UF UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

Samuel Proctor Oral History Program
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Program Director: Dr. Paul Ortiz

Joel Buchanan Archive of African American History:
http://ufdc.ufl.edu/ohfb

241 Pugh Hall
PO Box 115215
Gainesville, FL 32611
(352) 392-7168
https://oral.history.ufl.edu

AAHP 518 Frederick Fisher
Interviewed by Ryan Thompson on September 22,2017
2 hours 16 minutes | 61 pages

Abstract: In this Interview, Frederick Fisher gives an account of growing up in Jonesville, Florida and his family life. He attended Mebane High School and talks about his experiences of dealing with segregation while dealing with subpar education to what his white counterparts were dealing with. He graduated and went to Daytona Beach Junior College before dropping out because of family financial hardship. He later became a truck driver for a local trucking company. In 1966 he was drafted into the United States Army to be shipped out to the Vietnam War. He became a radio operator. He also talks about his experience of being in the war and the discrimination he faced while serving his country. Fisher also talks about life after the military and how he adjusted to the racism he was again facing back in the United States. He enrolled at Santa Fe Community College. He and his cousin would eventually found a group for Black empowerment within their community. He eventually left Gainesville, Florida moved to Ft. Myers Florida. From Ft. Myers he moved back to Gainesville to care for his family and to work with the railroads. Fisher also gives an account of everyday life with PTSD from the traumas of the Vietnam War.

Keywords: [African American History; United States Army; Veterans History; Jonesville,Florida; Vietnam, PTSD; Gainesville, Florida]

SAMUEL PROCTOR ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM University of Florida

AAHP 518
Interviewee: Frederick Fisher
Interviewer: Ryan Thompson
Date: September 22, 2017

T: My name is Ryan Thompson, I'm with the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at UF. Today is Friday, September 22nd, 2017. I'm here in Newberry, Florida, at the home of Mr. Fred Fisher. And Mr. Fisher, could you please, just to start the interview, say your name and spell your name, and give me your date of birth?

F: Okay, my name is Frederick Fisher. I was born ninth month, third day [19]46. And I was born in Jonesville, Florida. And the correct spelling is F-R-E-D-E-R-I-C-K, no middle name, F-I-S-H-E-R. And I'm a Vietnam veteran, and I'm here to give a[n] interview to a young man about the history of my life.

T: That's a beautiful thing. I like the way that you gave your date of birth, too; that was very original, to my ears. So Mr. Fisher, could you just begin by telling me a little about your earliest memories growing up here—because you grew up sort of in the vicinity of where we are?

F: Yes, I grew up in Jonesville, Florida, and my dad started out as a sharecropper to the best of my memory. But as I grew older, he got out of that. And I went to Mebane High School, a segregated school, and my memories of my school days was somewhat good and somewhat confusing as I grew older, because of the time and the era that I grew up in. I grew up, I learned more, and it was confusing, simply because of the segregation. And my memories of growing up in school was—after I got to about the ninth grade, I realized that the education that I was receiving was subpar simply because I was Black. Like I say, the school was segregated, and we receiving subpar material, but we worked well with the school—which I, to myself, I thought that they were doing the best that they could

with what they had. And I remember the teacher, the man, that—I remember two things: the Gettysburg Address, which we were required to learn, and the Preamble to the Constitution. In our history class we had to get up and recite those two particular items. And I remember taking Americanism versus Communism, and I remember the Cuban crisis to a certain extent, you know. Because everybody, that was a focal point. And remember having rehearsal on what happened if they dropped the bomb. We went through those trainings and stuff, you know, what happened if they dropped the bomb. So. And basically, I remember, you know, receiving books; we got our books from the school department, education department. And I remember seeing, getting older books from GHS—that was the White school in Gainesville. And we would get the so-called "leftover books," the used books. In other words, we were learning from books that was perhaps about three, four years behind, sometimes more. All our books was like that. And I remember, you know—it didn't really dawn on me, like I say, until I got to the tenth grade, and that's when it got disturbing. That's when I really started thinking about it, you know: why should we be getting used books when it supposed to be separate but equal? But it wasn't equal. And even our athletic department, you know, we was getting subpar material, and everything we got seemed to be used. And that's when I start focusing on why. I remember having to—I remember the segregation in Gainesville; everything was separate. Even in the ninth grade, we had one theatre to go to for Blacks, and we weren't allowed to—in other words it was separate, we couldn't go to the, I call it the White theatre, Florida Theatre. I remember that distinctively. And there were

other things; the restrooms. You know, lot of the—growing up, when I was small, they had Black and White restrooms. And there were a lot of other items that I start really visualizing why it should be like this. So I start thinking about, you know, the Gettysburg Address. You know, it states in there, "We are now engaged in a great war," you know, that all men were created equal. And that hit me. And I start thinking. I say, "Yeah, we might have been created equal, but when we were born that's when the disparity start happening." And my high school days were enjoyable in my class, because we had some great teachers compared to what we had to work with. And we had, our school was really, really accredited because the credentials our teachers had. Because we had a great biology teacher, and we would talk about, we learned about DNA, and—they were knowledgeable. And I didn't learn until later how important it was. And the most important thing that happened to me, that helped me when I entered college, was the Greek and Latin prefixes. That helped me tremendously when I got in college, because I learn how to decipher—I mean the meaning of words and how to break them down. And using Greek and Latin prefixes for the definitions.

T: Do you think the teachers at Mebane, which was an all-Black school, took it upon themselves to sort of prepare the race, you know, the African American race, to reach its fullest potential, because they understood the odds that you were up against? And that they had a special sort of care they took?

F: Yes, they put a lot of emphasis on the education. And we just didn't have the material to really apply, and we didn't, you know—like, the books were *all*

outdated, you know? Like I say. Sometimes, every once in a while, we would get new books. But the majority of the books were hand-me-down books. We have class meetings now—because my class from 1965. We had our 50th anniversary two years ago. And we get together once a month, you know, my class. And we plan events and stuff, and we pay dues and stuff, and it just a matter of we getting together, seeing each other, and talk about the past. And we do take trips and stuff, and we contribute to—if someone die in the class, all of try to get to the funeral and stuff. So we still have that connection.

T: How aware were you—you mentioned, thinking about your situation in terms of the Gettysburg Address, and having a grasp of that kind of history and what wasn't right, what you were seeing in front of you. How aware were you of the Civil Rights movement as a force that was challenging that?

F: Okay, that's what made me aware of it, because in [19]65, from [19]63 through [19]65, that's when it all start happening. They were trying to integrate the system. And it didn't dawn on me until I came back from Vietnam, you know? Because that's when they tried to integrate the school. And there was a lot of rioting going on at the high school. And I was going to Santa Fe Junior College at the time. And I remember my younger sister asked me to give an interview to her history class, if I'm not mistaken, about my experience in Vietnam. And I was a angry young man because, you know, so far as when I left and when I came back, it seemed like the situation hadn't changed that much. And so I went in the class and I showed my anger. And I took my medals and stomped on them. And I told the class, "This is what I think about the war and how just it was." Because

when I was over there, period, I wasn't really fighting for a flag; I was fighting for my life. You know, to get back here. And I, just about every veteran, you know, every Vietnam veteran, they'll tell you, you know, "Man, I just wanted to, I was fighting for, on my behalf for me, and used every method that I knew from training to try to get back here." You know, they, so far as fighting for a system, don't believe it. You fighting it to save your life and try to get back to your home, your home country.

T: Even though you had all that curriculum about communism and—

F: Yeah, I had, you know, they taught Americanism versus Communism. We had a class that we had to take: "Americanism—." Because it was a requirement. That was one of the requirements that you take before you graduated out of high school, you know. You had a certain amount of math you had to take, a certain amount of science, and you had to take PE, then you had to do Ag or either Industrial Arts, I remember, to meet the requirements to graduate.

T: If we could go back just a moment, I'm curious about your family life as a youth. Because you grew up in a rural kind of environment, right?

F: Exactly. My family grew up in rural, and my mom and dad were hard working, and they sacrificed.

T: And were they from this area as well?

F: They are from this area.

T: Wow.

F: And they were hard-working, and they worked hard to try to prepare us and to try to send all us to college.

T: Wow.

F: And to use—if we wanted to. Now, my older brothers they just got out of high school and they found them a job, you know? But me, that wasn't my ambition. My ambition was college. Because I had an older brother. He were four years older than me. And I knew that was the path. And I wanted to follow in his footsteps, but the Vietnam War interrupted that.

T: And so I imagine you were working pretty hard in the—

F: Coming up?

T: Well, yeah.

F: Oh yeah, we did. You know, because of my family was hard-working, they provided these schedules. Now, we had running water, we had—but when I was younger, I knew we didn't—. I remember going to outside toilet, a outhouse. But they worked hard, and they got us inside facilities, and running water and stuff. And they worked hard and purchased some property, and we owned our own property. And you know, I feel proud today. We wasn't part of the system in the city where of majority people rent and, you know. Basically, we had our freedom, and the neighborhood where I grew was—the property out there, I remember, probably half of it was owned by Blacks. I think it came from—I haven't really looked into it—it came back to during Reconstruction when they gave a Black man 40 acres and a mule, or something like that. It go further back than that. Because my parents discussed the situation that they were in, and how they were discriminated against. And working for pennies, you know, and how it was a struggle. So I knew they didn't want us to go through the same thing that they

went through. So they worked hard, and they spent every penny to try to improve the situation for us. But I remember—I have nine brothers and sisters. And we were a close-knit family, and they taught us dignity and respect. And then, none of my brothers or sisters have never been in jail, or institutionalized, or what have you. We never been in prison or nothing like that. Never gotten into any serious trouble, yeah.

T: That's an amazing accomplishment for such a big family.

F: Yeah.

