

R: What year did you start school?

S: 1945.

R: 1945. How old were you?

S: Five years old.

R: What year did you stop school at Ogden?

S: Let's see, I was in the fifth grade, so it was 1950.

R: Did you finish the fifth grade, or you finished the fourth grade at Ogden?

S: Finished the fifth grade.

R: Finished the fifth grade at Ogden.

S: We went to UCT where I went to the sixth grade. Or was that right?

R: Think about it. We're not in any hurry.

S: Let's see. No, it was fourth grade. I finished the fourth grade at Ogden. Then when I went to Alachua we went to the fifth grade, because Miss Woods taught me at fifth grade, and your brother was in the class with Miss Jones. Then we went to the sixth grade and I had Miss Lewis.

R: So as far as Ogden, the last grade you completed there was the fourth grade?

S: Yes.

R: And the reason you didn't go any further there is because the school closed? You were saying you went to another school in the fifth grade in Alachua?

S: The school was closed.

R: Ok, we're clear on that. Do you remember what month school opened when you were going to Ogden? What month did school start?

S: It was September. Now what day, I don't know, but it was in September because we had a little song we sang when we went back to school.

R: About September?

S: Yeah. This is the month of September. Days are sunny and nice and cool. This is the day, remember, when we go back to school.

R: Oh! How about that! That's wonderful. So there's the opening in September, and what month did the school close for the year?

S: I think it was June.

R: So that was nine months?

S: Yes.

R: From September through June, okay. Do you remember what time of day classes started? What time did school take in?

S: I'm thinking eight o'clock.

R: And what time it ended?

S: Three-thirty, I don't know.

R: How did you get to and from school?

S: Walked.

R: How far? How many miles? About how far did you have to walk?

S: Now if we went round the road, it's probably five, six miles. Course from here, round over there where you turn to go to where Mr. Mclrey lives, I think that's two miles, a mile-and-a-half. Yeah, it's about five miles.

R: Were there other people walking, other children going?

S: Oh yes. There were plenty of children going.

R: Can you remember any incidents or anything that happened?

S: I can remember one incident. I guess the reason I can remember it real good is because Roger Simmons, and there was Malacai, and I. W. White. They tied a rope around Roger's neck and they pulled him behind their bicycle. They told Retha they was gonna do it to her tomorrow. We gonna get you tomorrow.

R: That was your sister?

S: Yes. She was scared and she didn't want to go to school the next day, and daddy asked her why, and she told him. He said I'm gonna make sure you go to school tomorrow. Let 'em put their hands on you, just let 'em do it. So she went to school the next day. They didn't touch her, though.

R: So now, I.W. and Malacai, and just them two, or Joseph? Did you say Joseph?

S: I don't know Joseph. I remember I.W. and Malacai.

R: Well was it their bicycle?

S: Yes, it was their bicycle. They just you know, they was bullies. Everybody there was scared of them.

R: About how far did you walk with them? Were they all picked up some place?

S: Yeah. When we came down and got to, well what is 1491 now? They went left and we came right. Right there.

R: I think at the end of Northwest 278, the road that goes by the church.

S: Yes.

R: That's 278 Ave.

S: They went, because I think they stayed over on Bishop Vaughn's place.

R: So they went left on 1491, and you all came right on 1491?

S: Yes.

R: They didn't kill him?

S: No, no. They was just acting as bullies, that's all it was. I don't think they physically hurt him that much, but you know Roger. He was staying up there with relatives.

R: Who were some of your teachers or who were your teachers?

S: My first teacher was Mrs. Unita Simmons, that was my first teacher. Then I had, I believe the next teacher I had was Mrs. Woods. I'm trying to think, I don't know if Mrs. Long taught me or not, but she taught out there. I believe those were the two teachers I had.

R: Were all three of them there at the same time, Mrs. Long, Mrs. Woods, and Miss Simmons?

S: I think Mrs. Long came after Mrs. Simmons left and then it was Mrs. Long and Mrs. Woods.

R: Which one of them was the head teacher, or the lead teacher?

S: I think Mrs. Woods was. Mrs. Woods and Mrs. Jones. I can't remember Mrs. Jones, I think she was teaching, but I think Mrs. Simmons was gone then. There was Jones when Simmons left, and then Mrs. Woods came in after Mrs. Simmons left. There was Mrs. Woods and Mrs. Jones, and then when Mrs. Jones left, Mrs. Long came.

