

**Oral Memoirs**

**of**

**David Tossie**

An Interview Conducted by

Geoffrey Cravero

November 8, 2022

Regional Initiative for Collecting the History, Experiences, and Stories

(RICHS)

*University of Central Florida RICHS*

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## **Interview Histories**

Interviewers: Geoffrey Cravero, Diana Dizon

Transcriber: Hiram Davila

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the RICHES Department, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

## **Project Detail**

RICHES is an umbrella program housing interdisciplinary public history projects that bring together different departments at UCF with profit and non-profit sectors of the community.

Central Florida has often been associated with large-scale, commercial tourism and housing development. While those aspects of Central Florida are important to the economic growth of the region, much of its history has remained unnoticed and under researched. The Public History program at UCF links many projects under one initiative to promote the collection and preservation of Central Florida history. By facilitating research that records and presents the stories of communities, businesses, and institutions in Central Florida, RICHES seeks to provide the region with a deeper sense of its heritage. At the same time, the initiative connects the UCF students and faculty with the community and creates a foundation on which Central Floridians can build a better sense of their history.

## **Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with David Tossie is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on November 8, 2022.

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**Abstract**

An oral history interview of educator David Tossie. The interview was conducted by Geoffrey Cravero and Diana Dizon over Zoom on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Some of the topics include early life and education in Oviedo, his favorite teachers, integration of Central Florida public schools, becoming an educator, thoughts on Oviedo Colored Schools Museum, and his final thoughts.

## David Tossie

Oral History Memoir  
Interview Number 1  
Interviewed by Geoffrey Cravero, Diana Dizon  
November 8, 2022  
Zoom

0:00:00

### Early Life and education in Oviedo

**Cravero** Are you already recording? Let me see [*smacks lips*].

**Dizon** Good to go.

**Cravero** Okay. Alright I'm gonna go ahead and start. Let's see here. Hm. This is Geoffrey Cravero and with me is Diana Dizon. I am conducting an oral history with David Tossie. The interview is being connected via Zoom on Tuesday November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Mr. Tossie, thank you for speaking with us today. Would you begin by stating your name and telling us a bit about where you're from and what life was like for you growing up?

**Tossie** My name is David Tossie. You can say Tossie either way it doesn't matter. Alright. Um, part of my family says Tossie, some say Tossie. I am from Oviedo. I was born in Oviedo, Florida, 1954, at a doctor's office – Doctor Stoner's office – right in downtown Oviedo. Um, I attended school at Jackson Heights Elementary School<sup>1</sup> from 1960 to 1967. And that was when – since 1967 is when the integration was, uh, full-blown and it was freedom of choice. You could choose to go to Crooms<sup>2</sup> in Sanford or choose to go to Oviedo High School<sup>3</sup>, and I chose to go to Oviedo High School [*audio glitch*].

**Cravero** I forgot – that's – all the times I've done this I always forget to do that [*laughs*]. Um, could you please describe your experience attending Jackson Heights Elementary School, uh, Colored School and what are some of the memories that stand out to you?

**Tossie** Well, just, uh, going to school was a big excitement because I had two sisters, uh – I had four siblings in front of me that had gone to school in Oviedo but two

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<sup>1</sup> Built in 1959, Jackson Heights Elementary School, which later became Jackson Heights Middle School, is located at 41 Academy Ave., Oviedo, FL 32765.

<sup>2</sup> Crooms Academy was founded in 1926 as Seminole County's first high school for African American students. It is located at 2200 Historic Goldsboro Blvd, Sanford, FL 32771.

<sup>3</sup> Established in 1922, Oviedo High School is located at 601 King St., Oviedo, FL 32765.

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that had gone to Jackson Heights. And they would come home with all these stories and everything, so I was excited to go.

My first-grade year I remember catching mumps or measles. I can't remember what it was. But, you know, when I—when I caught that I was home for a week. And my teacher—my first-grade teacher just happened to be my next-door neighbor. So—and instead of missing all the schoolwork, she brought my homework home to me every day. So that was—it wasn't fun, but it was alright.

Um, all through the school I had good friends. Uh, I walked to school. Um, my aunt was one of the bus drivers for the, uh, school. We had—I think we had two buses that went to Jackson Heights. And my aunt, Gladys Ingram<sup>4</sup>, was one of the bus drivers and Dolphus Carwise<sup>5</sup> was the other bus driver.

We had probably around 400 students. My first-grade class was two classrooms and I think every other class—I can remember all my teachers from first grade through the seventh grade and all of my friends. Some friends I have—still have those friends for life. So we still see each other and still communicate with each other.

0:03:18

### **His favorite teachers**

**Cravero**

Did you have a favorite teacher? And what qualities did he or she bring to the classroom?

**Tossie**

Well I guess as you—as you progress my—I guess in first grade my favorite teacher was my first-grade teacher because she was my next-door neighbor, and I knew her. Our second-grade teacher was real good. Mrs., uh, Curtis I think her name was. My third-grade teacher was another neighbor and my best friend's mother. So she was pretty good but she was real strict. And since she knew me, you know, she was real strict on me. My fourth-grade teacher was a lady from another town, but she was close—you know, y—Jamestown is where it was. We always thought she was mean, but she was a good lady. But we always thought she was mean because we were little kids. Uh, fifth grade and—fifth and sixth grade I had the same teacher: a man. That was my first male teacher and we thought he was great because we did a lot of different things with him. So we kept him for two years. And then my seventh-grade teacher, Mr. Wright, was a teacher—that was when we started changing classes, too. We would go from science to English to math and different things like that. And all the classes we always had recess. We didn't have any physical education class. No special classes at all. We did have recess though. Alright.

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<sup>4</sup> Gladys Ingram (October 26, 1905-April 16, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> Dolphus Carwise Sr. (1910-February 13, 1993).

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**0:04:49**                      **Integration of Central Florida public schools**

**Cravero**                      Many, uh, schools in Central Florida were still considered segregated over a decade after the Brown vs. Board of, uh, Education<sup>6</sup> decision.

**Tossie**                      Yes.

**Cravero**                      You'd go on to attend Oviedo High School during a period of racial integration. Do you remember what that first day was like and would you share some of your memories of your high school experience?

**Tossie**                      It was—it was different. Um, that was my eighth-grade school year and I had seen the school—it was within walking distance of me. I had never been on that campus before. And I had seen it. I had been around it and whatever but never walked on that campus. Never been to any classes. Some of the students that were there I had seen before. And later on I found that their names were familiar because at Jackson Heights we wouldn't get new books. We would get their old books with their names in them. And so that was, uh, strange. You know, it was alright then because it was new to us but once I got up there it felt kind of strange. Because we wouldn't get the new books. We would get the old books. But it was—it was—it was different.

Um, I was put in classes that had, uh, mostly Black kids and probably—and I don't know if this is right or not, but probably the poorest of the white kids were in—were in the classes that I had. And my first day in English class—I remember this very well. A guy behind me—white guy—I didn't know him, but I knew his uncle because my dad and his uncle worked together on the farms. And he was sitting behind me. And he touched me on the shoulder and told me what his name was and said hello. Very nice guy. And I—I knew him until his—he passed away about three or four years ago. But he was a good friend of mine all those years.

And so—and I got some new friends, too. But there was some controversy or some tension at the school because a lot of the white people didn't want us up there. And our parents would tell us before we left the house to be careful. To go to your class. Do you work. One of the things my mother told me was not to touch a white girl, you know? So [*laughs*] make sure I stay away from them because you get hung by that. You know, stuff like that. So I did—I—I did all that.

Uh, one day, one of my friends was, uh—the school was a three-story school. It was where Lawton Elementary School<sup>7</sup> is now, it was Oviedo High School. One

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<sup>6</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), ruled that United States state laws establishing racial segregation in public schools are unconstitutional, even if the segregated schools are otherwise equal in quality.

<sup>7</sup> T.W. Lawton Elementary School (later changed to Lawton Elementary School) is located at 151 Graham Avenue in Oviedo, Florida.

of my friends had an art class and had brought some scissors to school. This the story I got and I don't know the real story of it. But this the story I got. He brought some scissors to school and some white guys saw him upstairs. And he was kind of a big guy, so they were gonna jump him. And it ended up that he beat all three of them up and he got sent to the office and got suspended from school. And they said they suspended him because he had scissors, you know?

So—and then there was another fight in the girls' bathroom where another girl—Black girl—was in there and a girl called her the n-word. I guess they must've bumped into each other or something, so she called her the n-word. And the girl hit her in the nose. And I was just happened to be passing by the hallway and the bathroom girl—girls' bathroom. When the girl ran out. And I remember her screaming and hollering that—that n just hit her in the nose, you know? And so the crowd—the hallway was always crowded and everything. But it was the next day I think all the—a lot of parents showed up. Uh, mainly white parents. I don't think any of the Black parents showed up. But you could hard—you could hardly walk on the school campus because of all those people that were there. And we didn't know what was going on, you know? We had heard stuff about KKK and all that stuff, but we had never seen anyone. But they didn't have on any robes or anything. But they were there. And I still to this day don't know why they were there, but they were. There was a lot of people there and it was sort of scary. But we got over that and ended up having some good white friends and Black friends. And some of them I still know today.

0:09:13

### **Becoming an educator**

**Cravero** You'd go on to, uh, become an educator yourself. Um, how did your formative experiences, um, in Oviedo shape your desires to become an educator and—and w—what—what were some of the differences, uh, once you were an educator versus a student in your experience?

**Tossie** The great thing about that: when I was in the eighth grade, that first year up there, the, uh, PE<sup>8</sup> teacher was a basketball coach and he was assigned to teach the high schools and the middle schools, but I guess the principal had him to take out the elementary kids also. And so he asked me and another guy if I would come over there. And he'd talk to the teachers I guess and got us excused and had me take the kids out to the playground for him. And so I guess that—that sort of got me into that mode.

And so during all those years I guess just watching what the teachers do—and I was a basketball player at school—in high school. And so when I went to college I had no, uh, expectations of becoming a teacher. I just wanted to make sure I got into college. And I was gonna think about it when I got there. But I did get into college. And I played basketball. And after my junior year is when I decided to

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<sup>8</sup> Physical Education.



become an educator. So it was just all of the basketball coaches, the teachers treated me good up at Oviedo High School. And I got along well with just about everyone. So it wasn't any big influence over anything. I had a lot of cousins that were teachers and educators and maybe that did, too. But it was—it was just a progressive thing.

0:11:04

### **Thoughts on Oviedo Colored Schools Museum**

**Cravero** The oral history that you're giving us today is going to be archived in the Oviedo Colored Schools Museum. What are your hopes for that museum?

**Tossie** Well, I would hope that it grows and that everyone—uh, people in the future will see what—what happened. Because a lot of times—I guess today's people are trying to push a lot of history down and not—not try to remember. But I think we should remember our history because if we don't know where we came from, we don't know where we're going. Um, I know that I grew up in Oviedo and it was poor and we lived in a one-bedroom house. My parents were not educated. My mother went to sixth grade, which is probably equivalent to maybe third grade nowadays. My dad—I never saw him or heard him read anything, but I did see him sign his name on his checks. So, we were not a upper-class or middle-class people. You know? They went to work early and came home late. They worked for other people. And so I just want people to know that Oviedo was a pretty good place to live. There was prejudice here. Um, I've heard about it. You know? I saw some of it, but not much. And I knew—you knew what and what not to do. And—but I would like for people in the future to just know that things are not just like it is today. But it was worse than it was and—and people need to know that. Some people are—they don't want their children to know how bad people were treated, but it should be known.

0:12:49

### **Final thoughts**

**Cravero** Is—is there anything else that you'd like to add or expand on? Do you have any final thoughts for us?

**Tossie** Well, I did write some stuff down to remember. I told you about my homework teacher—my homework in first grade. And we also did a lot of things with the Bible in—in elementary school. Our principal would come on the intercom every morning and say a prayer. And then he would tell everybody to have a good day and everything. Um, we would have a Bible teacher that would come. I don't know if it was once a week or once a month. I can't remember. But that Bible teacher was a white lady. And she would come there. And we would all assemble in the auditorium. And she would do Bible lessons. And she would have this felt board. I remember this very vividly. A felt board with things that she would—with people that she would stick on that board. And then she would give a story and tell us. And we would, uh—she would sing some songs and things.

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Um, we had a music teacher and she would do, uh, Christian music. Hymns and things like that. We would sing those things. Uh, we would – in the classrooms our teachers would have prayer. We would sing a song about “Get Thee Behind Me Satan” every morning before we, uh, started our classes.

I remember all the girls were always taller than me in elementary school. And then when we got in eighth grade or something I sort of passed them up. I love the carnivals that we would have. It would be a PTA sponsored thing, I guess. And they would have a little booth. And parents would make food. And they would have gifts. And you’d go to these different booths and try to play things. And they would have a, uh – I remember this truck that looked like a train that you could get on there for a certain amount of money. And then they would ride to downtown Oviedo then back to Jackson Heights. And it looked like a train but it was a truck.

Uh, recess was good because, like I said, we didn’t have regular physical education classes, but we had recess. And our teachers would take us outside and they would play little games with us. And then we would go to the playground and play that.

Uh, the parent participation was real good at PTA. When you’d go to a PTA meeting it would be crowded. And I when education – I was in education for 35 years and I don’t think I’ve ever been to a crowded PTA meeting unless it was a show or something that the children were doing.

Um, like I say my siblings – I always looked up at them. And the bad thing about having two girls in front of you is that if you get the same teacher, they expect you to excel like they did. And I wasn’t doing that so [*laugh*] it was just a little different.

And like I said we had – I’ve got friends that I met before elementary school and in elementary school. And I’ve had those friends for life. And the status of the students out there was different. There were people – most the people out there were poor. Uh, there were maybe two or three families that had exceeded. You know? We had some students that were – that their parents were teachers. Some students had parents that had gone to college, but not that many. Most of them worked for field – in the field. And they worked for other people. And they were just like us [*inaudible*] you know? So it was a – there wasn’t a big status different in anyone. And that’s about it. Any questions?

**Cravero**

No, that was fantastic. Thanks. Mr., uh, Tossie, thank you again for sharing your time and speaking with us. This has been Geoffrey Cravero with Diana Dizon on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

*End of Interview*