T: Wow. And so you, when did you kind of become determined to go to college. How old would you say that was?

F: When I was probably, my brother was, he was a junior then at Florida A&M University. And that's when I wanted to follow in his footsteps, and be a college student, and just advance my knowledge. When he was a senior at Florida A&M, I think I was just entering school. And it was very difficult for my parents to—back then, they didn't have all the grants and stuff that you have now. And he was going to Florida A&M; you know, that's a predominantly Black college. Which is a good one, they have a fine Agricultural department up there. I know this for a *fact*. So, when he graduated, I was entering—matter of fact, he taught at Florida A&M. That was the equivalent to P.K. Yonge, Florida A&M High School.

F: Oh, like a laboratory school.

T: Yeah, that's what it is, that's Florida A&M' laboratory school. So, he made up in his mind that that wasn't for him, so, matter of fact, he went to Allen and Benedict University prior to getting his degree from Florida. No, he went to Allen

University, I'm sorry. He went to Allen, he got a degree from, he got his bachelors from Allen University. Then he start going to, he got his masters from Florida A&M. And, you know, he went and taught at the junior college, and he later taught at South Florida. South Florida in Tampa, yeah. His major was Math. And I started out—you wouldn't believe this, but I started out—matter of fact, before I went to Vietnam, I majored in electrical engineering. And it was tough, man. Because prior to going to school, I'd had—the only course I had to contribute to that field was Algebra 1. And man, I had to cram, man! Because we had Physics, I remember that. Technical math, physics, technical writing; and I really had to cram. Because I wasn't really prepared for it. But, you know, I did well in it. I did well in it, because I saw how important it was, man. And hey, man: it was tough. Because my parents had to send every—pay for my books, pay for my—I went to DBJC, it's a junior college in Daytona. I didn't go to Bethune-Cookman, I went to the junior college, because my parents just couldn't afford it. Bethune is the Black college in Daytona. But I enjoyed them days. It was tough, but it was enjoyable. College life was somewhat enjoyable, but it was tough, you know, so far as the food is concerned, man? I learned quickly how to budget my money. Because I gave out of money because I wasn't budgeting my money. And I remember eating peanut butter and jelly before I got my next allowance. I had to go get me some peanut butter and jelly and milk, and that's what I ate for three days. Because I had gave out of food, and money to buy my food; just spending it like I was rich and stuff. But see, you know—like I say, and then I dropped out because it was tough on my parents. And came home and got me a job. And

then when I got back, they changed my deferment; not because I was making failing grades, but because I hadn't progressed. In other words, I should've been an advanced sophomore, and I was still an advanced freshman. So that's when I got the little paperwork from Uncle Sam.

T: Was that something, when you made that decision—so you went from, in [19]65, probably in the springtime, so you graduated from Mebane. And then, when did you get to Daytona, Daytona Beach?

F: [19]66.

T: Okay, so you were working a little bit, or—?

F: No, I wasn't working, man, because the jobs wasn't available to work, and I couldn't afford to work nowhere, man, because I had to cram. Simply because of the major I was taking, man, because I had to take Physics, I had to take Technical Math, Technical Writing, and we had—instead of like the kids today, we used slide rules and scales.

T: [Laughter] Pretty manual.

F: Yeah, back in the day, that's what any school was using: slide rules, and t-squares and stuff. And I was, by me being in Engineering, that's what was used. That was the requirement. And I remember the books, some of the books; I call it expensive now, but my son now pay *three* times that much for his books, some of his books, that's going to Santa Fe.

T: So when you made that decision to leave Daytona Beach Junior College, and because your parents, you were saying, were missing you?

F: Right, financially they couldn't afford to send me and my brother at the same time.

T: Was there any thought at that time, the war was still pretty—

F: It was pretty hot.

T: Pretty hot. Did they, was that something that entered your all's thoughts about you leaving? I mean, I know the money issue was not one that you could just get around, but was there any sort of thought of, now you'd be more vulnerable to being drafted, or was that, or did the change in status, and then your draft kind of sneak up on you?

F: Yeah, I thought about it, but I really didn't have a choice. Because it was crucial, man; they couldn't really afford to send them—I done forgot the amount—and pay for my books, and pay for my room and board. That was tough, man! It was important. See, my brother was advancing his education and I said, "Wow, it's no use in"—you know, all that money, they could funnel to him so he could go on and do his thing.

T: What kind of jobs were you doing when you came back to the area from Daytona Beach?

F: Oh, I was driving truck, hauling building supplies. They're located on the Waldo Road, man. Matter of fact, all my brothers worked out there at some time or another. Sometime during their life, out there at the contractor supply on Waldo Road.

T: I imagine Gainesville has really—

F: It's still there. Matter of fact, like I say, my son work out there.

T: Oh, it's up there, okay, in the east. I imagine that Gainesville was growing pretty significantly at that time?

F: Yeah, they were growing, they were building apartments, man. The work was thriving. We're working in the building supply, I remember hauling sheetrock to all the apartments around Gainesville. I remember going into all those apartments, man, on Tower Road. Because they were apartments for students. Times has changed now, man. Even on 20th Street, all those apartments were designed for students. And I remember carrying sheetrock in all of them. Now, they a part of the Black neighborhood. In other words, they're Section 8 apartments now. They building new apartments for students.

T: Yeah, I've seen, closer to the university. The eight, nine, ten stories.

F: Yeah, they're going up in heighth now.

T: Yeah, yeah. How would you say life was going for you at this time?

F: I was working and earning my own money and, you know, I had got me a car, and on the weekend I was saving up my money to go back to school. And I did, eventually. I think I worked about, I don't know, about nine months after I had came home. And I had saved me up enough money so I could, when I got back to school, I would have transportation and I could really---you know, I had saved me up enough to pay my way. I had saved enough money to really pay my way. And when I made that decision, soon as I got in school, I was considered as a part-time student, and that's when I got drafted.

T: Man! That sound like a—

F: It was rough, man. It was rough. Oh, I tried to get into the National Guard, too! Yeah, but you had to really know somebody to get—because the National Guard was, I had heard it this way when I went through training and got to Vietnam: National Guard was a way out. Because they weren't sending any National Guard to Vietnam. It's not like it is now. National Guard they do fighting just anybody else.

T: Were you expecting, by the time you were working, that you might get called up?

F: It didn't really cross my mind, because I didn't know how the system worked. And I thought, I really didn't think about it that much. I thought I was—by me, I considered myself a student, even when I was working. So I say, well, since I had did one year, maybe they wouldn't mess with me. I didn't think about it then; I knew somewhat what was going on in Vietnam, and I knew the amount of death was happening and stuff. And I didn't even think about it. I said, "Since I'm a college student, I won't have to worry about that," you know? But see, I wasn't aware of, you had to go and progress over a period of time.

T: When and how did you get drafted?

F: I got drafted in 1967, and that's when I got that dreaded work. And I really, it frightened me somewhat because, you know, being a soldier in a war; that's not my thing. That's not my persona. I don't have nothing against the military, but that wasn't my ambition coming up through life. Because I'm the only one that really served in the military out of my immediate family. There are other—I had maybe one cousin, he served in the military. But other than that, didn't nobody in

my family serve in the military. I was the first one of my brothers and sisters that served in the military.

T: What about from your larger network of friends and acquaintances?

F: Oh! In high school, approximately when I got drafted—matter of fact I had cousins to get drafted—approximately half of my class got drafted. Half of the males in my class. And the only way the other males didn't get drafted, they either had some physical problems, or maybe something—you know, that was the only way they didn't get drafted. Either they had got married and had kids. So you could use that as somewhat as a deferment too, you know, if you were married; because the government didn't want to take care of you, your wife, and your kids at that particular time.

T: Those are some terrible odds! I wonder, do you know at all, maybe anecdotally, but was that rate as high at somewhere like GHS, you know, that was an all-White school at that time, or do you know?

F: Mebane?

T: Yeah, like the rate of—?

F: The rate of, our equivalency and the test scores were down, compared to GHS. Because we weren't getting the material. And you know, a Black person, they had to work. In other words, when you start out, you start out below the White. And that's the process, so this goes on through high school. So, that made it difficult for we as a Black race to really close the gap. And I think it's somewhat still like that. Maybe the gap is closing a little bit so far as education is concerned, but the gap is still there, simply because of the economic situation between the

Blacks and the Whites. And that's really, I think the gap exists. And if you don't have, if your family can't plan trips and you can't learn about the world as a whole, and you don't have the books and the facilities, it's hard to close the gap. And then you working, and your family, you know, just behind the scale economically. So that's where it exists. That's why the gap haven't closed, I think, in society today. That's the difference between the poor and the White. Matter of fact—so somewhat, it hurts Whites too, economically. Economically it hurts the gap between the poor and the rich. That determine your educational levels, to some degree.

T: Getting back to this news of you being drafted, how did you react and how did your family react? And how did you find out?

F: I got it in the mail. And man, my mom, man, it really hurt her. She knew what was going on in the news, because at that particular time quite a few soldiers were getting killed, and it was on the news, man. It was on the news, and, you know, back then we had TVs and stuff, so you could see about the death. And, you know, knowing about how hard it was for the veterans. And because we had never fought a war of this type, and it was rough. So, man, didn't anyone want to go; a person maybe had revenge on his mind might, you know, want to go over there, but man, I didn't have nothing against them people over there. So, I really, I didn't have no revenge toward all those people, man. And I felt, you know, "What am *I* fighting for?" They not across the field; they not in Georgia, something, coming this way. So, they not threatening me. They not threatening, really, the United States. So, that's the way I viewed it when I went over there.

And then, the average soldier, when I was over there, they felt the same way: "What the hell I'm doing way over here, 10,000 miles away from home?"

T: Could you tell me a little bit about what—so you get the letter in the mail, what were your thoughts, what was your—?

F: Mentally?

T: Yeah, like as you were going through training, yeah. What did you see among your, like, colleagues, or the officers and so forth?

F: Yeah, man, my ambition when I was going through Basic Training—I went through Basic Training fine. And their whole thing was to brainwash you, and to inspire you to *want* to go. And that's the policy of Basic Training. It's a good thing, because they're training you to save your life, man; *prepare* you for this—which is normal. And it helped to a certain degree. And to prepare you for what you were going be confronted with. So. Yeah, all through Basic Training, and when I went, I had that mindset, man. I say, "I'm going make it back. I'm going make it back." And I was *determined*, you know? That was my frame of mind. I say I was going try to do everything to get back, you know? Everything, man. So.

T: What branch was this?

F: That was that the Army. I was in the First Cavalry Division. I was in the R—radio operator.

T: What was the training?

F: The training was at Fort Ord, California. Combination of wiring and radio operator. You stretch them wires and then you learn radio procedures. But it was, the radio part of it was part of the Infantry, so they needed—the guy I was

replacing, he came home—and it's an irony. The guy that was replacing me, he got shot down in a helicopter. He got shot. The guy that replaced me got killed before he even got to the unit. And that was, and they told me about it because I was about to come back to the States, man. When they told me about it, man, I said, "Lord have mercy!" I say, "Jesus, just get me out of this place!" I remember flying to Da Nang, man, in the C-130, man? We were on before we caught the civilian, before we went through outprocessing. Man, we had a rough landing, man. And I say, "Jesus! Man, I made it this far. Just get me *out* of this god-forsaken place, man!" I fought from Da Nang up to the DMZ, up to the demilitarized zone. In other words, all the way up to the mountainous area that divide the North and the South.

T: I would imagine that would be one of the highest casualty areas?

F: Yeah, up there it was rough, man. It was rough, man. It was rough. That's the first—I seen some Natives, I mean, you know, tribes that were, they called them "Mountain Yards." And they were primitive people, man. They were still like people that lived two hundred years ago. They had a tribe up there in that area. And I guess they still exist; I haven't really looked into it. They was called "Mountain Yards." They weren't Vietnamese—they weren't North Vietnamese or South Vietnamese, they were Native people, sort of like the Indians was. I was over there when they did all the bombing, man, and Nixon bombed them. I think Nixon was our president then. And there were over half a million military people in Vietnam during the time when I left.

T: This was the peak of American involvement?

F: It was the peak. That was during, they called it the Tet Offensive. That's when the NVA and the VC really was pushing to just get—just all over the country was a lot of fighting, man.

T: When did you arrive in Vietnam?

F: I arrived in [19]68.

T: Okay, so you went from—

F: [19]68, and I came home in [19]69. I was over there when Martin Luther King got assassinated, and Robert Kennedy got assassinated.

T: Geez. Geez. I mean, that's a lot to, all that was going on—I mean, that was the hottest fighting in Vietnam, and then to know what was going on back in the States.

F: I got back, man, you know, they had I think five college students got shot at Kent State University. I think that's in—I forgot where it is, Ohio or somewhere. Kent State.

T: Ohio, yep.

F: Yeah, our National Guards. Somebody made one mistake, and then, you know, it just metastasized. And a lot of people, a lot of the troops just start shooting and five students got killed. I don't know if you've looked back on your history, but five, they shot five students, man.

T: I was just listening to a program last night, actually, where they were talking about the—

[Break in recording]

F: So far as Vietnam is concerned, and my military time is concerned, there were discrimination in the military. And I think it came out on the news that there was a Master Sergeant, he wasn't in our unit, that was putting Xs by all the Blacks' names. And if there were any duties that a person could come back, an infantryman, could come back and work at the rear, he wouldn't select them. The purpose of it was to not select Blacks. Because he was prejudiced; let's face it, it is what it is. And when they got, when it came, it was on CBS News. And he were giving—the Blacks had to stay out in the field from one to two weeks longer than the Whites that was, you know, getting ready to come home. Otherwise the Blacks, you know, he wasn't giving them a break. So there were discrimination—even up to now, there is some form of discrimination. Because let's face it: you don't know who the VA is hiring. They could be some kind of federalist, or, you know, have the mindset of a skinhead or Nazi person. When they hire, nobody not going say, put on they application, where, "I'm a Skinhead," or whatever. You know, they going hide their feelings, too. So therefore, as a veteran, being a Black veteran, you got to put up with all of this stuff. Because, let's face it: there is still discrimination simply because of the different mindsets of the people working for the VA. So, but anyway, I could feel, and I saw the discrimination, so far as how we were promoted to some degree. Because if you got someone that really don't like Blacks, he not going to give you a break and give you the promotion that you deserve. That's a fact of life. And, we just kind of like accepted that. But, you know, Vietnam—once you, I noticed one thing: once I was out in the field, we were brothers, man. We were. There was no White and

Black thing when you fighting a common enemy. When you get out there, you are as one, as one group. We all trying to protect each other, you know. But I found out when I got back to the country, it seemed like nothing had changed, to a certain extent. Integration was taking place then, but there was a lot of—you could see it. A lot of differences between Blacks and White, and the feelings between Blacks and White. And even job hiring, we were still being discriminated against. And I got pretty fortunate, in some cases, because of my education, to kind of move up the ladder and getting jobs, simply because of my education and my experience. I contributed mostly to my education. And when I came back, of course, I went to Germany. I played football on, they had different little leagues over there. And I noticed something about Germany. I didn't see no swastika signs, and I felt, there was no—the German people, there was very little discrimination between Blacks and Whites so far as the German people was concerned. And, there was no, the swastika sign, anything that—I was over there before, when there was an East and West Berlin. So there was this wall, I actually saw where Soviet troops were facing the United States, and they had this line between East and West Berlin. And I knew, you could see the tension, you could *feel* the tension between the Russian tanks and the United States tanks. Because I was part of a tank division when I was over there. And I travelled the country, man. And hey, man, I *enjoyed* Germany. But when I got out of the military, when I got back here, it was a whole different story. It was a whole different story, man. I used to go down on the Strauss and drink beer, man; they treated you like you were just another person. And the women did too. There was

very little discrimination between Blacks and White. When they couple you together, you all were Yankees; in other words, a Black was a Yankee too. You was in the military there. If they had any hard feeling, it wasn't because you was Black, it was because you was an American. So, that was the distinction, the difference, in Germany to here. It wasn't no Blacks and White so far as their people was concerned; and the women, either. You could get you a German lady and then nobody, at that particular time, nobody didn't look at you strange. And it was just another woman. But when you got back here? Oh man, that's when it all change! You know, it *hadn't* changed. And we were just getting, and when I got out of the military, the United States was still in that process of getting used to Blacks and Whites being together. So. And that was the feeling when I got out the military; nothing had changed. And I remember I had back problems. My back was injured in Vietnam from an explosion, and I remember getting out, and I remember applying for a compensation for my back. I remember going to the VA, and had my—I didn't have *all* my paperwork—and this guy told me, "This don't show me nothing!" So man, I got, I just said forget about it, man. I was trying—because I *still* have back problems! When I do some work, man, I got a back brace I put on, and I've had surgery on my back. My back really got injured in Vietnam, but when I started working for the railroad, I was off for eighteen month because of something that happened to me when I was in the military, in Vietnam.

T: We should say that you won a bronze star.

F: Yeah, I have a bronze star, it's on my military 2-14.

T: Can you say how you received that, what the—?

F: Heroism, I did something that—sometimes, man, you just react. You know? It was, what, three of us received the bronze star at that particular time. Man, they contributed to heroism, and we risked our lives, man, to save someone that was under fire. And, man, I wouldn't do that today. What I did then, I wouldn't do it today, man. I'd have did what some of the other guys did, man. They wouldn't have never did that, man. I didn't get injured, but what I went through—machine gun fire, man! You know. I saw it hitting on the ground, where I was running, I ducked down to cover the guy that was injured. And when they pinned them down, we drug him, to save the man, to a bunker. Man, I saw so much carnage, some bodies so mangled. And that summer what—you know, I have a dream. It goes back to Vietnam, and it goes back to—you know, I have put bodies into body bags, man. And they were disfigured.

T: People that were in your unit?

F: In my unit. And then I saw where, sometimes they dropped bombs, man; you couldn't tell—if it was a direct hit, man, you didn't know it if it was a animal or a human. It was just that much carnage. And me, it was, to now, it's trauma. That's what cause PTSD. It's the trauma that cause you to go back. Now, because of our body metabolism, some people can handle it better than others. And, so far as I'm concerned—like I say, I take medication for it. And it's just something that I can't shake. It's still there, after all these years. That's been approximately fifty years ago, and about fifty years ago. And it was all through my life, but I tried to cover it up. It's like, from a psychological standpoint of view, you put it in a closet.

Because at that particular time they called it shell shock, and they didn't have treatment for it. You know, I compensated for it back in my earlier days from smoking pot, doing cocaine, and drinking. I drank more than I—because it was easily accessible to you. That was a cover-up, that was like a sedative. But soon as you come down off your high, when you go to sleep, here come these nightmares and dreams. So the next day, you go through the same process again. You go to drinking and you go to smoking pot. Pot was the thing with me, you know. You get high as hell, and sometimes when you get high—so, alcohol was one way; you can just drink it away. You know. And I wasn't a alcoholic. Maybe my nightmares and dreams contributed to be almost an alcoholic. So, that was the easy way out, just to get some alcohol and drink it. And that, them thoughts would go away, and you'd be so damn drunk. So, you'd be just out of it, you'd just be a drunk person at night, and that's it. But the next night, if you didn't get drunk, here come the dreams. So the thought process was, "Hell, if I drink, I won't have the bad dream." And that was the medication for it.

T: How did you think you'd be received when you came back by your community, and how were you received when you came back from—?

