

Oral Memoirs
of
Patricia Ann Black and Billy Hardy

An Interview Conducted by
Trish Thompson and Freddie Román-Toro

March 2013

Celery Soup: Florida's Folk Life Play

Creative Sanford, Inc.

Creative Sanford, Inc.

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Interview Histories

Interviewers: Trish Thompson and Freddie Román-Toro

Transcriber: Freddie Román-Toro

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the Creative Sanford, Inc., Sanford, Florida.

Project Detail

Creative Sanford, Inc. is a non-profit organization created to manage *Celery Soup: Florida's Folk Life Play* community theater productions. The original idea for the *Celery Soup* project came from Jeanine Taylor, the owner of a folk-art gallery on First Street in Sanford, Florida. The first production was *Touch and Go*, a play focusing on the people of Sanford and the town's determination to overcome various obstacles, including the Freeze of 1894-1895, the fall of Sanford's celery industry, and the closing of Naval Air Station (NAS) Sanford in the 1960s. In the process of producing the show, Creative Sanford decided to rehabilitate an historic building, the Princess Theater, which is located on 115 West First Street and owned by Stephen Tibstra. The Creative Sanford offices are housed in the Historic Sanford Welcome Center, located at 203 East First Street.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Patricia Ann Black and Billy Hardy is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed in March 2013.

Abstract

An oral history of both Patricia Ann Black and Billy Hardy. Hardy was born on August 17, 1956, and Black was born 14 days later on August 31. Both grew up at the end of Tenth Street in Sanford, Florida. This oral history interview was conducted by Trish Thompson and Freddie Román-Toro.

Hardy and Black attended Hopper Elementary School through sixth grade, Lakeview Middle School for seventh grade, Sanford Junior High School for eighth grade, Crooms High School for ninth grade, and Seminole High School through twelfth grade. They talk about what life was like in Sanford during segregation and what happened to make integration possible. Black talks about what her education in New York was like when compared to that in Sanford. Hardy discusses how football helped ameliorate tensions among blacks and whites. He also shares his experiences in the Army. Black and Hardy also discuss their childhood romance and how circumstances changed their relationship. Hardy also speaks about his time in technical school and his passion for cars. Other topics include the differences between attending school in New

A Creative Sanford, Inc. Project: Celery Soup: Florida's Folk Life Play

York and Florida, the Trayvon Martin case, and the sexual abuse of Black as a child.

Patricia Ann Black and Billy Hardy

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Trish Thompson and Freddie Román-Toro

March 2013

Sanford, Florida

Thompson How did y'all meet? *[laughs]*

Hardy We grew up at the end of Tenth Street. Our house was the last house on the street. And it just so happened that my birthday was August 17th, 1956 and yours was...

Black Mine was August 31st, 1956. And we're like 14 days apart and our mothers carried us at the same time. And we're at the dead end of East Tenth Street. so I'm at the corner and he's at the end. It was just us two kids. There were others in the neighborhood, but...

Hardy Not as close as we were.

Thompson So you went all through school together?

Hardy Pretty much.

Thompson What school?

Hardy In elementary school, it was Hopper [Elementary School] – between Eleventh [Street] and Celery Avenue – and afterwards, it was Lakeview [Middle School] for seventh grade, I think.

Black Yeah. We were 12 at Lakeview and we went to Sanford Junior High [School] at 13.

Thompson And where was Sanford Junior then?

Black That's Sanford Middle School now. It's the same one.

Thompson Oh. It's on [U.S. Route] 17-92.

Black Yes. The next year we went to Crooms [High School], which became our ninth grade. Then we went to Seminole [High School].

Thompson So you were there for the integration of – or you were one year after?

Hardy No. We were in the midst of it.

- Black** We were in fourth grade when that began to happen, so we kind of had a choice for our fifth grade. Our parents could decide if they wanted to send us to the other school, because they didn't close Hopper or anything like that.
- Hardy** It just made an opportunity to go to other schools, if they wanted to, but we stayed. It was right around the corner [*laughs*].
- Black** We lived one block away. It was on the corner of Eleventh and Bay [Avenue] and we lived on Tenth and Bay so – my parents left the choice up to me, because all my life I've always gone to integrated schools. I began school in New York state and...
- Thompson** Oh, so you left?
- Black** I would leave every year. My father was a migrant crew leader, but they lived here. They stayed here. My parents' work was as a migrant to carry people up north to pick apples – to harvest the fruit.
- Thompson** And so you went to school up there every year? So you were just home in summertime?
- Black** And I spent all my summers in New York. I began school in New York and I would end it here every school year. From September to November, up to the week before Thanksgiving, I would go to school in New York. Then we'd come down here and I'd finish school. And it used to be June 6th that would be the last day of school, and then as we got older it would be June 11th. The next day, my mom and I would get on a Greyhound bus and go to Rochester[, New York] to visit with my sisters, and my father would come up around July 5th – out to the migrant camp that we lived on.
- Román-Toro** Could you elaborate on the differences between going to school up North and coming to school here?
- Black** Yes. I sure can. For me, it was more of a freedom. When I'm in New York, I could be myself. I could be all that I thought I could be. I went to school with whites. I started out with whites, so in school, there was no limit to what we were taught we could be – even the black students.
- However, down here I had to go to an all-black school, which wasn't a problem, as far as it being black. I knew I fit in there. However, at a very early age, I learned the difference. It was kind of sad for me, especially by sixth grade, I had a grip on what was going on. I didn't like when I got to Florida, I had to feel "less than."
- Thompson** When you were in Florida, did you feel like the teachers didn't tell you you could be all that you could be? Did the teachers treat you different in the North and South?

