

GARY MIKE SMITH

Interview 211a

October 13, 2010, at The History Center, Diboll, Texas

Patsy Colbert, Interviewer

Patsy Colbert, Transcriber

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Patsy Colbert, Diboll native Gary Mike Smith reminisces about growing up in Diboll. He was a 6th grader during the first year of total school racial integration and played Little League baseball when the program was racially integrated. Mr. Smith recalls his interactions with white and black students, teachers, and coaches, particularly Mrs. Odysa Wallace, Coach James Porter, Mrs. Bea Burkhalter, Mrs. Beth Stubblfield. He recalls an incident of racial tension during his senior year of high school, in 1975, but doesn't remember very many of these types of problems. He also discusses Diboll Day, his involvement in the Little League program, and his work at the Texas Southeastern Railroad.

Patsy Colbert (hereafter PC): Today's date is October 13, 2010. I'm Patsy Colbert and I am here at the History Center with Gary Mike Smith and we are going to do an oral history interview today and talk about the integration of Diboll Independent School District and H. G. Temple School. So, Gary Mike we will just start off if you will by telling me when and where you were born.

Gary Mike Smith (hereafter GMS): I was born and raised in Diboll, Texas. Well, I was actually born in Lufkin at Memorial, but I've lived here all my life. I started at the elementary school and finished what they called junior high, the Temple Junior high and high school and finished high school.

PC: Okay, and when were you born?

GMS: Sept 25, 1956.

PC: Okay, and what year did you graduate?

GMS: 1975.

PC: Do you remember what grade you were in when the integration took place?

GMS: Sixth grade.

PC: Sixth grade. I believe I saw in the '69 annual which would be the '68-69 school year and that was the first year of full integration, was your sixth grade year.

GMS: I believe so, yes ma'am.

PC: Okay, what was your first knowledge of integration? How did you come to know about it before it happened?

GMS: Well, when they first...before they first integrated there was a choice. There was a couple of years where those kids, or the black kids could come to the white school and then you had a choice. There was a few that came over. And then the sixth grade we learned mainly through the Free Press and talk of the town and that type of stuff.

PC: Do you remember any conversations that your parents had about integration and how they felt about the process of integration?

GMS: Well my parents, of course, my mother and daddy separated when I was a very young age and I lived with my mother mainly but, my parents...I was raised that you didn't mistreat anybody and you didn't go causing trouble and if somebody treated you well you treated them well. That is just the way I was brought up and you were friends to everybody. My grandfather always told me you never know when you may need a friend, always have a friend. And I believe that today. But, being a young age like that it never really...it never did really dawn on me of having problems or anything like that. It sure didn't.

PC: Okay, had you had any experience of being around the black community before integration?

GMS: Yes, my mother and dad we had a babysitter or a housekeeper, Minnie Bell Spencer. In fact, we had two. We had Hattie Smith and then Minnie Bell Spencer. I was mainly around Minnie Bell and she practically took care of me all when I was growing up. I remember a lot. She before I could eat dinner she would make me say the blessing. I didn't get nothing to eat until I said the blessing. She would tell my dad all the time, "Little Mike didn't say the blessing today." But, she was very close to me and I was close to her. Color of skin had nothing to do with it. I didn't know any different because Minnie Bell took care of me.

PC: Now, did she live in your home or just come during the day?

GMS: She stayed in our home but she never spent the night.

PC: Okay.

GMS: They lived over there by the horse ranch and then again that was a section of town. Her sister, I don't even recall her being married. Her sister was Virginia Spencer and she had two kids, Minnie Bell was her daughter and then Oather Spencer who later on became a very good quarterback at Diboll High School. But we pretty...in fact, I called Oather Bubba and that is what we called Oather, Bubba and I considered Bubba would go fishing with my dad. Dad used to take a lot of people fishing on the Neches River. Chester Willis and of course Minnie Bell and there was a few others. Of course

dad fooled with horses and Namon Calhoun raised horses and him and dad would talk horse business and all that kind of stuff. But, Minnie Bell she was my hero.

PC: Like your second mom, huh?

GMS: Well, really she was.

PC: So, that was Oather's mother?

GMS: Minnie Bell was Oather's aunt.

PC: Oather's aunt, okay.

GMS: Virginia Spencer was Oather's aunt [Transcriber's Note: he means mother]. In fact a way there is sort of a story there. Oather was...we were in high school and he was a great quarterback in Diboll I think. I had a chance to make the varsity as a freshman and he came to me and said, "Give it all you've got, hit, hit, hit and get up, get up, get up." And, later on I was around Oather with a few more guys and I called him Bubba and some of them looked at me like I had insulted him. He said, "No, I've known him all my life." Well, not all my life but when he was little. I considered Bubba Bubba and it was hard for me to call him...in fact we started calling him...his nick name was Scale. That is when we started calling him Scale.

PC: That is a neat story.

GMS: No, it was no problem with me.

PC: So you grew around the black community.

GMS: I grew up around it.

PC: And was comfortable with it. Your parents had black friends apparently.

GMS: Well they worked for my mother and father as housekeepers and babysitters and stuff like that.

PC: And, he was friends with Mr. Calhoun.

GMS: Yes, Namoun Calhoun, sure was.

PC: That is great. So, was there anything particular that you might remember that your dad shared with you when the school board voted for full integration? Did he have any mixed feelings about? Was he for it, against it, can you remember?

GMS: My dad probably...you got to remember back then in the sixties coming up the way we did, he probably had the belief that we stay separated but he didn't believe in mistreating nobody.

PC: Okay.

GMS: My dad he never mistreated nobody but now, he was also the type of person that wasn't going to take nothing off nobody but, we didn't go looking for trouble. If you were right dad would stand behind you and if you were wrong he would pretty much let you pay the consequences. But, being dad with his generation coming up and everything he never did talk about it much, he really didn't.

PC: Is there anything you particularly remember about the first year of integration your sixth grade year when that full integration took place? Like a certain teacher, a certain student maybe if you had class with a black student. Do you remember having class with a black student that first year and was it an issue or did everybody feel comfortable?

GMS: It really wasn't an issue simply because Mrs. Bea Burkhalter lived right down the street from us and my first year teacher was Miss Carrie Hemphill and I knew that was Mrs. Burkhalter's sister. They had been in the neighborhood and I knew, you know, if I got in any trouble where I could go. I could go to Mrs. Hemphill and again I was asked the question one time if there ever was any trouble what would you do and I made the statement "I would go to Minnie Bell." She lived right across the road and also Minnie Bell, she had a nephew I believe, Leroy Spencer, he was the basketball coach and everything. So, Coach Spencer and I became very good friends because he knew I knew Minnie Bell and that. So, I knew if I behaved there would never be any problems.

PC: Mr. Spencer taught seventh grade in the 68-69 school year, which was the first year for the Temple Junior High School campus. So, that was her relative?

GMS: That was her relative and he lived right across the street too. He sure did.

PC: Now, there was one black teacher on the white campus during the Freedom of Choice and that was Mrs. Odyessa Wallace.

GMS: I had her for a teacher. In fact, the way Mrs. Wallace she is the one that probably labeled me Gary Mike.

PC: Oh, okay.

GMS: I went by Mike until I got in her room and she told me, she said "Gary Mike you need to go by your first name." And, it really wasn't a big deal but it was sort of an East Texas name, Gary Mike so...

PC: It stuck huh?

GMS: Smith was so common so, I went by Gary Mike.

PC: Now, what grade were in when she taught you?

GMS: Fifth grade.

PC: Fifth grade, okay. Now do you remember her having any issues? I know you were a young child but, did she have any issues being the only black teacher on an all white campus?

GMS: No in fact of way, she was very protective of her class. I know we all sort of competed soft ball at PE or recess back then is what we called it. She would pretty much let us boys...because I was a baseball fan and always have been, and I took it serious. She was always amazed because she let me be the coach and I would choose, put kids that really couldn't play very well in positions where the ball wouldn't be hit and she always told me, "You got a talent for that." And when we did like a scrapbook or stuff I always did it on baseball or if we had to do a deal it was baseball. But, she was a good teacher, she really was. She didn't show no favoritism.

PC: Okay, that was my next question if she showed favoritism.

GMS: She was fair, very fair. She would always tell us, just boys, David Porter and myself we would all be squirrel hunters and everything and she always told us if we ever killed anything we didn't want to bring it to her. So, we got to shooting rabbits and we would take her rabbits and stuff like that. And, it seemed to just tickle her that we would go over on the weekend and just give it to her and stuff. But, again I was brought up you shot something you shot it for a reason and we always gave it away.

PC: Now when you went over did she live in the black community at that time?

GMS: Yes, she lived right across the street right beside Coach Spencer and Mr. Massey.

PC: Oh, okay.

GMS: I don't know the name of that street but she lived right there in the corner right down from the Shiloh Church.

PC: Oh okay, when you went over to that section of town which we called the quarters were you comfortable going over there?

GMS: My mother would carry us in the car. My mother would carry us in the car over there and she would make sure we were okay. I never would go over there at night.

PC: Okay. Now do you know of any issues later on even when you were in junior high and moved onto high school do you know of any issues that she had?

GMS: Mrs. Wallace?

PC: Yes, Mrs. Wallace any issues she had being the only black teacher on the campus.

GMS: No, as far as I knew never any at all.

PC: Okay. After integration and I'm not sure I didn't really have a chance to see how many black students were in your class but...do you remember?

GMS: It was four I believe, Frank James, Lester Ray Dixon, and I want to say there was a girl named Kathy, I believe. I can't remember her name. But, I know Frank James and Lest Ray because we all ended up playing basketball pretty well together. Frank and I...I was the type of person if someone was a better ball player I got out there with them because I always believed you got to be the best if you took on the best.

PC: Learn from it, huh.

GMS: One thing I think our sixth grade team we beat the seventh grade in PE a lot. Coach Spencer knew we were going to come up and he would have us play at lunch. It got to be pretty serious.

PC: Pretty competitive.

GMS: We could stay with the seventh grade. Of course Jay Wyatt was on the team, myself, Finis Adair, Carol Smith, Frank James, Lester Ray. Kenneth Taylor he was on our team. We called him underdog, that was Kenneth.

PC: Do you know of any issues or concerns that your black classmates had during that first year? Did they ever share anything with you or did you sense any concern they had?

GMS: No, I never sensed that but you could always tell they sort of let us make the first move on stuff like at PE and stuff. It was always naturally that they sort of hung around their group of friends.

PC: Of course.

GMS: It really wasn't anything that was a black-white issue we just didn't know no better. We stayed with our friends.

PC: We tend to do that today even just where we are comfortable.

GMS: Yes, we stayed with our friends and they stayed with theirs but, nothing like that.

PC: Did you make new friends that you didn't have, after integration? Did you make friends with black students that you had not gone to school with?

GMS: Yes, I consider myself friendly of course, again through baseball and stuff like that I consider Danny Ray Jones, his dad Marcellus Jones owned the cleaning business for years. My mother used to press clothes too and when he would get in a bind he called my mother and said “Melba” that is what he called her, “Is there any way you can help me out?” And she would go over there and press clothes of course we was with her, but I would consider Danny Ray Jones a good friend. I would consider too Lester Ray Dixon but he had some problems in life but, yes I had friends. No doubt about it.

PC: What about the classroom experience and again not just during your sixth grade year but on through the years through graduation, what about the classroom experience of white and black students? Did you experience anything racial tensions of any sort in the classroom?

GMS: Yes, my senior year there was an incident between Nehemiah Simmons and a Crager boy I don’t know if it was Dory or Cory, they were twins. And they closed the school, campuses, it got pretty ugly. At the time I was dating Teresa Weatherford and when it broke loose it was in Fred Douglass’s class and Wayne Clark told me said “Gary Mike there is going to be a big fight.” I didn’t believe him and when it broke out it got pretty ugly. It was an incident where it was so much...I don’t know if it was a racial deal as much as it was tough boy against tough boy and then it got racial. They closed campuses and the superintendent then was...I don’t think it was Mr. Greer it was Mr. Foster then.

PC: Mr. Foster, yes.

GMS: He called all us in and sort of wanted to know what the issues were and the issues weren’t and everything. Mainly it got ugly. You probably heard about it.

PC: I actually remember it. I could not remember specifics but I do remember my high school years which my class would have been ’76 and I was thinking it was my junior year. Well it would have to have been my junior year. So, this might have been early ’75 or your senior year.

GMS: Yes, we graduated in ’75 so it was either ’74.

PC: You graduated in ’75 okay. So, it was ’74 or ’75.

GMS: Yes.

PC: Okay, that is when I remembered it as being my junior year, your senior year but, I could not remember the exact details of it. But, you really to say that it was racial but it turned to that?

GMS: I don’t think it started out as racial so much that it got that way. It was basically a boy to boy thing or young man to young man at the time, but then it spread from that to whatever.

PC: I remember the school being...they got us all out of campus.

GMS: And I remember one of our senior classmates' father came to school with a gun and they got him off the campus and it...

PC: Okay, okay. Well I'm glad that you shared that because I've often thought back on that particular incident but couldn't remember all the details of it. It was just all of a sudden happening but I couldn't remember why it happened.

GMS: Wayne Clark was probably the first one to tell me it was fixing to happen and we were sitting right beside each other and like I said, I didn't believe him and boy it came right across Teresa's desk and it went out in the halls. Back then they had a lot of what they called rakes they called them. Those rakes went flying pretty high and of course there were about 10 or 12 of us, I called them knot head boys. We had a group of guys that you know, we were not a gang we were more like brothers because we all hauled hay together.

PC: Took care of each other.

GMS: Yes, we took care and spend the night with each other and everything.

PC: But they from what I remember the administration was on top of it pretty quick and I think it all got handled pretty well.

GMS: Yes it did.

PC: And, of course that was some years down the road from the actual integration years so, okay. Now before integration and I asked you this a while ago, your experience as far as being around the black community and you spoke of going over to the black community on a few occasions. But, do you remember the black community or black members coming over to the white community to the store and how were they treated? Do you remember any particular incidents as far as them being in the community?

GMS: Yes, when they would come over to the Dairy Kream they had to go to the back window or the side window.

PC: But that was common at the time.

GMS: That was the common thing and also Diboll had a movie house, Mr. Bowman and Mr. Smith had it and they had to sit in the balcony which was upstairs, the old show. There was an incident or two that started there. I can't remember the movie but there was some racial tension there and that got out of hand. But, then again you got to remember at the time Jay Boren was the law. There was no such thing as a Diboll policeman. It was either Jay Boren or Fred Weeks or someone like that.

PC: The constables.

GMS: Yes, the constables and back then too we called them the quarters. They pretty much stayed over in the quarters and our guys stayed over here. But really and truly though I think Diboll was sort of unique 'cause a lot of the guys worked with different people at the plants, the railroads and stuff like that. And, back then you pretty much knew the line you could cross and not cross. I don't think it was so much hatred as it was people just didn't know no better. That was the way they was always sort of as a southerner taught.

PC: It seemed that the mill was already integrated, the men worked together.

GMS: Right.

PC: So, I think that helped Diboll to have a unique experience because of the sawmill situation.

GMS: Right, and I think too Mr. Temple was the main reason for that.

PC: Oh really. I was going to ask...that was one of my questions. Do you know of any particular event that took place or hearing your parents share about Mr. Temple expressing his feelings on the integration issue?

GMS: The only thing I can remember my mother talking about was that the Mr. Temple and I want to say Horace Stubblefield and it might have been Clyde Thompson and the housing project. I say the word project that part of town was pretty run down houses and they tore them down and rebuilt some of the houses. Some people called them company houses and I think that is where Margie Harrell come in with the housing project that those houses was better living standards than what some of those people had. I think that was one of the things I think Diboll was way ahead of its time getting that done.

PC: Through the city being incorporated in the early sixties that helped.

GMS: I think the majority of the people worked at the mill and stuff, you know they, you know, take care of your working people. Remember the logging camps were sort of family oriented.

PC: Right.

GMS: You automatically got a job if you finished school or you knew someone that worked at the company that spoke a good word and you had a name, a good name, you could go to work.

PC: Okay, all right. Now, is there anything that you learned from the integration experience that was long lasting?

GMS: Yes, (laughter) we were in Mrs. Wallace, going back to her class, I remember I was in a school play and I had to dress up as King Ferdinand. And, we did not know what to get, you know, I didn't know. Mrs. Wallace brought me her night gown which was sparkly and shiny and I didn't know whether to put it on or not and when I did put it on I felt totally...I had two things as a kid in the fifth grade I was worried about being harassed about wearing a woman's night clothes and then again I wasn't comfortable wearing, you know, clothing like that. I never really got harassed about it but, she went out of her way to see that I had something to fit the program that she just did on her own.

PC: Yes.

GMS: And never thought a word about it. I always remember that it was bright orange and yellow and (laughter) and I always remember that so.

PC: That is a lasting memory isn't it?

GMS: Yes, and never thought a word about it.

PC: Now it sounds like from your conversation that you liked school so your affections as far as elementary maybe, it wasn't like you were against going to school or did you have?

GMS: No, I loved school but I loved the sports. The only issue I had with school I refused to learn Spanish in the fifth grade. I told the Spanish teacher I would play band or sit in the hall I just didn't feel like I needed to learn Spanish. Boy, did she prove me wrong. If I could know even a word or count to ten but back then there were two things boys didn't do back then. You didn't play in the band and you didn't learn Spanish, you know. We were either going to be the next Willie Mays, which was my favorite baseball player, black guy, best ever was. He was better than Mickey Mantle but that is different subject. Willie Mays was my hero. Mel Renfro with the Dallas Cowboys was my favorite football player. I went to school knowing I better behave or Mrs. Burkhalter would tell my mother on the front porch.

PC: And then it would be bad when you got home.

GMS: Right, and I knew later on in high school if I got in trouble on my own I was going to pay the price but if I was right and stood up for what I believed in I wasn't going to be in trouble.

PC: Well that is great. Is there anything particular you remember as a good experience?

GMS: Yes, very much! I got hurt in football in the seventh grade or eighth grade I can't remember which one. Me and Jay Wyatt, who we grew up together, both got our kidneys hurt playing football. That is when Jay found out he only had one kidney. Well my kidney was just bruised but Coach James Porter, a black guy, came to my hospital room every night. Every night he stayed and talked to me and we talked and I sensed, of course

then my mother and father were separated, I sensed you know I was up there by myself, and Coach Porter really took me under his arm and later on in football he followed me from the eighth grade all the way up to a senior. Of course, me as a know-it-all, the biggest mistake I ever made, I quit football when I was a junior. I made the varsity as a freshman, quit my sophomore and junior year then came back my senior year and Coach Porter was with me all along. Later on when my son was in high school Coach Porter was still helping out with the school, he helped my son through a pretty difficult time too. To this day Coach Porter when I see him – it's more than a teacher or a coach. You could talk with Coach Porter with any problem you had.

PC: Well that is great.

GMS: It was always...

PC: It became a lasting friendship I'm sure.

GMS: It did and to this day Coach James Porter if he walked in that door and needed twenty dollars I would give it to him. No hesitation but, he wouldn't ask that.

PC: That is wonderful, that is great. Did you have a favorite teacher in school?

GMS: From elementary days?

PC: It doesn't matter just any at any time.

GMS: Yes, probably my favorite teacher believe it or not was Helen Cheshire. Mrs. Cheshire, she realized that I was a baseball nut and all I did, she sat me by the window and I'd watch the older kids play baseball; she could not get my attention. She finally told me, she said, "You are not going to PE until you can say all your multiplications frontwards and backwards because all you are worried about is going out there playing baseball."

PC: Uh-oh! (laughter)

GMS: I knew them and I got them done and everything and she always stayed on me. But really the most important thing she used to read a story *Charlotte's Web* of all stories. And, I brought that story with my kids raising and Mrs. Cheshire, I consider her a classy teacher plus a classy lady. When my kids were in school she realized I was a sports nut and Mrs. Cheshire she wasn't really into sports but, she was a good lady, very good lady.

PC: That is great!

GMS: In high school I had two. It was Hogue Forrest and of course everybody loved Beth Stubblefield. Beth Stubblefield she was more than a teacher.

PC: Unique teacher.

GMS: She was more than a teacher she was a life teacher.

PC: Let me pause this just one second.

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PC: Okay picking back up with Gary Mike Smith. You were going to share with me about Mrs. Stubblefield.

GMS: Oh, Mrs. Stubblefield she was the type of teacher, she knew who played sports and who didn't. If you had a flat top hair cut you would automatically pretty well get a 70 maybe a 72 on your project. (laughter) So, I had a flat top hair cut till I was a freshman in high school. But, Mrs. Stubblefield she would let you do side projects too rather like my daddy worked at the handle factory and she wanted some black handles for her Christmas ornaments. She couldn't figure out where to get them and I told her I said "Mrs. Stubblefield I can get them all day long if you let me go to the handle factory." She said, "You better go up there and you better not let nobody know you were up there." I didn't check out of class or anything but I went and got her black handles for her and my dad kept saying, "Why ain't you in school?" And, I said, "I am in school on I'm a special project."

PC: Special project, that is neat.

GMS: It was for Mrs. Beth Stubblefield. But too she was the type of teacher we made a...and I wish we would have kept it, John Richards and I made a complete scale of the Temple White Handle Factory. It started out and it was probably 10 x 12 foot long and she was so impressed that we did that she kept that thing down there for the longest.

PC: Oh man, that would be a treasure today for us.

GMS: I think John and I could still do it today.

PC: Wow that would be neat.

GMS: But, Mrs. Stubblefield she was more than a teacher whether she was a, she wasn't a very big lady, but she was a mother hen to all us school kids.

PC: She was, I remember my eighth grade year was my first year here and I remember her sending the boys over to Tanner's Grocery to get her a Coca-Cola and some peanuts just about every afternoon.

GMS: That is right. (laughter)

PC: We are going to move on and talk about Diboll Day. One of the things we are trying to determine is the integrated Diboll Day activities. We know from the records they had Diboll Day activities in the fifties just like we did. They had separate activities but we think they were included in the parades and they had separate black queens for the years before integration. Do you remember anything particular about the early Diboll Day before integration about the separate queen's races?

GMS: No, I do not. The only thing I remember, of course, my ex-wife she won Diboll Day Queen, Teresa Weatherford, and when she gave hers up I believe it was to Debra Washington.

PC: That was in the seventies after integration, right.

GMS: Mr. Shepherd, which to me Diboll Day ought to be named Mr. Shepherd. He played a part in it that he was for blood, you know. He believed in raising money for the activities of youth baseball and for the kids and, that is what a lot of people seem to think Diboll Day was originally started for the activities of the youth and stuff. That is another reason I was always involved in youth baseball too, but that was the only time of that.

PC: So, nothing as a child that you remember you know, about Diboll Day and how the blacks participated?

GMS: No, I think Mr. Shepherd was determined that Debra in the modern Diboll Days she was probably the first black girl.

PC: After integration yes.

GMS: That was solo and won it all alone.

PC: She was the first Diboll Day queen after integration.

GMS: She was a very nice young lady too Debra was.

PC: Yes, she was. So am I understanding you right, and I don't want to put words in your mouth, do you think he was really trying to back her for her to win to make that? I mean...

GMS: Knowing Mr. Shepherd that was probably his goal. Now I can't say that for sure.

PC: But, you felt that way.

GMS: I felt like...well Mr. Shepherd he really didn't care who his queen candidate was he was determined that the Fiberboard Plant was going to win!

PC: Oh, okay and she was his queen candidate. I see what you are saying.

GMS: I think that added some incentive.

PC: I see what you're saying.

GMS: It gave him some incentive because you're always proud to make an advancement and I think that was the first. I really do.

PC: Of course the competition was always fun back then between the groups and raised a lot of money that way. Now, one note that I did make, I noticed in looking at the annuals that your sixth grade year being the first year of full integration they made the former all black school, which was H. G. Temple School, they made it the Temple Junior High campus. So, you went one through fifth grade at the elementary.

GMS: At the old elementary.

PC: And your sixth grade year was the first year they moved sixth grade to junior high and the first time it would have been on the Temple campus. So, did you have any mixed feelings about going to that campus?

GMS: The only mixed feelings I ever had was in the seventh grade. Again, I was a sports nut and when it came time to get our uniforms for basketball they gave us Temple green and white basketball uniforms and I really got upset because I was a lumberjack.

PC: Right.

GMS: I think, you know, I couldn't get through my head to wear that green and white and too it was a Boston Celtic color and I was a Lakers fan. But, that was the only thing.

PC: So, did y'all actually use those green and white uniforms?

GMS: Yes we did! Yes we did!

PC: Really

GMS: I think I was number 21.

PC: Wow, well see in the annual they're black and white so I wasn't able to determine that. So, do you have a photograph of that?

GMS: I don't think I do. I don't think I do.

PC: Wow that is interesting.

GMS: Now Jay may, Jay may.

PC: Jay Wyatt?

GMS: Yes, he may have that.

PC: Okay. We knew with the H. G. Temple School that is something we've really worked hard at getting specific dates on their colors because they started out as purple and white. Then they changed at some point to green and white or they were green and white and changed to purple and white. So, they use both colors for their alumni association for that very reason.

GMS: I want to think...

PC: Some of the early diplomas in the forties that we have gotten donated recently they are green. So, anyway there is some confusion there but that is interesting. So, they were green and white when they integrated.

GMS: We used the old uniforms, we sure did.

PC: Okay, and ya'll used the green and white. I guess that was a little confusing since we were Diboll and you were used to the red.

GMS: Well that is true and that was all you wanted to be was a future Lumberjack of course in seventh and eighth grade.

PC: You wanted to feel like you were representing the Lumberjacks, and did you feel like you were representing the Tigers?

GMS: I wanted to prove to John McGilvra that I was coming up and going to play for him you know, but later on that didn't happen. (laughter)

PC: That is great. Now, how long did y'all use those uniforms just that one year?

GMS: I want to say we used them seventh and eighth grade.

PC: Really!

GMS: See we started off in the seventh grade and Coach Spencer was our coach and then the eighth grade it was Coach Porter. Then there was a Coach Hand. I want to say he was...he might have been JV and eighth grade. Coach Porter he rotated, of course later on Coach Porter found out that I was pretty active. Wherever he went is where I went.

PC: So you played basketball in junior high, Little Jack football and they were integrated teams. Were there any issues as far as racial issues like on the court or in the locker room because this would have been the early years that we are speaking of with your junior high years, the early years of integration?

GMS: The only issue we had and I'm not going to call the guys name.

PC: Okay, that is good, that is fine.

GMS: Coach Spencer, this guy was acting up and he was a white guy. He had a knife and he told him to give that knife to him and he threw the knife at the gym floor and it got real quite. Coach Spencer, there was no doubt in my mind could have took this guy and really hurt him, but he handled it so class that I thought, "Boy this is fixing to blow up here," but Coach Spencer handled it like, "Why do want to do that, you know? You know I'm going to have to take you to the principal's office." That got a little hairy. That happened in the gym.

PC: Your seventh grade or eighth grade?

GMS: Seventh grade, I believe seventh grade.

PC: Seventh grade, okay. So, Coach Spencer being a black coach and teacher with this issue with a white student at that time, because it was early years of integration, you feel like he handled it very well then?

GMS: I thought he handled it very well because the student who done it was considered a pretty tough customer.

PC: Were there issues later as far as his parents later, did they make any issues of it?

GMS: No it was just an instance where this particular kid he just wasn't going to do what Coach Spencer told him to do. He did though!

PC: He did though, okay. Well, I think you've already answered this question. Is there anyone that made a lasting impression?

GMS: Oh Coach Porter there is no doubt about it and Coach Spencer both. Mainly as respect to Coach Porter realized too that I made the seventh grade football team. He brought me up to center on the eighth grade team and I had sort of had a nick on my chin and he took tape and just wrapped my head. Well, when my mother got to the game, it was in Corrigan, she called me over to the sideline and she said, "What is wrong with your head?" I said, "I got a little cut but Coach Porter took care of it." He looked over there and said, "Mrs. Smith he's playing football and he's going to play on the JV." I ended up playing three games that night, center and right then my mother and him...she sort of let him know where...and we had a basketball tournament later on in San Augustine and...

PC: She had to take care of her baby. (laughing)

GMS: Right but Coach Porter, who was our basketball coach, this had to be the eighth grade, we played in a San Augustine basketball tournament and Finis Adair who was a

black kid was a good basketball player. He did not make the All-Tournament team and my mother went to Coach Porter and said, "The only reason this kid did not make the All-Tournament team you know and I know is because of who he is and if you don't go out there and tell that bunch they are wrong, Gary Mike is not riding home with the team." I did not ride the bus home with the team and from then on Coach Porter always knew that my mother was going to do what was right but then again he let her know it was true and true not. Coach Porter he made an impression on me. In fact, I think the best football team Diboll ever had was 1971 the year Tommy Joshua, Alton Jackson and Oather Spencer. Well I was a freshman on that team and Coach Porter had come up through the JV and he sort of caught me goofing around on plays because I was a freshman on the second team and he said I wasn't putting out. So, he made me and Bill Gartman go an extra few rounds and of course, Bill Gartman and I were good friends and he said "Smith, you know" and I said "Coach Porter has caught on." He knew we were loafing.

PC: He didn't cut you any slack.

GMS: That is exactly right, but he was a good guy. When I did get hurt John Richards had told him that I...or some of the guys I don't know if it was John, but I was passing blood. And, when I was passing blood I came out of the locker room. I wasn't going to tell nobody and he came back there where I was and he come unglued on me. The next thing I knew he personally carried me to Dr. Eddins office and then Dr. Eddins told him to get me to the hospital. Really I was scared to tell him I was hurt, but then we found out that Jay had gotten one kidney and everything. Then the doctor wouldn't let me play basketball at the start of basketball season. I'd sneak out there and play anyway.

PC: In high school after this incident that we spoke of happening your senior year around 1975, after the situation was kind of taken care of through the administration and going back to school, do you remember anything about the tension? Did it go on for awhile or did it just go away or was there anything that happened to make the situation better that you remember?

GMS: The main situation that I remember was that the black kid who started it got expelled. His parents asked him to come back and to be put back in school and at the time we were all in building and trades and they would not accept him back in school. I guess this kid didn't get to graduate or ever finish his GED and he ended up always thinking he made a terrible mistake because back then you know you needed a diploma and stuff. But too, that '75 we were coming out of course the Vietnam War and independent and to me discipline was sort of pushed aside. I'm a firm believer in discipline. I just, you can tell some of my hero's through school Coach Porter, Coach Wyatt, Hogue Forrest, John McGilvra. I bought insurance from John McGilvra simply because I was too scared to tell him no and I was married. (laughter) Fred Douglas and Jim Dunlap they didn't have to call our parents, you know, they took care of us.

PC: You respected them.

GMS: Yes.

PC: So, the incident would you say the incident really changed this person's life?

GMS: Yes, later on it turned out to be some bad moves and I always wondered if he stayed in school, you know, he might have not gotten labeled. But, again I wouldn't know where this guy is.

PC: Later on I'm sure he regretted it. Do you remember anything about your mom or dad sharing about the school board members at the time?

GMS: No, the only thing my mother ever got mad at the school board it was not racial it was more religiously. I am a firm believer in Jesus Christ and my grandfather was a preacher. But, the school would not allow girls to wear pants and my sister we walked to school and she always wore a dress and my mother used to raise cane down there because the girls could not wear pant suits. I want to say my sister was either in the fifth or sixth grade when they had the issue and I don't know if it was called dress code or pant suits or what but it was a big issue. Later on the girls started wearing pants.

PC: That was probably in the early seventies somewhere, '70-'71 because I remember...

GMS: It was earlier than that because I was in elementary school.

PC: It might have been late sixties. I remember myself when we got to wear pantsuits. It had to be a pantsuit, no blue jeans.

GMS: It had to be a pant suit, no blue jeans, you are exactly right. That was the only issue with the school board.

PC: Not as far as the integration issues?

GMS: No, no.

PC: Well, you know, what we are hearing overall it was pretty smooth as far as the time of the integration process from '65 Freedom of Choice, '65-66; they integrated the high school in '67. Athletes went over before that and then '68 full integration. What we are hearing overall is a pretty smooth process. Diboll was unique. It's the later seventies, '74 - '75 year that we are hearing more racial tensions.

GMS: I think there too, again you've probably heard the days of Jay Boren and that. He was mainly the main law, but then again I'm totally convinced that Mr. Temple wouldn't allow some of the stuff to go on. And Diboll is still, as you can tell I'm fond of Mr. Temple and the man, talk about a man of vision. He knew how to treat people and people worked for him but then again he's done so much for the community he didn't have to do and I think it shows relationship of the people.

PC: Yes, setting that standard. Mrs. Katherine Sage she was very good at what they did for the white community they did for the black.

GMS: Exactly.

PC: I think that set the stage and the precedent way back.

GMS: And, I tell kids coming up through Diboll youth baseball, we have all these tournaments and stuff and I said you know we may not be the best team at these tournaments, but people are going to know you are from Diboll. One of the best deals I think one of our teams was in Sherman when Bo Smith was over it and they wrote an article how well behaved the little town of Diboll was, the kids. That is the way we were raised in Diboll.

PC: Now speaking of the baseball real quick do you remember when little league was integrated?

GMS: I remember the first four black kids that played. Sonny Neyland...

PC: Okay, share that with me.

GMS: Sonny Neyland had a big part in that. Emmett King, Clay Joshua, Roger Goff and there was one other kid. I can't remember their name, but I do those three kids. Emmett King became a very good athlete and played for the University of Houston. Clay Joshua could pitch and Roger Goff could pitch. As far as being on the team it wasn't an issue to the kids but back then some of the parents and stuff, you know, they didn't make a big issue of it but why couldn't they play, you know. I was raised you played sports against whoever was out there, but Sonny Neyland was one of the first ones.

PC: One of the first coaches?

GMS: I think deep down Mr. Shepherd was behind it because Mr. Shepherd made sure that baseball program through Sonny and Milford Ruby and those people that we were playing baseball.

PC: Did the integration of little league coincide with integration of public school in '68?

GMS: I don't think there was ever an issue there at all, I really don't. The only issue that I remember...

PC: I mean was Little League integrated before school or did it all happen about the same time when the blacks came over and started playing?

GMS: I want to say Little League integrated around '68 or '69 and it was pretty much around the same time.

PC: Which would have been around the same time, okay.

GMS: But then again...

PC: And they only had four? Did ya'll have many teams then?

GMS: There was four teams and then it went to six. There was the Cubs, the Indians, the Dodgers, and the Yankees.

PC: Okay.

GMS: I remember them well because dad coached the Indians, Jack Sweeny I think coached the Cubs, Snuffy Tidwell the Dodgers and I may miss a year or two but Monk Warner coached some teams and Dick Hendrick, he coached some teams and Mr. Ramsey he coached.

PC: Did the parents of the black players come over and watch the games?

GMS: I don't think so. I don't remember ever seeing them.

PC: Okay.

GMS: They may have. I remember Emmett, he played first base and Clay Joshua played third base and he pitched some and Roger he pitched and played short stop. Emmett was a jolly type player; he was fun to be around.

PC: He just had a love for it too.

GMS: Yes, he you know it was just that it was a game. We didn't worry about that. The same thing with the Hispanic kids, Steve Martinez, Richard Martinez and it wasn't an issue. We got out there and had fun. Leave all that political stuff outside.

PC: And just as a kid you didn't pay attention to a lot of that. It wasn't an issue to you so.

GMS: It was never an issue with me.

PC: That is another part of integration we are trying to cover is the little league. We've interviewed Milford Ruby about the Little League but as a kid you were a small child playing and just wondered if you remembered any incidents or you just remember those boys.

GMS: Sonny Neyland was one of the first ones that probably went and got Emmett. We always wondered Emmett was probably the best of them and we wondered why Emmett got on Sonny's team. I never knowed that. (laughter)

PC: We still need to interview Sonny.

GMS: Yes, you do and you tell him Gary Mike said that.

PC: Is there anything else you would like to share with me that I haven't asked you about whether it's integration, school, baseball, Diboll in general, anything particular that you want to share?

GMS: No, as far as I know again, you sort of had different deals. You never mistreated people. You wanted to be respected but there you go you had some people that was just off the record you didn't do that. And, you didn't go over there, you didn't eat in the same restaurant and stuff like that. I barely remember a little of that but you know, just couldn't do that.

PC: Okay, now just for the record tell me when you started working for TSE Railroad?

GMS: Very easy! I graduated May 27th and Bill Weatherford and Howard Mullins told me to be at the Fiberboard Plant the next day and I worked there a year then I transferred. Don Harrison called my dad and said you tell Gary Mike to get over here at this railroad and I've been there ever since.

PC: Wow, right after graduation.

GMS: My goal really was to go to SFA or try to. I wanted really and truly I always wanted to be a coach.

PC: I'm not surprised to hear that.

GMS: That goes back to Coach Porter and I really thought I had some talent to coach, but then again every guy thinks he knows more than the next guy. But, I got my railroad blood and been there ever since.

PC: Been there ever since and still there. Any plans for retirement soon?

GMS: I hope to retire there. That is my goal and I hope to pass it onto the next generation.

PC: Well good.

GMS: But again, I've had some very fortunate bosses, George Honea, Charlie Foster, Don Harrison, Joe Sample and Mr. Temple. I've been very fortunate, Jack Sweeny too. The railroad is always sort of been you run the railroad and sort of keep quite over there until we need you. That is the way I try to run it and I try to run the railroad still like a family. My employees they say sometimes I get too close to them, but that is just the way I was raised. Like this morning one of the employees their truck didn't crank and I went

over there and helped crank his truck and everything. Did I dock him? No I didn't dock him. Would I get in trouble? Probably would get in trouble.

PC: I'm not sure of the years but of course you talking about the railroad and us talking about integration Professor Jackson comes to my mind. Had he retired when you started?

GMS: Yes, R. C. Green is probably the first black person at the railroad after Professor Jackson and he used to pick up all the mail, walking. He would start walking at 4 o'clock in the morning and he'd do car number checks and what trains come in. And then Cleveland Payne, he was a track foreman and Cleveland and I were very close. In fact Cleveland took early retirement and I asked him I said "Cleveland how are you going to do that?" He said "I'm a preacher and the Lord will take care of me." Cleveland and I were very close and I...we are having the first black engineer to ever be at TSE, Demetrius Vinson. We are training him now to run the locomotive and as far as we know he would be the first certified locomotive at TSE and we are over a hundred plus years old. So, I'm very proud of that.

PC: Oh well that is good.

GMS: People say well does that interfere with him, no it does not. I had to learn and he has to learn, so that has never been an issue with me. I was taught you come to work and you make a day's pay and if you don't want to work go to the house and that is what my daddy used to tell me. He said, "You show up to work" and he worked for the Handle Factory for 38 years. He had offers to go to Dow Chemical and places like that for more money, he said, "No I'm staying in Diboll. I've been here and if you manage your money right you'll be okay." So, I don't know if I manage my money right but I've been in Diboll all my life. (laughter)

PC: There you go. Well Gary Mike that is all the questions I have unless there is anything else you want to share with us. I appreciate your time today and sitting down with me for this interview.

GMS: Well, it brings back a lot of memories. And, again they may need an adjective or an adverb or a comma in some of that, but most of it is pretty much 100% accurate.

PC: Well we thank you very much Gary Mike.

GMS: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW