the same hospital. The hospital was separated. And I was feeling down so they brought him in a wheelchair and he said that he didn't have any ill feelings towards me.
- J: Oh so you felt like it was your responsibility because the man grabbed your gun?
- E: That's correct. I didn't act fast enough and I felt like I was responsible for all of them.
- J: So that visit from him did it make a difference to you?
- E: No it didn't because I still have that in the back of my head that I was responsible. And anytime I speak to officers, I speak to anybody, I tell them that. That whenever they come out on an

E: That's where I got into trouble because wouldn't do it. That's exactly where I got into trouble. I can recall one day when one of the lieutenants picked up a black female and pushed her down on the tile and put his knee in her stomach. Now I told him I said, "I can handle her, get up off her, get up off her." And the captain called me in the office and told me said, "did you know that was a lieutenant you was talking to?" I said, "I don't care who it was." I say," He didn't have to do what he did." I say, "Because I could have handled her." So I had to fingerprint her. And when I was fingerprinting her I told her what my name was and I say, "If you go to court and you want a witness," I say, "you have them to subpoena m

J: Did he have to face any false charges or anything in regards to request or arrests that he made?

E: Yes, he was strictly arresting people for moon shining he had his own bloodhound dogs that he raised. They would say that he would go out and steal dogs and find them on the road. They were just after him and he finally went off to the institution and made time and he came back and he ran for constable and made it again

J:

J: On Mr. Brannen what made him different than any other sheriff?

E:

E: No, mostly it was local. They would vote but it was more local. The only one, I retract it, with Lawton Chiles. He was a native so they made sure he got into office.

J: What did they do in particular to assist him?

E: Campaigning, finance.

J: Did you, when do you remember the first time you or your family voted in say a national election?

E: My father stated that the first time they allowed him to vote he voted. And uh he was 99 when he died. And he never missed a election. He would get a absentee ballot. I had to get it to him. He would compel us to vote. The children and my mother. And they all voted until they passed.

J: How old, what year was that when he started voting?

E: I don't know what the year they had that, they allowed him to vote. Blacks couldn't vote but whenever they did he took control and he started doing it.

J: So what was one of the first elections that you remember the black community rallying behind the votes was with which major candidates?

E: Pat Flanagan. In 1954.

J: Do you remember the first national election that maybe your father would have voted in?

E: No I don't.

J: In the 60's when you became a police officer you voted back then?

E: Yes, I voted back then.

J: So it would have been in your young adulthood?

E: Yes, I guess I started voting when I was 18.

J: And how did the black community feel about going out and voting? We're talking civil rights movement and during that time frame?

E: They some of em would do it. More people was going out to vote in those days than what there is now. Because they was proud that they could vote. The younger age now they don't care. And we try to get them organized to go vote. But they just won't do it. We have different registra

J:

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E: Oh he was nice. He used to be a State

E:

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J: So this gentleman you said he almost got into physical altercations in the courtroom, he was known for socking it to men in the community, How did the men in the community act towards him?

E: Oh, just his name was up Walter Manley. The women would say, "you mess with me I go get Walter Manley."

J: Ok did you know Lawton Chiles?

E: Yes, I did.

J: How did you meet him?

E: I had a case a personal case and he handled it. And uh we became very good friends. And he didn't even charge me for the case. And then he went to be a Florida State Senator. He was on the commission and I told him he needed to be governor. And the next thing I knew, he went to be the US senator. And I went to Quant

(Lawton Chiles served in the US Senate from 1977-1988. He was also elected governor in 1990 and was reelected for a second term in 1994.)

J: And you campaigned for him in all of his...

E: All his, all of em.

J: And what exactly did you do to help campaign?

E: Just put his name out, the signs out, and gave out cards for him.

J: Did you do that within the black community or all over?

E: Black community.

J: And do you think they came out in full support of him?

E: Yes, they did.

J: And what do you think makes him such a great person?

E: We just called him "Walkin" Chiles. He was just a man that would walk in any community give you a smile. And if he said, k

able to obtain a patent because of the price so I went to two engineers to make sure that I was