Black No, but there is a difference and I saw the difference. The teachers here did all they could, but you still left school thinking that you could go no higher than a teacher. We weren't taught about, "You could be a doctor one day." This is what I remember.

Thompson Billy, how about you?

Hardy Just like she was saying earlier. we were in that situation and, as far as going to school, that's what we did. We knew we had to go. we knew we had to have an education, so we went. The thing about Sanford during that time was that we lived over here and they lived over there. In other words, the black part of town was over here, and the white part was over here, and our parents taught us, "You don't go over there."

There were many parts of time that—I'll tell you what, as I came home from service, after 23 years of service, there were parts of town that I had never seen. When I came home, I was right down Melonville [Avenue] and I said, "I'm going over here," and I did. I rode on through the neighborhoods and I was like...

Román-Toro How'd you feel about that? How'd you feel about having that opportunity to go wherever you wanted?

Hardy After being in the service, basically, I was going everywhere I wanted anyway, so when I came home it didn't matter anymore. [*laughs*] The door was swung wide open. When I joined the Army, the door was open so wide, it wasn't black or white anymore. It was green. We were fighting for one purpose and one cause and that was it. Sometimes prejudice situations came up, but it wasn't a big thing. It was pretty much—it happened. It was controlled. It was dealt with, and that was the end of it. Growing up as a child, I had to stay where my parents told me to stay.

Thompson Did it make you feel fearful—them telling you that you can't go there?

Hardy It bothered me. It really bothered me, because Sundays—you know, Sunday afternoon—after a Sunday meal, everybody's been to church. We would go out to the schoolhouse and play football. It was all the guys in the neighborhood and we would have a blast. Gosh, we would just play football all day.

What happened was, some of the guys from the other side of town—the white guys—came and saw us playing football at the schoolhouse—and this is kind of what got the ball running as far as the integration part. We played ball. They played ball. We played ball over here, but they played ball over there, so when they came over and a group of them decided, "Let's go ask. Let's go talk," and we began to talk and things began to change. I think there was more to it than that, but that was one of the changes I saw.

Thompson So you and your peers—black and white—you made the decision to integrate before your parents?

Black Our parents didn't decide for us to integrate. It was the white man. It wasn't our parents. I believe that all of our black parents would rather have kept us where we were. They feared. They wouldn't have sent us out to white schools, but as time went on, white people had to make a change, so that's where it came about. We didn't care that it was integrated. We were fine just where we were. I chose not to go. They gave us a choice. It was a very easy decision for me. I had been looking at white people all my life, and honestly, I was afraid of the white people down here, because here there was always that segregation, but in New York – so I knew there was a difference.

The white people in the South – he probably could name some white kids that we went to school with. I can't. There were no relationships with any of the white kids that we went to school with. It's like...

Román-Toro So you were segregated, even when you weren't segregated is what you're saying? When segregation started informally, and then later formally, did you trust it? Did you trust that it was for sincere reasons? or did you suspect that there was an agenda behind it?

Black Well, I suspected that there was an agenda behind it – that they were being forced to make it happen. They didn't want us. They didn't think it was the right time to do this. There was a force behind it.

When I – in fifth grade, in New York state – well, I had heard it while in fourth grade down here – but in fifth grade in New York state, when it was time to move back down here in November, I remember that all the kids thought that I was so smart in school down here. The books that they were learning through, I had already studied and completed in New York.

Thompson So you were getting second-hand books in Florida?

Black And in fifth grade, the books were coming from the North. Yes, because when I got here and went to school and for Thanksgiving, the guy next to me, Willie Jones – when he opened his geography book – in the front they have whose name is in it and then they have the school stamp up in the corner. And there it was: "NRW," which was North Rose-Wolcott [High] School – that I went to. I was just floored, and I went home very upset with my father, because I had asked him, "How do these books get from New York to Florida?" He told me he didn't know, but in fifth grade I had my own evidence. I saw the book and I just – it was just never a good feeling for me.

That's where my – I am a big advocate for diversity and I have been ever since then – and with Martin Luther King[, Jr.] and John F. Kennedy – for me, in my life, even with what I was going through, I was going to be what Martin Luther King was talking about – black and white kids holding hands and walking to school together. I was going to show white people that that could be done, because I knew there was a difference between the whites in the South and the whites in the North and you're all white, you know?

Thompson I want to go back just for a minute. When you said your parents wouldn't let you go there, did your parents explain why they didn't want you going in those neighborhoods?