F: Vietnam veterans, man, we were considered as baby killers, man; and we weren't received as heroes. Because during that particular time, the students was rioting, man. And they seemed to think it was *our* fault. You know, I didn't have a choice. You either—I didn't have the money to go to Canada. Oh, there's another thing too: the Indians and the Blacks. If I'm not mistaken, percentile, we were the most represented soldiers in Vietnam, so far as Marines, and Army, and

people really fighting the war. Percentile, you know; there were more Whites, but percentagewise we had the most percentage of any race that was in Vietnam. You wouldn't think that because, you know, I don't know how many, what the population ratio was then, but we were way overrepresented. Simply because Blacks didn't have—just like me, there were a lot of Blacks. Percentagewise there were more Whites that was getting deferment than Blacks because we didn't have—if you did want to go to school, your parents just didn't have the money. You know. And the Whites, that's the advantage they had over Blacks. So, quite naturally, there were going be more percentage of Blacks in the military percentile. There were more Whites, but we had to—so far as the percentage of Blacks in there, and the percentage of Whites, we were more than represented—percentagewise.

T: Do you remember meeting people—you know, because up until you were drafted it seems like most of your life was spent here: Jonesville, Newberry, and Gainesville, and Daytona Beach, and to California. Were you able to kind of see people from different backgrounds?

F: Oh yeah, man! I noticed something—it was evident, man. People from the North, they were more receiving than the soldiers from the South. That was just the way of life. But when you got to Vietnam, all that changed. Because it was a life and death situation. You didn't give a damn if you were White or Black, man; we in this thing together.

T: So even the White guys from the South, they lost some of that?

F: That's right it didn't matter, man. We all trying to get—

T: Get back home?

F: Get back home, man. Try to shoot the enemy, man. And try to win that fight.

T: How did you feel about the Vietnamese when you were there? What was, did you have into a certain mindset just to—?

F: Well, you know what? Vietnamese, they seemed to treat Blacks better than they seemed—in some cases, Blacks better than they treated the Whites. Their thing, I remember the NVA had a PA system. And during that time, man, it was a—what the word for it? In other words they were using that—

T: Was it propaganda?

F: Propaganda. That's the, I couldn't think of it: propaganda. They were saying, "Blacks, this is not your war. Your war was at home." Because they get the news, too! They knew we were catching hell over here. And they saying, "This is not your war. Your war is at home." On the PA system, man!

T: That's when you were in the demilitarized zone up there?

F: It was, it happened all over, man. They were using—that was, any kind of propaganda they could use, they were using it.

T: Did that have an effect on you or people around you, or—?

F: They were, it was designed for the Blacks.

T: Yeah. Did that get you, like, you and the other Black soldiers talking, or—?

F: Man, I wasn't thinking about that stuff, because I knew that didn't really matter. That was a propaganda thing, man. They would shoot me just as quick as they shoot—. I've heard cases now, where they would give a Black—what they call

it—point man a break. Sometimes they'll let him pass. It all depend on the situation.

T: Do you mean like a scout, or—?

F: Yeah, something like a scout. You a lead man, and you out before the main force come through. And I've heard of cases where, you know, sometimes they'll give a Black lead man a break. But hell, in other cases, I hear they were just shooting people, man. They didn't give a damn if you Black or White; and we didn't give a damn. You know, it was just a matter—that's war. You trying to, you know, protect your life, or trying to kill each other.

T: How about stuff that was going on back in the States at the time, with the riots and rebellions, as some people call them, in Detroit, in Newark, and in Watts, a couple areas like—?

F: I don't know, I came back, man; I was in it before I went to the Vietnam, man. I *remember* that situation in Detroit. Because I was stationed in Kentucky then. I was stationed in Kentucky.

T: So you were on alert?

F: Yeah, we were on alert, man. Man, I didn't feel good about that at all, man. I said, "Hell, man, I'm going have to go up there and face my Black people, man." And that wasn't cool, man. It was very, I was very glad our unit didn't have to go, man. Mainly they were using National Guardsmen. Yeah man, but that was tough. That was tough.

T: Were there times in Vietnam when you felt like you might not make it?

F: Man, look it here: there were many times I thought we weren't making it. I remember we had came back to base camp, man, and that was when eighteen guys got killed from my unit.

T: How many were in your unit?

F: Well, it all depends; up to about a hundred and some, about a hundred and twenty, but it vary how many people get hurt and injured. From eighty to a hundred; sometimes they get down to, a platoon sometimes don't have but fifteen people to it. So you got four platoons in each company, and sometimes they would get low. And other times it all depends on the replacement, and who got injured, and blah, blah, blah. Because they—shoot, I met a guy, man, I met guys got killed the first day. Yeah, man. Then they, guys done spend eleven months over there and get killed, man. It's just a matter of when it's time for you to go? Hey, you can't control that, man. When they shoot them rockets, them rockets might have your name on it. And a rocket, you could hear it coming through the air: it's whistling. Like a whistle, man. [whistle sound] But if you hear it, you know it's going pass over, because it travel faster than, the sound travel really—it travel faster than sound. So the sound come, the sound come, and once you knew we hear the sound, you knew the rocket's done passed over you. That go for a mortar or anything.

T: Could you talk about some of the—you said you mentioned the eighteen. I apologize I interrupted you there—

F: You know, I don't like to go into it extensively, because that's part of my treatment, I try to stay away from that. But only thing I can say, man, is I put bodies in body bags that was mangled. And that's, that was tough.

T: Did you make preparations, like for your own potential passing, if something happened?

F: Man, a lot of times, you don't even think about that, man! Your mindset is, if you get in that mindset, I've seen guys that really go in the shock. Shock where there's no injury, you just say, you just a person that goes into shock. He's, "Mentally, he couldn't take it no more. They just out of it."

T: Some of those never really kind of came back from that state.

F: That's right, yeah. I've seen veterans, man, back there in the day, they didn't come out of it. It all depends on you body metabolism, and you state of mind, whether you can get through this thing. Now, you take for instance me. Some guys, man, it didn't bother them. You know. And some guys, they don't never get over it. Here, I'm seventy years old, and I'm still not over it. Course, I'm not to the extreme. Course, I've been Baker Acted, you know, for suicidal tendency; that's where I was Baker Acted, right over there to the VA. Because I was, you know, the treatment, it just got so much I couldn't—I had it made up in my mind, you know, what would be the best method. But what kept me was my son. I didn't want him to go through that, so I say, "Well, I got to—." That what really kept me: "I got to be here for my son, and to make sure—." Because my two oldest children, they didn't want to go to college. Because I raised them, man. I got custody of my two oldest boys from their mother. They gave me custody of my

two oldest boys, because she had taken them out of school; my first wife called herself "home-training" them. So I got custody of them, I raised them, me and my second wife.

T: Okay. Let's talk, I want to hear more about your family life, but could we talk a little bit more about when you came back from the Service, and how you were adjusting, and helping, and what—

F: Yeah, it was a hard, it was hard for me to cope. That's when I was doing my most extensive drinking. I got an early release to go back to school. In other words, I got two months in summer knocked off of my time, and when I got back I enrolled in a school—

T: This was at Santa Fe?

F: Santa Fe. That was when Santa Fe first became a junior college. My class, when I registered, we were the first ones to attend Santa Fe Junior College, when I got back in [19]69, I think. [19]69, [19]70, somewhere in that area. And matter of fact, I knew we were the first class at Santa Fe. My class, class I enrolled in was the first class. But man, I couldn't get back into it. I couldn't adjust to society because I was having these nightmares, man, and that was when I did my most extensive drinking. So me and my buddies, my cousin, and some old guys, all we would do is just stay high, stay high up. And wait for the night and just get blown away, and then next day it was a repeat. The next night the same thing, the same thing, man. I was getting a little GI money, man, and half of it I was using, I was taking the easiest courses I could find. As long as I got, I registered as a full-time student. I even took tennis, man. Anything, man, just to get that to be a full-time

student so I could get that check from Uncle Sam. Because it, back then, my education wasn't really important. The important, what it was, like I say, man: the memories of Vietnam, I was just trying to blot it out. And alcohol and drugs was the easiest way to blot it out. Of course now, you know, I take drugs. I *still* take drugs for PTSD. That take the places of the alcohol, and the drugs, and whatever.

T: It's like a prescription medicine.

F: But, something dawned on me, I said, "Man, you know, I'm throwing my life away." So, I was still was having the nightmares, and the only way—I had to leave here, because the road I was heading down was either a serious case of addiction, or I was somewhat militant, and I was part of that era, you know, the era of Black versus White and trying to do things. And because of discrimination, I had that hatred in me. Because the system wasn't—I felt the system was doing Blacks wrong.

T: Rafe, when I interviewed your cousin Rafe Johnson, he was telling me how he was involved with an organization. It was a militant Black liberation organization with, I can't remember, but the guy came up from Orlando who was leading it. I don't know if, JOMO I think it was? I don't know if that was the one you were involved in? Could you speak to your activity?

F: Yeah, excuse me for cutting you off, but we had a Black student teacher and he taught Black history. And he was somewhat of a militant, too. So, man, I took every course that was available for Black history. I learned so much about that, I put more emphasis on that one study than I did anything else. All the rest of

them, man, were just taboo to me. You know, it didn't, you know, I was just registering to get that money, but I *did* attend that Black history study class. I remember his name was Horne. David Horne. He was the Black history teacher at Santa Fe. Yeah.

T: I want to look him up, he sounds inspirational.

F: David Horne, yeah, he was a Black—I think he graduated from some school out in California. I don't know, USC or UCLA, or one of the two.

T: Okay, yeah.

F: He was a young dude, man. Yeah, I don't think he was thirty years old.

T: And so were you thinking about getting involved, sort of, in grassroots community organizing at that point, or like—?