R: So it started out with Mrs. Simmons and Mrs. Jones, when you were in the first grade, but Mrs. Simmons was your teacher. It was those two teachers.

S: Yeah.

R: Then Mrs. Simmons left and Mrs. Woods came, so then it was Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Woods. Then Mrs. Jones left and Mrs. Long came, and that's when the school close and you went to Alachua when those were the two teachers there, Mrs. Long and Mrs. Woods. Mrs. Long was your teacher you said, or did you?

S: Mrs. Woods.

R: Mrs. Woods was your teacher. You think Mrs. Woods was like the head teacher or the lead teacher?

S: Yeah.

R: Did they have principals?

S: They didn't have principals out there, no. I'm sure she was the head teacher or lead teacher or whatever you want to call it. Department head probably would be a better word for it nowadays.

R: How many students were in your classroom?

S: About twelve, fifteen at the most.

R: Twelve, fifteen in your class, but was there more than one, like there's some in another?

S: There was two classes, [my class] and another class.

R: About how many students were in the school total, you think at the time that you were going?

S: It might have been thirty.

R: Half of them in the class you were in. About half to one teacher because there was always just two teachers?

S: Yes.

R: How many rooms were in the school?

S: Two. Now in the winter time there was only one pot-belly stove in that school. For a long time we had to dig those stumps for kindling out there on Emerson's place.

R: So the students went out there and dug the stumps, brought 'em in for wood.

S: Yes. Most of the time, I'm thinking, Daddy and them got some wood there some kind of way. Now I remember, there was a sawmill in Fort White, and they brought those ends they cut off and things. They brought all that wood and they dumped it back behind the school. Then all we needed was some kindling to get it started, get the fire going. Then you'd throw them pieces or ends or two-by-fours and whatever else in there. They brought it in and dumped it out in a big pile.

R: The kindling is what you all were digging for?

S: Yeah, yeah. We'd go out there and dig every time.

R: But you had plenty of wood otherwise. That was the only way to heat it.

S: That was the heating system.

R: Did you have a cooling system?

S: No. There was no cooling system whatsoever.

R: How many windows were in the school?

S: There were quite a few windows up front, but I'm trying to think [if] there [any in the back or not. I can't remember any in the back. It was windows in the front and on each side, but the back I don't think there was any windows in the back.

R: What kind? Were they glass windows?

S: Yeah, glass windows.

R: Glass windows. So you let 'em up?

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S: Yes, you could let 'em up. Put a stick under there and hold 'em up.

R: Air to come in, cool.

S: Yes..

R: Where'd you eat lunch?

S: In the classroom.

R: Did you bring your lunch?

S: You bring your brown bag, your jelly biscuit, peanut butter, whatever. That was it.

R: How long did you have to eat it? How long was the lunch period?

S: I'm sure it lasted for thirty, forty-five minutes maybe.

R: Was food prepared at school?

S: No.

R: What kind of outside activities did the students participate in?

S: We had softball. We played sally go round the sunset, sally go round the moon, sally go round the sunset, every afternoon – boom! And you'd go back the other way. [laughter] Boy, those were the days.

R: What about basketball, volleyball, nothing like that?

S: I can't remember no basketball or volleyball, nothing like that, but we did have softball. I don't know if we had any gloves or not. We had a bat. I can remember your brother, Henry was coming into home plate and Irma Jasper swung and he was coming in and she hit him on the head with the bat.

R: Did she knock him out?

S: No, no it didn't knock him out. She wasn't swinging that hard.

R: Stunned him probably. May have stunted his growth.

S: That's been too long to remember.

R: Well you just did.

S: Yes.

R: You just did. So the girls and the boys were playing together then in softball.

S: Oh yeah, yeah. Girls and boys played together.

R: How long did you have to play? How long was the recess?

S: It was for one period, so it must have [been] forty-five, fifty minutes.

R: Was that after lunch, or when was it?

S: I'm trying to think.

R: Last thing before school?

S: No, no it wasn't last thing. It was right about noontime when we ate. Then we had recess, and then I think we had another class after that, maybe two.

R: So you think lunch and recess kind of followed each other or were close together?

S: Yes, I think so.

R: Now, let's talk about the outhouses. What kind did the school have?

S: Two outhouses. One for the girls and one for the boys.

R: Where were they located?

S: In the northeast corner of the school property.

R: Which direction was the school located in?

S: The front of the school was located and the front doors were toward the south.

R: In the back where there were no windows, you don't remember any windows?

S: Yes, no windows.

R: Toward the north. And then the bathroom, both of them was in the northeast corner?

S: Yes, in that corner.

R: Did everybody go to the bathroom in line.

S: Oh no. I can't remember no lines going to the bathroom. When you had to go to the bathroom you raised your hand.

R: Let's talk about the books. What condition were they in?

S: Secondary books. They weren't new books, they were hand-me-downs. Sometimes the pages were torn out. Sometimes they were placed back together with something like scotch tape, but we learned from them.

R: What about the backs of the books? Most of them had the backs on them?

S: Yes.

R: Let's talk about school closing. Do you remember the names? Let's go back to books, can you remember the names of any of them?

S: I can't remember any of the names of the books.

R: So besides reading, what did ya'll have? Spelling and writing?

S: We had writing, arithmetic.

R: The same teacher taught all of it?

S: Yes.

R: You just work on one thing for a period of time?

S: Yes.

R: Now in your classroom, the students were from first through the sixth grade?

S: I think so.

R: First through the sixth. So it was, say when you were in first grade it must have been, and it wasn't but two teachers, that teacher must have taught first, second, and third you think?

S: Probably.

R: Do you remember the end of the school year?

S: At the end of the school year we had a school closing, and we had a play. Mrs.

Black, Katie May Black, she was a musician, she used to come out there. I don't know how they got her a piano, but somebody brought a piano out there and she played for us. I remember we were dressed up like bumblebees, brown and yellow, and we had different little things to say.

R: Was everybody in the play? Everybody in the school?

S: Just about. Yes, everybody was in there. Brown and yellow as you can see, what does more good than a bumblebee. They just had nursery rhymes going on.

R: That was your speech?

S: Yes.

R: Now Mrs. Katie May Black was Mrs. Woods' name, as I remember, was Ruth Black Woods, so they were sisters-in-law?

S: Yes.

R: What about the audience when you had the play?

S: When we had the play they would take the chairs out of one side. One side of the school was larger than the other. So they'd take 'em out the small side and put 'em all out front, and we would have a little place up there right next to the wall. We would perform up there.

R: Did the parents come out, or grandparents?

S: Yes. Parents, grandparents. There's a whole lot. It was well attended.

R: What time of day?

S: This was in the evening.

R: After school hours, close to night?

S: Yes.

R: And that happened every year as far as you can recall?

S: Yes.

R: What is the most memorable event that happened to you at Ogden School?

S: Well, some of the memorable things I just mentioned. I remember when Mrs.

Woods came and Mrs. Simmons was gone, and she helped me because we had to do a map of all the states, a United States map. That was one of our projects, our homework. I went up to Mrs. Simmons because she lived right next door, and she helped me put that map together. You put the map together and you made it big enough so you could put the name of each state in there, and then you colored it different colors.

R: And you got a good grade on that?

S: Oh yes. Another thing that I can remember, too, is I believe every Monday morning that we would come in with a Bible verse. We'd have to find a Bible verse. I think they'd start with "a" and "b" and go on up, and you'd have to search the scriptures to find all those. But we had, you know, we'd write it down on a piece of paper and then our momma would write it down for us.

R: You didn't have to memorize it? You could take it in?

S: No, you didn't have to memorize it, but you had to get up there and read it. We'd have prayer.

R: It's different now, isn't it?

S: Oh yes.

R: How do you judge the education you got at Ogden? Well, you can't compare it to other schools, but yes you can because you've been to other schools, but how do you judge that because that was your foundation?

S: That was a foundation when teachers and students--the teachers worked closely together with the students. I can remember when I first learned how to write letters, and make numbers. And I can remember how I was taught to make the number two. The teacher tell me curve in and out we go. This is the way we make numbers. Then when we got to three it was curve in and curve again.

R: So it made it fun.