Hardy Well, basically they didn't want us going over there because it was trouble. Some of the experiences – I mean, I got dogs sicced on me. I got to the point where I just got fed up by a lot of stuff and it was – I walked to the store one day, and this guy sicced his dog on me. He had one big one and one little one, and they didn't bite me, because I guess I was a pretty good size as a kid. I would jump at one, he'd run and the other one would try to get me and I'd jump at him, you know? I tell you what, the hatred that built up in me during that time – I was going to kill the dogs, but they died. I had something on the inside that really bothered me for a long time. and when we left Hopper and went to Lakeview it was like a big melting pot.

Thompson What year would that have been?

Black We were 12. That would have been [19]68. We were 12 years old.

Thompson Because the integration of Crooms didn't happen 'til 1970.

Black We were 14 at the time. Crooms was in ninth grade. Lakeview was built for the seventh grade – for all of us. Everybody was going to have to go to Lakeview.

Hardy We fought every day. every day. They shut the school down once, because we fought so much. I mean, it was lunch time, and here come the buses, and it was a mess. I could honestly say that the class of '74, from Lakeview all the way up to high school, we fought.

Just to take it even a step further, I played football. My thing was football. I was big in sports, and it got to the point where I just decided, "What are we fighting for? I'm tired of fighting." Did you see the movie *Remember the Titans*? We finally came together Homecoming. It took Homecoming in the 11th grade for us to come together – actually, in the 12th grade. It took Homecoming for us to come together. We were down 7-6, and we got in that huddle, and we looked at each other and decided, "That's it. We're going to do this." That was the first time we joined hands and said, "That's it. No more." We were on defense, and I was on defense, because I played both ways. when the game started, I was on the field from then to the time the game was over. Gosh, their quarterback dropped back for a pass and we rushed him hard. And he dropped back and he threw it and one of the quarterbacks – I'll never forget it, Jimmy Clemens, a white guy, intercepted it. We formed a wall and we wiped out everybody and Jimmy ran in for the touchdown and we won the game.

Thompson But didn't you all go to the state [championship] that year?

Hardy No. We didn't. We didn't go to state. I'll tell you what – it took that to bring us together. We really had a time. We really did.

Thompson It wasn't every black or white person, but it was certain ones that they had been...

Hardy It was certain ones. I'll give you a good example. I have a good friend named Pat Howard, okay? Pat were[sic] practicing one day, and I was on offense at the time. Pat intercepted the ball, and I hit him pretty hard. We were in the shower and I wasn't expecting Pat to come up to me. He said, "You tried to kill me out there." I said, "Coach is wearing us out out there. Nah. I didn't try to kill you." I said, "You all right?" He said, "Yeah." We shook it off. The next day we got ready to line up and the coach blew the whistle. He said, "Hardy? You're over there on defense next to Howard." Now we're on the same side. Now it's getting good. "Don't come this way," I said. "I don't care who you are – black or white. Don't come this way." Pat catches on real quick and he stood back to back with me and said, "Don't come this way." Now we're having fun. Now it's getting real interesting. We're great friends right now. As a matter of fact, his mother has a barber shop across the street – a hair salon. Betty Ann?

Thompson Oh, yeah. I don't know her, but everybody says what a wonderful person she is

Hardy That's his mom, so when we get together we hug, fish, and talk. Needless to say, when the wall was torn down – while we were in the pot fighting – there were some friends made in the pot. The wall came down. Doing sports – the wall came down. We realized fighting wasn't going to do us any good. "You're here and I'm here. We've got to go to the same school. We're from the same town. Hey, we might as well get along."

Thompson Your thought process is that that brought about the change, because you said, "I'm not fighting." Then you said that to them, and they said that they didn't want to fight either. You were really a catalyst for the change in your school.

Hardy Somebody had to do something.

Thompson Well, I'm glad to meet you, because that was a wonderful thing that you did.

Hardy All that fighting and carrying on – it gets to the point where you're like, "Come on. We just did this yesterday." There was a big change. When we graduated. Tears flew. "I might never see this guy anymore." I knew these guys, so when reunion time comes around, that's great. We go get a ride, Pat gets drunk, and I have to take him home[laughs]. All of a sudden he's hugging you and wants to tell you how much he loves you. The true feelings come out then. When I see him in his momma's shop, it's like, "Hey! You didn't call me!" They look at us like we're going to tear the place apart.

It had to come to that. The wall inside of me fell. and it didn't just fall, it crumbled. After I joined the service, it really crumbled, because now those I thought were my enemies were now my friends. Now we're fighting for the same cause. I'm training them and they're training me. I've been to the battlefield.

Thompson Which one?

Hardy [Operation] Desert Storm. I rescued so many I can't even count the number. I was a combat medic and I'd pull them out of holes and hills, and rescued them out of the battlefields. It has been a great life and it ain't over yet. The best is yet to come.

Thompson So when you got out of the service, what did you do?

Hardy I opened up an automotive repair shop in Columbus, Georgia. That's where I live now. That's where I've been ever since. I work on everybody's car [*laughs*].

Thompson Now, when you were in school, did any of the girls fight?

Black Well, he saw more fights than I did. I think that since I went to school in New York, when I got here, I didn't have to put up a wall, because I understood already, because I understood what was going on. However, as an African-American, I knew where I stood and how far I could go. Which brings me back to the fifth grade and having to — it was an awful feeling to have to feel "less than." I spent six months knowing that I was more than that. Then you get to a place where you can't go here and you can't go there. I think we grew up desiring not to. Which is why when we got old enough and came home, we wanted to see what all the hoopla was about. We wanted to see why we couldn't go over there. It was to our great disappointment, because there were houses just like ours. Our house looks better than theirs.

Thompson Okay, but what about the fighting? Did they do any fighting?

Black Oh, yes. There was fighting. However, I would be in New York, so he would see more. The fights were always in the beginning of the school year and definitely at the end of the school year. The last day of school [*laughs*].

Hardy You can't get suspended. The only thing you can do is go home.

Black You've been saving up the whole year for the last day of school.

Thompson Get even time.

Black I think we even picked fights. It was the last day of school.

Hardy It was wild, I tell you. I think about some of that. There was one in particular. I had a problem with one teacher. This guy — from the moment I walked in his class until the time class was done — did not like me. I didn't bother with him, but there was this girl that liked me. She was white and she liked me. My thing was, "I can't do nothing with you. Ain't no way." I wasn't interested, but because she liked me, he was upset about it. She didn't try to hide it. She liked me and I kept saying, "Look, I can't do nothing with you." And he realized what was going on, and one day, he called me outside the classroom and he said, "You are one dirty,

stinking, colored boy." It hit me and I told Dad about it and he said, "Don't worry about it." but I still had to deal with this guy

One day in class there was a hand-cranked electrical generator. You can generate electricity with this hand-cranked electrical generator. Now, my dad was a plumber, but he was also a carpenter, and he knew electricity, and he taught me a lot of things. One of the things that he taught me about electricity was if you got in line with the electricity, if you touched it and I'm touching you, then I'm going to get it, okay? He had this electric generator in class and he was trying to prove a point, and the point was that if you touch this—he had us get into a line and hold hands and guess who was last? Guess who was next to last? The young lady. I knew what was going to happen. He was going to crank the generator. He was saying, "Y'all ready?" Everybody was ready. When he made a motion to crank that generator, I snatched my hand out of hers, and her hair stood up on her head, and she said, "Eeeeeee!" [*laughs*] When she hollered, he looked straight at me. I was standing there looking at him, because I knew. Needless to say, I got an F. I wound up going to summer school and I passed with a B. Stuff like that happened and I couldn't do anything about it. I had to deal with it.

Thompson So what happened to that girl?

Hardy She followed us right on through high school. She was right there. I can't remember what her name was, but she graduated.

Thompson But she learned her lesson that—she didn't mess with you again did she?

Hardy We went to high school and I would see her and she would—but that was it. I couldn't. My dad said, "No," and that was just it. It was taboo and I just didn't do it. You have to be obedient to your parents, so I didn't. And with everything that happened to me, I didn't want anything to do with that. The only thing that got me interested was when they came to the football field and said, "Hey, y'all want to play?" At first, there was a wall. After playing football the first few times, there were a couple of fights and everybody was like, "Come on." As time went on, you get tired and you say, "Hey, something's got to give."

Thompson So what about the girls? They fought too?

Hardy Yeah. The girls fought too. You know how girl fights are—tearing clothes off, pulling hair, scratching. [*laughs*] There was a lot of that too, but when the girls start fighting, a lot of the guys would get in too and they would hold them and keep them from fighting. At the end of school, there weren't enough people to stop all the fights that broke out though. The only thing you could do was get on the bus and go home. The last bell rang, run to the bus, and go home [*laughs*].

Thompson Well, you both have come out with really wonderful attitudes.

Román-Toro How did you guys feel when the Trayvon Martin case happened? How did you act when you heard about that?

Hardy I was in Georgia at the time. I was just working in my shop when I found out about it, and I was like, "Man, that thing ain't going anywhere yet. It's still there." I was saying, "Gosh, the only way that this thing is going to leave this city is that some folks just have to die." How long are we going to be upset with each other? If I get cut, I bleed. If you get cut, you bleed. It's the same color red. The same thing God did for you, he did it for me. Some folks won't let it die.

When it happened, I was like, "Wow, here we go again." Just when you think everything's good and maybe there's a chance and we're doing all right, here we go again. It blew me away. It really hurt, because a lot of people knew me as the guy from Sanford. When I was in school, they used to call me "Sanford." When Trayvon got killed, everybody was like, "Ain't you from Sanford? You better look at the news. Something's going on down there."

Thompson Did you talk to any of your friends down here? What did they say?

Hardy Oh, gosh. You know, you always get some radical friends, because this happened to Grandma and this happened to Granddaddy. The memory is still there too. People say, "I'm going to get in on it too," and "I'm going to do something about it." I'm like, "Hey, man. That ain't the way." Then the demonstration—I was so glad that they were peaceful. I didn't want that for Sanford. I didn't want all that fighting and carrying on. We fought enough.

I've got a lot of sisters down here and a lot of kinfolk, and I'm like, "Hey, man. Be peaceful. Let's let the law work for a change." I mean, it's obvious what happened. If the blind man heard what he said to the 9-1-1 operator, I mean, come on. You¹ were out to get that young boy and he didn't do anything but go to the store. Now, I don't know what had been happening in the past. I don't know how many break-ins they had had in the past. I don't condone that kind of stuff. I mean, if there's a thief, let's catch him. I don't want him to break-in mine. I don't want him to break-in yours either. You work hard and you don't want anybody breaking in and taking your stuff. but Trayvon wasn't doing that. This guy was so obsessed that he just had it out for him, and what he did was wrong.

Black And overboard.

Hardy The 9-1-1 operator telling you, "Wait 'til the authorities arrive." And you're going to take matters into your own hands, and, as far as I'm concerned, you're guilty. You shot that young boy and he didn't do anything to you. You messed with him. It could have been your brother, son, or cousin. He came from Miami. I hate that he came to Sanford for this thing to happen to him, but it opened up a lot of eyes in this city—black and white.

Thompson I was so proud of the City of Sanford. They had a thing from the Sheriff's Department that said that all through that spring there were no reported fights, no break-ins, no attacks, etc. We stood head-and-shoulders above any

¹ George [Michael] Zimmerman.

community that was having all that outside pressure to do something and we didn't do it. We stood together.

Hardy And my sister called me and told me, "You should have been here. You should have seen the city. Everybody got together and marched." It did my heart good. I hate what happened to Trayvon, but it sure did bring this city together and it got people to thinking. I mean, it was something deep inside of me.

Black When we're born, that's something that's imbedded inside of us from birth. In New York, we say that white babies are born with a backpack full of privileges, and when the black babies are born, the first thing you get is: "You're black." If you come from a black parent, this is one of the first things that you're going to learn. You are Negro. It's changed several times since then — colored, African-American, black.

Hardy You heard it different. See, I heard it as, "If you're white, you're born with a silver spoon in your mouth. If you're black, you get a slap on the butt." *[laughs]*

Thompson Okay. Now I want to hear your feelings about what happened to Trayvon.

Black I'm not an avid television watcher. I certainly try to stay away from the news. I prefer the peace, because I can always hear God speaking. When the Trayvon Martin situation happened, I was unaware of it, but I was in the process of relocating from New York to Sanford, and when I got here in February, I didn't need the TV. All of our friends and family were talking about it.

What happened to me when I got here, as far as Trayvon is concerned, was that I came downtown really just trying to feel Sanford again, because we were allowed to come on First Street. We used to go to the Rexall Drugs.; we couldn't eat at the counter thingy, but we could go and get our medicines. Then there was the five-and-dime or the 10-cent store.² So I came downtown and remembered *[inaudible]* and Manuel^[?] Jacobson and, in passing one of those places and seeing that it was open, I went in.

Immediately, Sarah Jacobson — I got pretty upset, because she wanted to know how I felt about it, but she felt that the world is thinking that Sanford is a horrible place now. and since I was from New York, she wanted to know how I felt. I said to her, "Unfortunately, I've just come from New York now, but I've lived in Sanford all my life, so I can't agree with you that this is something different. This has just come out, but they have been killing all along." That's what I said to her. "This isn't new. We don't know how many black people or children someone has killed and they're out there in the St. Johns River. I do know that, in my lifetime, Trayvon is not the first one. He's just the one the Lord is using to clean up Sanford." Cleaning up Sanford from the top. starting with the police department and everything. We got into a heated discussion, because I wouldn't back down. I'm the African-American. I know what happened, so I'm

² Next to the Sanford Atlantic Bank.

not going to listen to you tell me based on what your parents – and all of that. I told her, “Sarah, but you’re still white. You don’t get to have a say in stuff like this. Your opinion is not going to matter to us or to the world, because we look at you and we still see white and all the things that conspired in the meantime.”

She was very proud of her mother. Back during that time, when her mother had Manuel[?] Jacobson, she only had white ladies working for her. Somehow, it had come about in the city that they were going to boycott her, because she didn’t have any black employees. Well, one of the ladies that lived in the neighborhood heard about it and she liked Mrs. Jacobson, so when Mrs. Jacobson got to work that morning to open up the store, this lady was waiting outside so she asked her, “Why are you out here? I’m not open yet.” She said, “Well, I came to apply for that job that you’ve got.” She let her in and she said, “Well, you know I can’t hire you.” And she told her what her credentials would have to be before she could hire her and she just kindly told her that they were going to shut her down that day. She said, “I’ve come here to work for you for free as to save your life.” Sarah thought that that was really great, but not on the woman’s part. she thought her mother had done this awesome thing by letting this black lady come in there. I said, “Sarah, they were going to kill your mother.”

Thompson Kill the business, not kill the mother.

Black Well, I don’t see it that way. I don’t see that they were just going to get there and it was going to go over peacefully. I see Mrs. Jacobson in all of that. The black woman really put her life out there to save their livelihood. All Sarah had gotten out of that was that her mother had done this awesome thing for a black woman.

Thompson Well, did the woman keep her job? Did she continue to work for her or did she just work one day for free?

Black No. It was for a while until all of that had blown over. People saw that she had employed a black person. From that, Sarah just took this great pride that her mother – I said, “Well, she may have been loved enough by the blacks that this woman would come up to her, but she didn’t do anything great. She came and opened her shop like normal.” We just kind of had it out about that, and she wanted to know how I felt about the Trayvon thing. “Is Sanford really a bad place?” I said, “Well, it’s the same. Nothing’s changed.” She disagreed with me, and that’s okay. I never expected her to agree with me, but I was really pissed inside, because that brought back something. I could feel the ball and the chain around my feet while I was talking to her.

What happens to us is that we know what to say to you and how to be diplomatic when we say it. However, if your attitude is the same as Sarah’s, then we have to come together and see the truth. This isn’t the first time this has happened in Sanford. We really have to control our anger. We don’t intend to be anger[sic], but it angers you when you’re talking to someone and they’re not listening. and you know they’re not listening by what they keep saying back to you. I just finally got tired of talking to Sarah and I told her I didn’t want to

discuss that anymore. Sanford hasn't changed. She said, "I could see this is really upsetting you." She was laughing and there was this guy there watching. "What's wrong with you, woman? Okay. it's your money. It's your money that's still got you down here and you own half these buildings here, so okay." She said, "Well, Patricia, if you're going to open up a shop down here, you should go over across the street and talk to the black lady over there to see how she's doing." I said, "Why? Sarah, I don't need that, because whatever they're doing to her, I don't need to hear her troubles and I'm not going to let any of you all do anything to me while I'm here. I'm from the North, Sarah." She said, "I still think you should go over there." I left there with a thorn. I still feel it, but it's better now, because I get to say it to white people [*laughs*].

She was purposely sticking something to me. She knew she was doing it. She was laughing the whole time. That bothered me and it really discouraged me from even being downtown. I'm opening my shop over on Sanford Avenue across 25th Street. Sarah's not invited [*laughs*].

Thompson Did you have other encounters with blacks or whites in Sanford that you knew when you lived here all those years?

Black Well, at this time I'm not going to repeat any of it, because it's not suitable for the audience. It was negative towards whites. I'm using that word, because I can and it's true. Sanford as a city has done nothing but grown. It's the people in Sanford – both black and white. When we speak about different situations, we're talking about the whites. In our minds – well, they are in charge. Even if we did say "the city of Sanford," we still mean "whites." They had lots of opinions, but they were basically what we've shared about whites.

Hardy Our house was next to the bushes, so there wasn't anything else back there. There was a big ol' yard. When I went outside – growing up, I can remember having no shirt on – short pants, barefoot. I can remember wearing a shirt, short pants, barefoot. I can remember standing in the road, because my aunt – she used to keep me, and I would always be outside when a story came on called *Search for Tomorrow*. Do you remember that?

Thompson Yeah [*laughs*]. Take a look at this white hair.

Hardy I remember that. Organ music and everything. And I would go outside, because I didn't want to be inside the house – no way, no how – because it was on a black-and-white TV. I'd be outside and I'd look over there, because the house across the street was Mr. Jack and Mrs. Blanch's. They were old folk. No one around was my age except Patricia and – and lived across the alley.

Black There were other kids, but this is Tenth Street, but when you get to the stop sign, this is where I am. This is the end of Tenth Street – a dead end, actually. It was just he and I as children over here, so we all played together at some point. But at the end of the day, and even at the beginning of the day, it was he and I. Today, we are best friends.

Hardy We got close.

Black He can tell you what I looked like. He swears I had ponytails all the time.

Hardy And it wasn't hard to figure out who I was either. It was like this most of the time, because this is the only kind of haircut you got. [*laughs*] Some of the old ladies would plait them. They would take one piece of hair and make this long plait and they'd [*inaudible*] back and one back here — four big plaits and that was it.

Black I always had plaits.

Thompson Now, did she wear little dresses or would she wear shorts?

Hardy She had a little dress on. Every now and then she'd come out with shorts.

Black Well, at the age of seven, my mother taught me to sew. At the age of eight, I was doing well enough that, at 10, she bought me my own sewing machine. I would come home from Hopper around third or fourth grade, and all the kids would come out and gather together to go out and play. I would be finishing up my little halter and shorts, and I would go out in an outfit that I just made in 15 minutes. That's when I would have on shorts. Yeah, but he's my best friend.

Thompson Did you ever see him play football?

Black No. That was during the time we separated in spirit, due to the other part of my story. We separated even though we were still there.

Thompson Talk about the separation.

Black We didn't see each other for about 50 years.

Hardy We used to walk to school together. Young girls they grow up faster than we do, and they reach a certain point where they lose their mind. It's just crazy. As young guys we're like, "What's the matter with them?" It's because we don't have that yet. It was me and you and a whole bunch of girls, and it got to the point where they were way ahead of me. I didn't have a clue. I realized that something was going on, and at the age that I was, I didn't want to be a part of it. We used to have to walk to school — talk about no bus. They said, "If you live two miles away, the bus will come."

Black We lived two blocks from the two miles.

Hardy But they told us, "You guys can't ride the bus," so we walked. It was a trip. It got to the point where you would see people that lived right around the corner of the school get on the bus. They'd drive from the schoolhouse and drop them off.

We used to walk. And they had gotten to the point where they had begun to walk fast, so me being the only guy, I knew something was different. You start

growing up and you start looking in the mirror and you see them and you see yourself and you say, "Nah. I don't fit. I'm not what they're looking for." When they sped up, I slowed down, because I just didn't—you know, after you're called "ugly" enough...

Thompson You were shy.

Hardy No. I went through school being called ugly, big head, big lips, big feet, and all this stuff. You know, after you hear that enough, you kind of think, "You know, I don't want to deal with that." Then I would purposely wait until I would see them turn the corner, and then I would walk on to school. When I got to Sanford Middle School, I already had a license. At 13 years old, I had a driver's license. I had restriction at 13. I had operator's at 14. All that walking was done once I got my license.

One of my uncles had a car that was in the bushes and I wanted the car. He laughed me up under the porch. He laughed and laughed. And I stood there until he finally said, "You really want that car, don't you?" He said, "If you could get it out of the bushes, you can have it." I went and got my dad's truck and pulled it out of the bushes. I carried it over to my house, and three days later, I drove it over to his house [*laughs*].

I had my driver's license, and I taught my aunt, which was his wife—I taught her how to drive, because he'd try, but he'd freak out and holler at her. I taught her how to drive, so he loved me. I was driving his truck and he bought a Cadillac for her, and she was scared of that car. It was so big. I would drive the Cadillac. Woo, man. The car I pulled out of the bushes. I would drive that. It wasn't a big deal.

Thompson Okay. I want to hear a little more about the car. What kind it was and what you did to repair it? That became your life's calling?

Hardy I was fixing [*inaudible*] and lawnmowers since I was eight years old. I didn't know why. All I knew was that I could do it. When I got the car—which was a '64 Oldsmobile Starfire—it was like a tank. It was cast iron. I was teaching her how to drive one day, and she just tore it all up. We didn't have any insurance. Nothing wrong with the car. [*laughs*] The other car was all torn up and the owner said, "You could go. [*laughs*] It was a light blue '64 Starfire. I got that thing running.

I carried it home, rose up the hood, and started checking stuff out—spark plugs, distributor, wires, battery. and it didn't take much. I put some gas in it and fired it up. He just gave up on it, basically. I think about that now that I run an automotive repair shop and think, "It just needed a tune-up." It cut off on him and he went and pushed it into the bushes.

I was driving in junior high school. So when they took off walking, I rode a bicycle for a while, and then I started walking. It wasn't a big deal. I would see them walking on the other side of the road.

Thompson And you didn't even offer them a ride?

Hardy No [*laughs*]. I was doing good[sic]. I was satisfied. I drove all the way through high school and everything. I always had something to drive. My dad used to have an old Chevy pickup. I used to drive that. I fixed it up for him. I didn't realize that God put that gift in me until later – until I accepted him and got saved.

I was reading the Bible – about [King] Solomon. When he was building the [First] Temple, he was trying to figure out, "Who's going to help me?" Then God told him, "This guy over here knows about bricks, this guy knows about wood, etc." I got to thinking and realized, "You did that." [*laughs*] I thought that I was going to be the mailman after I got out of the army.

I had taken the post office's³ exam. scored big time. After I came from taking the test, they told me, "You've got three interviews already." I said, "Shoot. I'm going to be the mailman." I had had about three tickets in the past. I went to Macon and they said, "Oh, you had these a long time ago. Just clear your racket and you're good. Take the test and everything." I go to my first interview, and the guy said, "It looks good, but you have too many tickets." I said, "What do you mean I have 'too many tickets?' I talked to these people at Macon and they told me that my driving record is good." He said, "Man, I can't use you. You've got too many tickets." I said, "I know what I'm going to do. I'm going back down to Macon to straighten this out." I went back down to Macon and got another ticket. [*laughs*]

Now I'm sitting there in the car, and I'm saying to myself, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" He said, "Go home. Enroll in school." I went home and went to the schoolhouse and enrolled in school and I started the very next day. That's what he wanted me to do, and I signed up for automotive technology. They thought that I was the best thing since ice cream. I was just doing what I know, and they were like, "Nobody like you has ever come through here." I kept saying, "Man, all these mechanics..." They said, "Look, no one like you has ever come through here." I would get my grades and throw them on the table. When it came time to graduate, the instructor walked up to me and gave me these papers and said, "Fill these out." I looked at the papers and they said, "National Honors Society." I said, "You got the wrong person. Wait a minute now. National Honors Society means that I'm going to wear a white gown. You got the wrong person." The guy said, "No. you haven't seen your grade point average." I said, "Well, what is it?" He said, "It's 4.2." I said, "4.2? How do you get 4.2?" I built a car, and that's how I got 4.2.

³ United States Postal Service (USPS).

This young lady and I were in the class, and I guess we were neck-to-neck and it got to the end of the class, and I said, "I'll know what I'll do. I'll just build a car. You know, I'll just put the engine in, and the transmission and everything." They said, "You ain't going to be able to do that." I looked them and said, "Y'all don't know." I built that car and I didn't realize they were looking at me, because I would go to the end of the hall, where the car was, so I could work on it. But they were looking. Finally, I finished it and I stood there and looked at it. I put the key in and fired it up and it looked like everybody came out of the woodwork and it looked like everybody came out and started clapping and everything. I was like, *Wow. [laughs]* So I filled out the papers and was part of the National Honors Society.