F: Yeah, we had our little thing right there in Gainesville. I was a member of, they call it a—I done forgot the name, it was four letters. Organization of Black American Unity? No, that was something that we had organized in Jonesville. But we had our own little thing in Jonesville, man. We had our own organization in Jonesville, man.

T: And this was for, like, self-defense?

F: Self-defense, and just a organization to improve the character and the community of Blacks, man.

T: Did anything stand out from that time?

F: Yeah man, I remember we used to have **diligence**, we had meetings every Friday night and you paid dues, man. And it was really to help the Blacks, you know. But the organization that I was part of, it was part of the Black Student

Union of Santa Fe. That's what it was, a part of a Black Student Union at Santa Fe. Because we had a Black student union at Santa Fe, at the junior college, and everybody in there were taking Black history classes, so. We used to do things, man. I'd rather not to go back and discuss them, because they were some times, man, we had some *things* going on.

T: A little civil disobedience?

F: Yeah, man. And I'd rather not to go back there.

T: Sure.

F: Yeah. But see, during that particular time, it was a lot of things going on in the United States, man. Where Blacks and White were clashing down here in the South—well, all over the United States to tell you the truth. There was a lot of things going on, man. A lot of things going on.

T: Well because it seems like, at least in my reading of history, it seems like there was kind of a promise, the great promise of the Civil Rights Movement, to bring equality. And some of that, seems like it started to happen legislatively and in the courts, but then King was assassinated, and people like you were the ones who were going to Vietnam, so there was a little disillusionment.

F: Right. What it was, society wasn't ready to accept integration. You know, after all these years and they, you got Whites—you got a lot of that today. They just won't accept it. And sometimes they won't admit it and they show it sometimes, like with the skinheads and stuff. They'll show it. And with the rebel flags and stuff, man. And I learned a lot of history, man, about, you know, these schools: Robert E. Lee out of Jacksonville. Lot of school were named after—see, that was

another thing, too. You got to got to, in Jacksonville, you got to go to a school, a high school called Robert E. Lee. And even up there in Alachua the "Rebels." And Newberry, they had these names, man. We were forced—when I came home, when they did the integration thing, they were forced to go to these schools with these names, and a lot of people flying around rebel flags and stuff. But you had, you know, even today, they expect Blacks to just to ignore them and just carry on just like they don't exist. That's the problem. But they exist. They exist in *my* mind, you know. They exist in *my* mind. Now, the younger generation that's coming up now, not of his age, you know, and my youngest sister' age; but the younger generation, it don't affect them as much as it affect us. Because we were part of the segregation thing and the discrimination thing. So that's why it's hard on the Blacks my age, say from eighty on back to, say, forty-five and fifty. Because we were part of the segregation thing. So, we felt it, you know. And that's how, you look at it from that perspective and it's like—see, the situation is sometimes you can, in other words, sometime Blacks and White—Whites has treated Blacks wrong so long that the best theory I can give, they have treated Blacks wrong so long until it began, they began to think it's all right.

T: It's normal?

F: It's normal. And, you know, it's not normal. But they have got in their mindset that that just the way of life. It's *not* the way of life, you know. You're not supposed to treat people like that. And I did a lot of history research—not researching, but I did a lot of history how the Indians came up, man. And you hear things, you

know, “Nigger, go back home. Go back to Africa.” Well, all us are immigrants. The Indians were here before all the Europeans got here, you know. I mean, there was things that were happening years ago; you learn these things, how they killed the buffalo to starve the Indians, and then put them on reservations and stuff. See the Indians, they’re in the same situation that we were in; we were brought in here as a slave and like a commodity. And lot of people know—I feel, you know, we as a race, we the ones was the backbone of this country. We made the South rich because of cheap labor. And I feel for the Mexicans now, because they’re the ones that replaced us, because we just got where we didn’t, wouldn’t accept that and refused working for them, those kind of wages. You can just say, “I could get on welfare and do better than that,” you know? And to some degree it’s the truth. And the Mexicans, because the situation that they are in, they, you know, they know they are illegal, so they’ll work for pennies. And see, that’s the system taking advantage of their labor. And especially in California. A lot of workers down here, they take advantage of the situation because they know you not going talk. They know you not going protest, you know, because they’ll kick you out the country. And, that’s just like the DACA student, man; I keep up. I keep up with, well, you know, the news and the current events. I know, you know, I keep, I watch more CNN and Fox News and MSNBC than anything on TV—except on the weekends, I enjoy my football. But, it’s that the minority and somewhat poor Whites been been taken advantage of through deception, you know. Through plain deceptions. And sometimes, during voting, because of illiteracy, some Whites will keep themselves down by voting for the opposition of

Blacks. And that's a simple fact. They might, you know, they might be just as poor, even poorer than I am, but because of the hatred they'll vote for a person but at the same time they don't realize they keeping themselves down economically. You know, the advantage really, they hurting themselves. And that's a true fact! "Well, to keep a Black man down, well, I'm going vote for the opposition because that's what his party doing." And then why you think, you know, that the KKK come out and vote for Trump? Because they feel he going to do more to harm the Blacks and the minority, or the brown people, or whatever, because that's their mindset, you know? They might be poorer than me, but at the same time, they hurting themselves. That's a true fact. And that's my opinion of *that* situation.

T: So, in about the [19]70s, you started working again, you mentioned? When did you start working for the railroad?

F: That was after I stopped working for the state. When I was going to school down in Ft. Myers, they waivered my education to get a job as a counselor.

T: So you were at Santa Fe, and then you go down—

F: I left here because of the drugs, man. I came to the realization that I had to get away from that. I was still drinking, but I [inaudible 1:17:12] it when I got a job down there, but I wasn't doing it, you know, on a daily basis, man. I still was, you know, drinking.

T: It's amazing that you still had that sense of direction and—

F: Yeah, I had, I said man, I was going down a road of—I don't know what the end of it was going to be, man. Because I would get drunk; the next day, same thing, getting drunk. It was like a repetitive thing.

T: What was happening, was your family noticing this? Or you friends?

F: I was staying in Gainesville. See, my family is west of here—

T: They were at the farm.

F: Right there where our property is. So I was going to school and I was, you know, me and my cousin were staying together in Gainesville, man. I wasn't staying home; I was staying, me and my cousin had apartment in Gainesville. I was getting my little VA money, so, man, I became a city person then. Man, we would get together, especially the guys that got out the military and that was going to school too, so.

T: Guys that you knew growing up, and/or that you met just—

F: Yeah, it was a combination of the two. Majority of them was from Gainesville. It wasn't the ones, our school was sort of like a rural school. When I was going to school, they were from Lincoln, but we were all like one big family. We knew each other because that was a rivalry, man. Majority of our class knew everybody in their class. So we played football against each other, because we, during that era, Black schools played Black schools. And I remember that era, man. Back then Florida A&M, they were getting the top Blacks scholarships. At that time, University of Florida weren't getting any of the top Black players; they were going to all, they had the choice, man, to get the best; they had three or four Black schools in Florida, and they were getting all the best Black players in

Florida. Now, Florida A&M, Bethune-Cookman—mainly Florida A&M and Bethune-Cookman. Man they had a big, you know, they had choices man. They could get the best players. And at that particular time—actually, I'm not being biased—Florida A&M could've beat the University of Florida. Because you can imagine, man, they were recruiting, from all the schools in Florida.

T: They had a legendary coach, too. I forget his name.

F: Yeah! Jake Gaither. Man, I'm on to everything, man.

T: So tell me a little bit about just, like, that choice that you made, and then how, your life, restarting your life—

F: Well, yeah, man, I got so messed up one night, man; so I came out to my parents' house, my dad' house, because my dad and my mom had got a divorce, man. They had got a divorce, man, after my youngest sister got grown. You know, that was all over, but I went out to my dad's house, man. I called my mom and told her, you know, "Look, I'm going down here where my grandmomma was from and had businesses." And I, at that particular time, went down there and got me a job—

T: Is this Ft. Myers?

F: Ft. Myers. I went to Edison Junior College in Ft. Myers. So at that particular time, after a year, man, after I had got a job down there, man, my supervisor, she was from the North. And she knew my ambition and she knew how intelligent I was, and be working in the position that I was. And she say, "Well, you should apply for a counselor." In that particular time, the state was putting pressure, the government was putting pressure on the state to hire Blacks. The Quarter

System was in, that's how; I took advantage of the situation. So, I was given this position, and it wasn't difficult for me. Because I had courses, man; I had took courses in psychology and sociology. And so I knew how to handle, I looked at, my view of the mentally retarded: they just human beings. So that's the way I viewed them, and I understand their problem. So man, I got that position as a counselor over eight boys, and when I didn't have to go to that regular hours of work, only thing I had to do was keep up composite records of their behavior and their jobs, and write a progress report on them. And other than that, I could go to school, come and check out—I used to come out there every day. Now, I was diligent about that. And then I used to go in their jobs, about once a week, stay and talk with their supervisors. Sometime it last five to ten minutes, and at the time I had a notepad, and then I transferred this to their chart and their record. See, that was one thing about, it: I kept a good record, and, matter of fact they say I was doing a better job than the previous person. So I think I got a recommendation down there of what job I was doing and how I was, you know, how I was doing on my job so far as the eight clients that I had. But all of them had jobs, man; just like I had a job. But their job was mainly from eight to five. So in the daytime, they would catch the bus and go to their job. But see, because back then, the mental status was high. In other words, they weren't low-grade people; these people had jobs making, some of them was working in concrete, working in restaurants, and performing duties. A lot of them, their parents just put them out there to really get rid of them, because they were problematic people. But when we got there, we—it was like, we had them in programs that really

increased their ability to function in society like normal people. But they weren't to the place where they couldn't function, man. Lot of them, man, if you saw them—I see people now that's in worser shape than some of the clients I had. Really! I see people now, I been around people that was worser than some of the clients I was responsible for. Yeah, sometime I go off on a tangent, but when I left, the reason I left, like I said, I went down there, I went to school. I took courses in, I had six hours of psychology and three hours of sociology. So I took the sociology to, you know, just—in a way, man, I was just taking classes that was interesting. I took a sociology for how to compare and observe people on social events, from race to societies and stuff, you know? And compare them, you know? Matter of fact, one of my, I done forgot—his name was Picnic. He was in the process of writing a book and he used to interview me all the time, man. And, just like you are interviewing me, man, to help him with his book. Well, he was my psychology teacher, and at the time he was writing a book.