S: Yes, made it fun. And you can remember things like that. Whatever the teachers taught you, they were as much of that as you are. They enjoyed it. Very seldom did anybody act up. Every now and then you'd have to get a spanking. About the only time I can remember getting a spanking, or they got lashed by a teacher is because if you missed the word from the spelling, you'd get a lick. If you missed two, you'd get two. So every now and then I had to get one or two, but that's about it. Other than that you spell them words. It was just good. Now the teachers act like they don't even [care], you learn if you want to, if you don't, don't bother me. I got mine, you get yours. But they were concerned about you

learning, and they would take their time.

R: And they were just glad, sounds like what you're saying. When you learn they were just as happy as you were to see that you were learning.

S: And they'd go over it and over it and over it until you got it.

R: How did your parents view education?

S: I think dad, he at one time, he thought it was a waste of time. But as he got older he saw where education was the best way to go. There was a man out here in the area that couldn't read or write, and he was definitely against education. I think this is what started dad to looking at things from a different perspective because he couldn't even write his name. I think probably dad thought about that, and that is not a way to be.

R: Because he thought because he could read and write, that everybody else could that I guess was in his age group that was out here that he knew.

S: It boiled down to. . . he said you know at least you need to get a twelfth grade education. I went to a few trade schools in my life, plus I went to Hillsborough Community College for two years.

Mom was always for education because she didn't get a chance to go because after her eyes failed on her when she was young, then after her eyes failed they said well you can't go to school, you can't see how to read, so you got to work in the fields. I don't think mom got glasses until, shoot, probably after I was born.

R: What sort of values in addition to educating you, did the teachers, this one is about the teachers, what other kind of values did you see your teachers embodying? I don't know if that's a good word, but what else about the teachers?

S: Those teachers back then in those days, they were honest. They believed in doing the right thing. You didn't have 'em coming to school looking like a hoochie momma. They dressed like momma.

R: Respect.

S: Respect, yeah. They carried themselves with dignity, you know. I can remember we always had to say our blessing before we ate. That was one thing.

R: So religion?

S: Yes. They were Christians, Christian people. That was the most important thing.

And people from that school, right now, it was a few of them that went out in left field, but most of them still treasure those values, and it's still coming back to them.

R: Cleanliness, too. Washing your hands before you eat.

S: Yes. We had that old pump out there. Prime it up.

R: Speaking of the water part, you primed the pump and had a bucket?

S: Yes, you usually have a, I think it was a jug, with about a quart of water in it, and you'd prime it. Then when you get that bucket, we had a bucket with a dipper in it. Everybody had their own glass, and you wrote your name on the glass. When you went to go get you some water it was some kind of a _____, and get your water. When you prime that pump you make sure you fill that little jug back up because if you don't. . .

R: You won't be able to prime it again, you won't get any water.

S: You won't be able to prime it again, and you have to go get some water from somewhere else.

R: Is there anything else you can think of that you want to tell me about being a student at Ogden School from first through the fourth grades?

S: I remember when they were talking about closing down the school and daddy went over to Gainesville, and he had a lot of things on his mind because that was during the time when his mom was real sick. He went over there for something, and I asked, daddy we gonna go over to Alachua school? [He said], boy, don't bother me. I ain't got time for foolishness. Later on he came back and he told me, Ogden School will be closed. You all gonna be bussed to Alachua.

R: So he probably had gone to a meeting over in Gainesville you think, and he had that information?

S: Yes.

R: Speaking of busses, and I know that you said you walked to school, but the white children?

S: The white children always rode busses. They had busses.

R: And did they pass?

S: They'd pass you and throw paper and stuff out at you. The driver didn't slow

down, and the road was dusty, and you just got dust all over you. They thought it was funny, but we still survived.

R: They were laughing on the bus and throwing paper out at you?

S: And the first bus we had, I think it was number twelve, and it was about a [1946] Chevrolet. Mr. Lee drove it, Ralph Lee. It was raggedy as _____, you'd look down and see the wheels turning and look at the floorboard. It's a wonder we didn't fall through there, but it's the grace of God that kept us. But through it all, we can look back and say look where He brought me. Thank God.

R: And we'll end on that note. Thank you so much, Freeman, for this interview. I enjoyed it.

[End of Interview.]