I was floored. I didn't think that was me. As they finished with the National Honors Society, they said, "Now we're going to name the Student of the Year." And they're going on about this guy and they're just talking about how great he is and how good he is and I'm saying to myself, *This guy must be – goodness, boy. This guy really did good[sic]*. They just kept talking until they said, "The Student of the Year is Billy Hardy." And I'm sitting there and they're just clapping and hollering, and I'm sitting there, because it didn't hit me yet. and somebody said to me, "They just called your name." I looked around at the instructor and walked up to the podium and said, "Y'all said all that about me?" I was like, *Wow*. I've been doing it ever since he blessed me to open up a shop. I worked at the dealership and a couple of other shops and then he blessed me with my own shop.

Thompson Were you in contact with him when he was in the service?

Black No. It really was 50 years. It was 50 years last year since we saw each other. It's been a year now.

Hardy When I left, I left. I'd come home and ride in and ride out.

Black I wouldn't see him though. We still lived in the same places, but we didn't contact each other. The separation was my doing. I did it because of what was going on in my home. He and I were so close that I knew what he knew. The separation was me not wanting to ruin him by telling him what was happening to me all those years.

Thompson Okay. If you want to tell that. We have 14 minutes left.

Black I'm the one that started to walk ahead. I would look over the corner to see if he had come out. If he hadn't, I would shoot out so I would be ahead. That was because I decided not to tell him what was going on. He was quiet and I could just tell he wouldn't have known what to do with that information. This had already been happening to me for six years at that point, and we had played together up until that point, so I had to make a decision. It wasn't until all these years later that I could tell him why.

Thompson You can tell that if you'd like to.

Black I had been being molested every week by a family friend in my home or wherever he would drive me to. At one point, Billy and I were playing and he dared me not to do something to him. and I was always hitting on him and everything, because he's always been a whole lot bigger than me and he dared me this time. He always let me have my way, but this time he was saying, "Oh, you better not do that." I knew he was serious, but I also knew I was his girl and he was going to let me get away with it. so I did real quickly and I ran across to my yard and he came running after me. The guy that was molesting me was standing there and I ran into the house and as Billy was running to come up behind me, the man hit him. and when I looked back I realized the man was really fixed on me. Billy got up to come after me again, not knowing why this strong man that he didn't know would punch him like that, and he punched him again. so I knew I had to leave him alone. I made the decision to walk ahead.

Thompson Did he hurt him?

Hardy He hit me pretty good. I was just a little fella. If I find him again—I don't know. I remember clearly how he did that, and I couldn't have done anything, because this guy was swinging some hammers. He knocked me down about three times and the only thing I could do was get up and go home, you know?

Black I couldn't look anymore. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know if to tell him that this is what the guy was doing. For me, I let Billy go. I didn't want to mess him up or leave him thinking he had to save me or something, so I did that. The girls didn't do that. I was the one that said, "Here comes Billy. Walk a little faster." The girls didn't even know why. It was very painful for both of us.

At the age of six, he and I were playing make-believe, and the aunt that he was talking about saw us and called my mother. And at six years old, I got the beating of my life. It was my molester that went and caught me and brought me back, and my mother beat me with a leather belt. and when she stopped swinging me around, I got introduced to shame. The guy was standing there and he watched me get the beating, and from there, he began to touch me and became my friend. So I thought I was saving Billy at that time.

We would still go to school, but we ignored the feelings we had for each other. We were in love at six years old. We went to the store on one of the lawnmowers that he hadn't fixed yet. I have no idea where I learned any of that from. But for me, the separation was very difficult. because your friend doesn't know what is going on and I just couldn't tell him or anybody else.

Thompson And for how long did that go on?

Black For 11 years. I was 17. By the time. But by that time, our lives had gone in different directions.

Thompson When did you go to the military?

Hardy In '76. After football season I said, "It's time to go."

Black I never did try to contact him all these years. I wouldn't ask his sisters or anybody where he was. I just always prayed to God that one day, I could see him again. and, lo and behold, that was last year. It was always in me, because the day after, he never asked me, "What happened to you?" We never asked each other that. I believe that if he had asked me that, it would have given me a chance to say. But since we didn't – by the time we're 12, I'm trying to protect him. I had determined, through all those years, that if my name ever came out of his mouth, I would go.

It was 50 years later, and he was talking to a cousin, and he asked about me and she called me in New York and told me, "Billy was asking about you. He wants your number." And I asked, "My Billy?" She said, "Yeah." I said, "Billy boy? My Billy boy?" And I started to cry and asked her, "Tricia, is it my Billy boy?" And she kept saying, "Yes." Even she knew what it was. She asked, "Do you want me to give him your number?" I said, "No. give me his." It had been long enough. I called him immediately, and, probably to his annoyance, I called him every day since then [*laughs*].

My father owned a school bus, a big truck, and a car. The bus was to carry the people up North and the yard was always full. The backyard was where Daddy kept all his vehicles was actually right in his view.

Hardy So I knew when they came from up North. When the trucks and the buses were out there, I knew she was back. We were like Forrest Gump and Jenny [*laughs*].

Thompson This was just wonderful and I'd love to do it again.

End of Interview