T: So you were about mid-twenties, late-twenties at that point when you were in Ft. Myers?

F: I was in my early twenties.

T: Oh, okay. Wow, you were—

F: Not really early—mid-twenties. Because I left here, man, when I was about twenty-two. Because when I got out of the military I was twenty. So I left here when I was about twenty, I went down there.

T: So young to be dealing with all this.

F: Yeah, man. I was completely on my own, and I began to save my money. And because I had, I was making pretty good money for that time and era, because I was a counselor. I was pretty much hired on the status working for the state. And I was going to school, man; it wasn't that much problems. And after I saved my money up, I got kind of depressed, man. So I came back home and started the farm—I had money—start the farm with my youngest brother. Because I got kind of depressed with, really I was still drinking and got depressed with the job, so I said, "I got to get out of here, man. I want to go back to my home and do stuff that I really enjoy." And that was really farming, you know? So me and my brother got together and we start farming. I think he was about twenty and I was about twenty-five; he was twenty-one, twenty, somewhere between eighteen and somewhere in that area, because I'm four years older than he is. So that's what I got into, and it was a success for about one or two years, and then it start to fall off. So I got me a job working with the Cedar Program. I was teaching, I went to class and I got a job working with the Cedar Program teaching farmers about herbicide and insecticide. And I got paid mileage, and I was teaching the Black farmers about the modern ways of farming. And me and my brother was using it to a certain extent; we didn't have the money to use it like it's, you know, big time, but we were modern farmers, man. We was using herbicide to kill the weeds and just plant. We had the whole setup, man. You know, he had a tractor and I had a tractor. But I knew all of the methods and what it took, and I knew about soil sampling because I had, you know, knowledge of that field, too. So. We were, you know, we were pretty modern. You know, we just didn't big time

like the big-time farmers, but I knew how it was supposed to go, you know. I knew all the technology and how to, you know, about genetics, and corn, and soil—how important soil sampling was, and fertilizing, and what each plant took the, the nutrients of each, what it took to grow each. Say, we were primariliy watermelon and corn then, but I knew the elements it took to grow each crop. So that's what, when you buy fertilizer, you design your fertilizer according to your crop.

T: Sounds like you had it down to a science.

F: Yeah, it was; to me, it was a science. And we did soil testing to determine if we needed to order if we needed dolomite and lime, and I'm—right now, man, I'm aware of all of that stuff, man. About farming and stuff.

T: Do you feel pretty attached to the land, as, you know—

F: The land, the property of my family? Yeah, because see, his dad was my brother. So he's, yeah. His name is Michael, and, you know, we inherited that land from my parents. My parents worked hard for that property, you know? And we continued to farm; matter of fact, his dad was farming and working at the same time. And I wasn't into it that extensive because I was working for the railroad. I concentrated myself because I stayed on the road a lot. Man, I'd work from Homestead, Florida all the way out to Indiana for CSX Railroad. I first started out, it was C. The name has changed and it has merged, so I worked for a company, they merged, you know, and merged and merged. Now it's CSX Railroad. But I, like I say, I travelled extensively working for the railroad.

T: This was, so you went from Ft. Myers and came back—

F: Ft. Myers, farming, and then to the railroad. I did some, a little bit of work for the government teaching, doing the Cedar Program. I taught farmers how to, I had a class and I'd get, I had the authority to give out licenses for farmers to get bulk herbicide and insecticide. Because you had to have, back then you had to have, be certified to buy bulk herbicide and insecticide.

T: Is that an acronym, the Cedar Program?

F: It was a government program that the government sponsored for—it was a government sponsored program for farmers. And they had other mechanics, they, you know, students, that were teaching students. Other than, if you wanted a vocational tech. You know that's what I was teaching, in the vocational department. In other words, I was doing the F, what—

T: The FFA?

F: Not the FFA, they loaned money.

T: The FHA does that.

F: Yeah, yeah! FHA, that's what, that program was associated with that. That's been so long ago, man!

T: It seems like you were really recognized for just like you ability to communicate through all these jobs.

F: Oh yeah, I could communicate. And I knew how to, the best method of getting a person to understand what I was teaching. You know, I used different methods and analogy, sometimes I used analogy to get my point over. Yeah, I had this unique ability to use association and analogy to explain to a person, you know, the techniques I used to explain to a person. Say, for instance, like, you know,

how many, how to calibrate your equipment to put a certain amount of herbicide or insecticide per acre, you know? And I developed my own method, how to calibrate their sprayers or what have you, or their fertilizing equipment, to put down a certain amount to the acre. Because everybody don't use the same equipment. So, you know, I thought one method that I could use. And I used this method: I say, "Well, just take a quart jar and go your regular speed, and then you use your mixture according to how fact you're going plant there. And you use that to calibrate how much you're going to prepare for the acre." Sometime I went to the field and did it for—as long as you were seventy-five to, I mean back to 75%, herbicide and insecticide would work. And I told them, you know, there was a safety thing in application of herbicide and insecticide because that's some dangerous stuff. You know, I'd tell anybody today. And the clothing apparel and all that, how important it was not to get it on your skin and breathe this stuff, man. Because that weed killer, that's some dangerous stuff! The stuff that you use commercially, that's some dangerous stuff. I told them how important it was because, you know, what it could cause; cancer and other illnesses. So I told them how important it was to have on the right apparel when you applying that stuff. And the right gloves and everything.

T: Covered head to toe?

F: Right.

T: I want to ask you one more question about this topic, and then maybe go on to hear about your career on the railroad, and then your family—

F: And that was another, I've got some doozies to tell you about the railroad!

T: So just on farming, how did it change? Like in your lifetime, how has it changed? Particularly like in the Black community, how has farming changed? I imagine it's sort of less—

F: Well they, the Black farmers are just like anything else; they were behind in technology. And the way Black farmers—because we came from a farming community out there. You know, lot of Black farmers was out there at one particular time.

T: Were they proud, you know, to be farmers and have their land, or how—?

F: Yeah! Back then, man, it was, you know, it was a good thing, and proud to have owned land and stuff, and be independent. And have, you know, not be controlled by the system. You had your land, and couldn't nobody just come in there and do anything they wanted to, and you stayed off to yourself. And it was like you didn't have to worry about the system, or the White man coming and telling you you got to do this and got to do that. We weren't renting; everybody owned their own homes and stuff. It might've not been—you know, a modest, say home of $100,000, but it was yours. And that was something to be proud of. So, we coming from a community like that called Jonesville. And back then, man, it was, I would say about 50% of the property owned in that area that you came through. Once, it was more than that during Reconstruction. But as time went on, it sold. But I would say, I talked to my cousin, I talked to his grandma, man; she, the older people out there knew a lot of history back during Reconstruction. And it was a proud community, and, like I say, it was predominantly Black. Owned by Blacks. When you came down through Publix, Blacks used to own all that, man.

From the tung oil farm down there near—the history, Blacks used to own all of that between 39th Avenue and—I mean at University Avenue and some on the right, all the way to when you get down there to that caution, little bit past that caution light. History says Black owned probably 80% of that property. Years ago, that was owned by Blacks.

T: And now it's middle class and upper middle class White homes?

F: Yeah, and then it's a lot of gated communities out there in that area, man. They done bought up, man, and it's really, that's just—

T: You tell me what—

F: The evolution, I guess, in the country going, and somebody come up and offer a certain amount of money and they just sell it. And see, they had the advantage of us, I found this out later: they knew up there at the courthouse and the planning that they had. They always stay ahead, they probably stay ahead of you, too, if you don't go to those county meetings and stuff? They got plans ten years down the road what they going do in a certain area. If you don't go to those meeting, you'll never know. You see they had, that area down there was planned ten years prior, that area when you start down, that light down there by Publix and you seen that area, how it grew up? That was, they had that planned ten years before they got started. I heard, "We'll sell it," but I didn't believe it. Until they built that Publix down there, and they start building all that stuff down there. But see that was in the plan before we, you know, somebody say they going eventually build a Walmart out there. Say, give it five to ten years, the plan is to build a Walmart out there in that area.

T: Tell me about how you started working for the railroad, because that was a long stint that you did with the railroad.

F: Well, my neighbor, he started at eighteen, he was his age. And he was telling me how much *money* he was making, man! That's a great thing, man; I make as much as a schoolteacher! Because at that particular time, in 1976, the salary was about six dollars an hour, and that was much as—more than some schoolteachers and the mailman was working, you know? Those was top quality jobs back then, schoolteachers. I said, "Man." And they started a hiring spree. And back then, because of the work was so hard, Whites couldn't stand the sun. Let's face it; they couldn't stand that heat like we could. And when they hired a White, nine time out of ten they'd put them in a position where they'd move up to a foreman. I actually worked with a foreman, a White foreman, he started before I did—White foreman that couldn't read, man. Could barely read, their education level was low. But because of their skin color they could automatically move up the ladder, because of the system. The system.

T: Sounds like the military all over again.

F: Yeah! So I learned this when I first started working out there. And my best bet, I say, to learn how to run these machines. So that's what I started a plan for, man. It was easy for a White to get influence or job, but if you get on one of them machines, I figure—and that, for about first four years out there, man, I say, "I've got to get me, get to learn how to run a machine, be a machine operator." Because those guys on the ground, man, that was tough work, you know. And as time progressed, man, machines start to get to be, to do everything. So as the

machine got more complicated, I start learning those more complicated machines that had computers on them. Because they was easy for me, because I had all the math, man. Some of the other machines out there got computers on them and do four or five different things at one time, and it's hard to—and then, you have to know what you looking at. When you look up there at that computer and that machine lining that track and doing the elevation of it, then you have to put the inputs in just like you do anything else. So you got to know what you're doing. So it was hard for a Black man to break in. And Black man, it was just like anything else: you had to perform at a higher level than your White compatriots or competitors, you know. They'll let them get by, but if you a Black man, just like anything else, man you have to really perform because somebody—I remember when I first got on a machine, that I applied for; they call it a spiker. That really just spike, instead of using hammers to spike, but you got on that machine—

T: To put together the track?

F: Yeah, you just sit up there and you got, in each hand you got, it's like you shooting a gun, man. You had to get adjusted over that hole, and then you pull the trigger? Boom, it's spiked! You know, the machines done got—just like anything else, machines on the railroads done got more, they do more and more and more. But it take a more intelligent to run a lot of those machines, too, because they had computers on them. And if you not educated enough—some of these kids, man, some of these kids in sixth grade, man, could get up there and run them machines! That's the truth! Because that's where the technology is going. Because they used to—.

T: Yeah, the new wave, a big wave.

F: Yeah. But anyway, like, just, you know, the world is evolving. And it's through technology, less physical work is required because the machines are taking over.

T: Well it sounds like you were able to be kind of savvy enough to see the evolving—

F: Yeah, man, I, yeah I learned everything. And then, I had one roadmaster.

T: Roadmaster?

F: Yeah, he was the head of a certain district, over the whole tracks, signals, and everything, you know, controlling the trains. You know, he knew where and when the trains are and everything. Everything go through him. And they unit controlled large—say from here to Miami they had, say, four different roadmasters, and he controlled, they got territories they control. You know, one is like state line and stuff; that's basically what the railroad is about, too. And he wanted me to go to roadmaster school, so I thought about that seriously. I talked to my wife about it, and I was married then, and I told her, I said no. Because there was still discrimination in the system. And I, my job, if I'd've got, they call it Assistant Roadmaster, you just go replace the roadmaster in a territory when he go on vacation. And there were few, very few Black roadmasters over the system. And he say, "You can handle it, man. You can handle it."

T: He was a White man?

F: Yeah. And for some reason he just—because when I, sometimes we have some problems come up and he knew how intelligent and smart I was to handle the problem. Because, you know, you are building a switch, man. I knew—the

railroad had a book. And the math that they were using was obsolete. You know, the math that they were using to build switches and do other things, because, you know, they had a book that you, it was designed for the educational level for the people that was working for the railroad at the time. But, you know, their method now, you could use a simple formula to eliminate a lot of the math and the work that the manual called for. I don't need no manual to solve that, man, to square up a point! You know, can use a little bit of algebraic formula and square up a point. You don't have to do all that there; you can just measure one way and then measure, you know, horizontally or vertically, and you can measure one way and figure that out. You know, it don't take all that stuff that all, you know, you eliminate a lot of that process. So, he found out, and then he found out my educational level, too, and how much math that I had. And then he recommended me, for them to send me to roadmaster school. But I knew, I had worked over the system then, and I knew from territory to territory how prejudiced some of them roadmaster was. And how prejudiced, you know, the people above them was. So I said, "Nah, this is a good way for me to lose my job." Because sometimes they'll set you up. I said nah, I didn't want to get set up to lose my job. I'll just stay right where I am. Because it, there wasn't a real big disparity in the salary. When I got on disability, because I got hurt on the job, man, I was making, with overtime, I was making—in [19]97, I was making as much as about sixty to sixty-five, sometimes close to seventy-five thousand dollars a year with the overtime. And that was in [19]97, brother. You know, that was a lot of money back then! Some professors wasn't making that much money at the UF during

that era, from sixty to ninety thousand dollars. Of course, there was a lot of overtime in there, too.

T: Did you find it satisfying work? Did you find it to be rewarding?

F: Yeah, I found it to be—it was demanding because, say, for instance, if my kid sometimes didn't see me for three weeks. I didn't see my wife sometimes for three weeks, because we would be working in Ohio, man. I worked—oh man, I worked in Tennessee, Ohio, Virginia, man, all up the East Coast. Because see, that's where CSX tracks. And then they'd meet, what is that railroad coming from California over to Indiana? I done forgot now, they done changed up so much. But that's where they interchange, you know. One company take over for the other. Used to be a lot of railroad companies, now; but see, they merged. And that's why a lot of times we, as a consumer, have to pay so much—what they call that on cars and stuff when they—not tariff but? The transportation fees. There's a word for it, but I can't think of it right now. It's like when they ship a car from Germany over here. In other words, you pay, when you buy a car. We as the consumer pay for all of that. So when they merge and less companies, there were less companies, so that's how the system gets so screwed up. They can charge you what the hell they want to charge you because they know you don't have no other alternatives. That just like anything else that the—in other words, that the big eat up the small. That just like animals, that's how the system work, the same way. You know, they ate all up the little and bought them out; now they can just charge freight. Freight! That's what I was trying to—freight. That's why the system here, that's the whole, that's the way the system is designed here in

the United States. Even down to the stores, the mom and pop stores, and the big manufacturing; they just ate them up. And then when they move across the water, and they never lose money because that's the way the system is designed. They never, ever lose money. That's why they buy stuff from, go over there. The company move to Japan and Mexico because they designed like that. We'll go where we can make, the CEO makes sure the people, the investors going get their money. If they have to charge us as consumers, that's the way—in other words that's what I mean by the railroad.

T: Or if they have to send jobs overseas.

F: Right. Right, right. But anyway, when I got hurt, man, I start back, you know, my nephew knew about it. Because he was, he used to stay with me. I start back on this drinking spree again. Because I didn't—

T: After you, after your disability in [19]97?

F: Yeah, man, I got hurt, yeah in [19]97. Yeah, my children, you know—

T: Because you'd been pretty—I mean, did you drink kind of socially, or?

F: Yeah, I was still drinking, but man I start piling it on again, man. And then, you know, that led me up to about three, four years ago. And that's when my psych—I start, my doctor sent me to, I don't know what helped her, but she start sending me. Because you have primary doctor and she send you out to these specialists.

T: Is this with the VA?

F: VA, right. You know, she send you out through VA. And she sent me to **Dr. Stennett**. So I went to her several time. And some reason, man, it just came out.

T: That you were drinking a lot?

F: Drinking, and I was suicidal. They, you know, the good psychiatrists and the good psychologists? If they good, they *good*. And she was good, man. So I went up to her for an appointment and it was two weeks later before I came home.

T: That's when you were Baker Act-ed?

F: Yeah, that's when she Baker Act me, because I start crying and I just, it just came out. I told her I was on the verge of killing myself, because I was suicidal, because I didn't have no direction, man. I didn't have no use in life, and simply because of the nightmares. Simply because of the nightmares, man. Because I—because my nephew was staying with me, man. You know, I was getting my disability check form the railroad because I wasn't eligible for retirement at that particular time. I had put in twenty-three years. And I was getting, you know, enough to live moderately. And I wasn't worried about no money, I didn't owe nobody nothing, because my bills and stuff was paid for. And them two oldest boys of mine, they weren't into college. And the only person I had to be concerned about was my youngest son. And I was giving, you know, made sure he was getting a good education. That's one thing, now; he kept me focused. Because I didn't want him to go through—that's just like now. I didn't want him to go through what I went through.

T: Was he saying things to you, or he kept you focused just in terms of you knew you needed to—?

F: Yeah, needed to, because his mom, you know, she made sure he was well clothed and all that, but so far as the education—. So, one day I was home; that's when he was attending Vanguard in Ocala. And his math teacher call me, and

she was telling me how smart he was. So, she call me, and that's when I really got involved with him, like. So, yeah, that was before he had—but he was going to Buchholz prior to him moving down there. So when he moved down there—she had a Spanish name—she called me and she told me. And told me how well-versed he was in math, so that's when I started looking. But when he transferred from Buchholz, when his mom moved to Ocala, you know, I didn't see him that often. I saw him about once a week or once every two weeks. But when she called me, that's when I really got involved in his life. But prior to moving, he asked me about Vietnam because he was in ROTC at Buchholz—Buchholz High School right here in Gainesville, prior to moving down there. But after he talked to me, when he moved down there, he didn't get in ROTC. I don't know know if it was the conversation. And he knew what I was going through with my PTSD. So he just, when he transferred down there, he didn't get back into the program.

T: Is that the first time it ever came up with your children? Your time in Vietnam?

F: Yeah, the first time. Because my other children, they were grown. They weren't living with me; they were grown at that particular time. When I moved back, when I got a divorce and was staying in the house where they were raised—I had, my oldest son that got killed on a motorcycle, now he didn't pay no attention. Because he was doing his thing with marijuana and getting messed up, too. So.

T: Did you lay it out for your son, when he asked you about that? Or did you kind of try and—

F: I didn't want to dictate his life and determine, you know, I didn't want to say, "Well, you know, you don't need to be in the military." But he asked me certain

things about Vietnam, and I didn't put no emphasis on it, you know. I just vaguely told him what it was about. I didn't tell him the bad stuff. I didn't tell him the good stuff.

T: That's what I was wondering, yeah.

F: I didn't want to make no determination about, you know, trying to dictate, going forward, what he wanted. I didn't want to dictate his life. In other words, I wanted him to make his own decision. But when he moved down there, when he start going to Santa Fe, that's when he said he wanted to get into graphic design. And he was interested in computers. I knew he could handle it because he's better at math than I was. And because the methods they use now, compared to what—he had access to stuff that I didn't have access to when I was going to school. So therefore, he's smart. He's a whiz. And right now, you know, that's why—from a financial standpoint, it put a little dent in my pocket. Because, you know, he's getting, his books and stuff is being paid for, but I have to pay for his room and board over there at the school. At the crossing there, right in front of Santa Fe?

T: I drove past it on my way up.

F: Yeah, on the fork of—you know where that school is out there, between, next to 39th over there, you turn and go by the school?

T: Sure.

F: Well he's staying in the apartments for students.

T: Do you see him pretty frequently?

F: Yeah, I see him. Matter of fact, when you leave, I'm going get prepared to go by there and see him. Yeah, matter of fact, he want me to take him to the store, to get him a few groceries.

T: Okay, you've got to stay close.

F: Yeah, that's why I told you, you know, we can talk until about 3:30. But, you know, if there is some other thing, we got a little time.

T: Well, I think mostly, you know, we talked over the phone about just sort of processing—it seems like the Vietnam stuff has never really gone away.

F: No, it hasn't.

T: But in terms of how overwhelming it is, it seems to fluctuate. But at this period that you were telling me, once you had this disability from the railroad, it really kind of crept back up and sort of took over everything.

F: Yeah, that's when it really got, I mean, got massive. The dreams and stuff, man. The dreams and stuff, man. When I, you know, it got. Man, I know this girl I was staying with, we were kind of like shacking, man, and I woke up one night, man, and I was choking her. That's sad, man! I'm sitting there, I remember one time I was sitting in the house, man, and I took the remote and threw it against the wall. And because I was having one of them dreams, one of them nightmares, man. But like I said I've pretty much got them under control now to some degree, throughthe medication. But some of that medication, man, when I first get up in the morning, man, I just, I'm kind of out of it. Because it slows your reaction time down, you know. It makes you—you know, you're not drunk, but your reaction time, it slows it down, man. Some mornings I won't even get behind the steering

wheel. It vary from morning to morning. And sometimes I don't take it, but when I don't take it? The nightmares are so horrible, they are fearful to me. I don't want to have them dreams, I don't want to have them nightmares. And then, see, I took a, they call it a mood swing medication that kind of dictate so I can communicate and not get angry with people, you know? It's three medications that I take: one for nightmare, one to sleep, and one for mood swings.

T: Do you do therapy, either like a group therapy or like one-on-one counseling?

F: Yeah, I—no, there be a group of us, and I will say 50% of the people in there are suicidal. In the class.

T: Like, currently suicidal?

F: Yeah. We, I went to class yesterday, man, and we sit there and I'm able to discuss it in the class because all us in the same boat. But I don't get out there and expose myself because, you know, people, they misinterpret what PTSD is. They say, start saying "you crazy as hell." You know, they aware of you, you know, of the stuff there, first thing they say: "well you crazy as hell," you know? People not really crazy. You know, I worked in the mental retardation field., I know what it's—I got experience in it; there's a difference. You know, it's a difference. It's a different, PTSD is, basically it's a new field. That just like football players, they learning now so much problem with football players after a certain period of time, they have a different problem than we have. It come from, you know, them get hit in the head, the brains shaken up. What the guy named? Hernandez. They finding out now, man, he was, they just found out they did, that played for University of Florida, then played for the Patriots. They finding out

now, that was on the news, it started last night, man. He was in bad shape, man, after they did the autopsy. So he was suffering from, I forgot the name of it.

T: CTE?

F: CTE. They found out now he was suffering from CTE; well, we been suffering a long time without treatment. We got, you got, you know what the suicide rate—the suicide rate is twenty, I done forgot, it's twenty-two, on the average twenty-two veterans commit suicide, on an average, every day. It's much higher than the normal. In other words, we consider, when you put the two categories together, we are twenty-two—our suicidal rate is much higher. But then, hey man, do you have classes or somebody would want to ask me special questions?

T: I think that, I'm going to talk to—I was in the history department as a student at UF, so I'm going to talk to people who are teaching like modern United States History to see, particularly with this PBS series that we've been talking about coming out, I think there's going to be more strong recognition again of Vietnam, and what it meant for the United States, and also—

F: How it's *affecting* Vietnam veterans. Because the era that we went through, they were different from World War I, the Korean War, simply because there were no lines, you know? There, I mean, used to have to get hit behind, over there, on the side, there were no lines where you pushed them back and they push you back. It wasn't, they were all over the place: behind you, front of you, on the side, and everywhere.

T: Did you ever have the chance to meet Vietnamese soldiers?

F: Hey man, I got a neighbor. He was a scout, interpreter. I used to mow his field. He, matter of fact, he is a teacher, he's a retired teacher. A Vietnamese, he's a teacher at the—Dr. Phuc. I got his number, we communicate. He was a scout working with the Vietnamese with the Americans as a—not a, a scout and a translator. And he taught, he retired from Santa Fe. And I go down there, he got his home less than a mile from the property down there at that light. And we talk and we communicate, and we talk some pretty extensive stuff, man, about the situation here in America. You know, the Black and White situation here in America. We get deep in discussion on things like that too, man, and he, he don't see how we as Black Americans survived. I say it was just through, man, the desire.

T: That's why I'm so happy with having your story being told here.

F: Yeah, and it was like the problem that Black Americans was confronted with, it's horrendous, man, what we had to go through just to survive. From slavery up even today, the things we have to improvise just to survive sometime, you know? We are a resilient people. We are, through, I don't imagine my son and from there on up, you know, the cultural gap has closed a little bit, but the resiliency of the culture from my age and his age on down is like we had to develop certain tolerances to survive. And you get that embedded into your system and you get used to it. And so we was at, on a survival stage, man, and you develop tolerances.

T: I know you've had a lot of hardship and suffering that we've talked about here today, and some of your, you know, successes and triumphs as well. But do you have a favorite memory?

F: When I came home, man, from Vietnam. That was, my mom cried when I left, and she cried when I came home. And that was the best memory, of me coming back to that little country called Jonesville. And that was one of my best memories, you know. Man, I made it. I made it. That was my best memory: to be, make it back. Of course, when, I left, again, I went to Germany, but that was my best memory, man. I felt I had made it, man. You know, I had made it man, you know, man I did it. I made it back alive. You see at that particular time, I didn't know, man, I was kind of screwed up in the head. Because that's when the dreams started happening, man. And they has continued to happen right on up to now, man. And they really, really, somewhat—Vietnam just screwed my life up, man. You know, because I was on a path, man. The sky was the limit. Because I'm the type of person, I was resilient, and I was the—I had a person with a lot of determination. But you see, that spoiled everything for me, man; my determination went down. And my self-esteem, it did a lot to my self-esteem, man. And the self-esteem, man, when somebody kill that, man, that—mentally, man, that's hard on your body. You know, self-esteem is a big contributor to PTSD, and it all come from your experience, man. Your experience, what you went through, the trauma. That's the main thing: the trauma that your body go through.

T: Would you recommend anything for the veterans? I know they have different resources now, but, you know, based on your experience, people who are serving in some of these wars now that are coming back? It's a totally different environment and social dynamic and everything, and what's available to them, but—?

F: It's the time. Sometime you get service, the time it take for you to sometimes get medical attention—which is getting a little bit better—but the time it take for you to get compensation. That's the main thing, because, like I say, man: I've been waiting on them to, you know—and I put on there, I just want to improve the quality of my life. I want me a new truck. And I want my son to be able to go to school and get a check because of my disability. And the time it has taken been almost two years, and it's not because they have turned me down, it's because they put in all the paperwork! It's the simple fact, that's what, each time I look into my case, they say it's pending. And it's not. And each time I go and talk to my counselor and go, they tell me, "Well, it's just so much paperwork." Well why should I suffer because the government is not doing its job taking care of the veterans? That's what it amount to. They not doing a good job taking care of its veterans. They not. You see disabled, homeless veterans, and they might be going through the same thing I'm going through. Waiting. Waiting on compensation. You know. So they can improve their quality of life. It's a lot of veterans, man, living in tents and stuff. You wouldn't believe it, but it is; it's the truth. Not because they *want* to, and a lot of times, I would say about 75% of the time it's because they *have* to.

T: Well, Mr. Fisher, I'm so grateful and honored for your time today, sir.

F: There are other people—my cousin probably can give you, probably as much interview, because he used to be on the radio station. So he would be another one. And I got three people that you really need to interview. One is, because he was a professional, he's one of these guys got college education. And one of them was radio DJ, and another one is with the Buffalo Soldier. And, you know, the three of us, right now, we are the best ones for the interview that was in my class. Because we went through more than anybody. All three of us are Vietnam veterans, and they are—people fall out the sky? Paratroopers. Both of them are para, one of them was in the 173rd, the other was in the Screaming Eagles I think. Yeah, so, I mean if you got the time, man, they could give you an additional information that I can't. Because this one guy, he do a lot of studies on the Buffalo Soldiers that was in Germany, and he know all about the Airmen, Tuskegee. He know all that history, man. He know all of that history. And both of them are Vietnam veterans. And the other one, he—man, he has stuff in addition to what I can tell you, maybe on a different level or variations of it, and the one that I'm telling you, you need to interview him with the Buffalo Soldiers, because he's still doing things, Civil War things. Because he got his hat, and he got horses and stuff man.

T: Rafe was telling me about him. Let me go ahead and I'll just stop this, and if there's anything else, then we can talk about getting a hold of them.

F: Yeah, man. It'll be good for *you*. It's good, man.

[End of Interview]

Transcribed by: Hannah Lyons, April 2018

Audit-edited by: Ryan Morini, July 26, 2019

Final edit by: