

Victor Hundley--Interview Summary

Interviewee: Victor Hundley

Interviewers: Timothy Jensen and Daniel Suh

Interview date: October 21, 2016

Location: Ferguson Center for the Arts, Christopher Newport University, Newport News, Virginia

Length: 1 audio file, WAV format, 87:13

THE INTERVIEWEE: Victor Hundley is a Newport News resident born in 1949. Hundley was one of the first African-American students to attend Ferguson High School in Newport News and the first African-American student to play on its football team. He played first on junior varsity and later on the varsity football team. A star athlete, he scored seventeen recorded touchdowns in one season (1966) and made the all-district and the all-state football teams as well. After graduating from Ferguson High School in 1967, he attended Virginia State University before joining the Air Force and moving to Kansas, where he and his wife had two sons. Later, he moved with his family back to Newport News and took over his father's masonry contractor job.

THE INTERVIEWER: Timothy Jensen is a senior and Daniel Suh is a junior at Christopher Newport University. They are part of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project which interviews local residents regarding their experiences with the civil rights movement.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW: The interview was conducted in a second-floor classroom of the Ferguson Center for the Arts, where Ferguson High School previously stood. Hundley was enthusiastic to share his life experiences during the interview, which included his attendance at Ferguson High School, football career, adulthood, as well as his race relations throughout those times. He spoke fondly of his time at Ferguson High School and believed that the civil rights movement was possible not only because of the efforts of African-Americans, but also because of good white people such as his high school principal.

There is coughing throughout the interview as both Hundley and Jensen were sick, and Hundley's cellphone rang a few times. The interview focused on Hundley's high school and young adult life as well as his interactions with white students and people.

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START OF INTERVIEW

Timothy Jensen: Okay, this is Timothy Jensen, and my partner is Daniel Suh. Today is October 21, 2016. We are interviewing Mr. Victor Hundley. This interview is taking place at the Ferguson Center at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia. This interview is being carried out as part of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project at Christopher Newport University. Good afternoon, Mr. Hundley.

Victor Hundley: Good afternoon.

TJ: Thank you. We are taking what is called a “life history,” and I’d like to begin our interview with a few questions about your childhood. So I guess, just to begin, where and when were you born?

VH: I was born in Newport News, June 5, 1949, in the East End section of the city. And during that timeframe, blacks only could be born in a particular hospital, which was Whittaker Memorial. So that’s where I was born.

TJ: Have you--. During your childhood, did you stay in this area or did your family ever move?

VH: My family moved from the East End to the Deep Creek area when I was in elementary school, prior to integration, or desegregation. And that was quite a while before I actually attended Ferguson.

TJ: Growing up, did you have any siblings?

VH: Growing up, I had two sisters and I have a stepsister that was born my freshman year of college. But I do have two sisters. The one behind me also came to Ferguson, and the one behind her went to Menchville.

TJ: Okay, gotcha. What did your parents do for a living?

VH: My father was a masonry contractor. We were middle-class. My stepmother was a schoolteacher, so we did better and had more than most. So it was not a poverty-stricken household by no means.

TJ: Is your extended family--I guess your parents also--are they also from this area? Or did they move here?

VH: My father is from Newport News. My stepmother is from Columbia, South Carolina.

TJ: Okay, how did she end up here?

VH: Her sister taught school in Hampton. She was a schoolteacher also, and told her about the area. And she lived in this area, and that's when she met my father.

TJ: So you mentioned that your parents both work[ed], [and were] middle-class. Along with any of the job occupations that they had were they involved in any community organizations or churches in the area?

VH: Oh, yeah, I grew up in Saint Augustine's Episcopal Church, which is in the East End portion of the city. Here again, churches, hospitals, schools, you stay within your racial group,

racial makeup. Even though I lived in this section of the city, we had to go outside of this section of the city for social events and things of that nature. Even church.

TJ: I guess that leads perfectly into the next question. What were race relations like in Newport News during this time when you grew up in this area?

VH: Well, oh, there was tension in this area because it was strictly white. In the Deep Creek area, you're looking at a lower-income white [people]. So there was no playing *per se* with the guy down the street. Now, if we played, we had to sneak off and play. We couldn't openly play. So, the black children in the neighborhood, we got together and we played amongst ourselves. It was not until high school that we actually associated outside of our race.

TJ: I guess a follow-up to that then is also, like for you specifically, you mentioned playing with other kids. If separate races, you had to do it sort of more quietly.

VH: Yeah.

TJ: Are there other examples? What was it like for you growing up, specifically in segregated communities?

VH: Well, I knew the boundaries: knew where you could go, knew where you shouldn't go. As a rule of thumb, people pretty much stayed to themselves. There weren't even people riding around jumping on people or things like that. None of that. But the racial makeup stayed separate. So, I understood it. And that's the way it was.

TJ: You say that that's the way it was: were you ever taught these rules or is just as growing up you just picked up on them right away?

VH: Well, as growing up, you were taught certain things that you do and don't do, and that was pretty much etched in stone. You didn't travel outside of those boundaries. But I think, for the most part, this city--or Hampton and Newport News--was not as tense as other areas around this

state, and that's primarily because of the shipyard. And I would attribute to the fact that blacks and whites worked together in the shipyard. So, being that the parents got along in the shipyard, it was not that hard of a transition once it was time to go to school together. It wasn't smooth, but it wasn't as bad as it could've been.

TJ: Was any racial intermingling happening outside of work? Or was it just primarily at the shipyards?

VH: No, no no no no no. There was no socializing outside of the shipyard or--. You must understand even the hospitals--there was no going on Riverside. I got sick, real sick, as a baby. And my mom was downtown Newport News who took me Riverside. They said "You [have] to leave here because you can't come in here." The beaches! Buckroe as you knew it, that was segregated. One side was Buckroe, the other side was Bay Shore. Blacks went to the Bay Shore side, whites went to the Buckroe side.

TJ: They even had different names for them?

VH: Yep, I mean they were side by side, chain link fence running right down the middle of the water. So, yeah, it was two different names, same beach! Same water going back and forth! But you couldn't mingle together.

Daniel Suh: DMZ.

VH: Yeah, so that was the way it was. That was the way it was.

TJ: You mentioned [school] earlier, what elementary school did you attend?

VH: I actually started out elementary school at Booker T. Washington, which is in the Southeast community of the city, and then once we moved to the Deep Creek area, I transferred to Carver Elementary. So, I went from Booker T. to Carver. And halfway through the second grade was when we moved.

TJ: And this had to do with you switching schools?

VH: Yeah.

TJ: About how big--obviously these schools are still here in the area. How big, though, was it when you attended? I guess Booker T. and Carver, if you can remember.

VH: Booker T. was your average-size elementary school, *per se*. Carver was also your average size elementary school. The makeup of the school itself, they were very well built. The makeup on the inside--I didn't know until after I came to Ferguson that chairs were better, the desks were better, the books were better, even the buses. We never, as a people, we never rode on new buses. We had the raggedy buses. After the white students got the new buses, they sent us the old buses. Well, the same way with books and desks. That was passed down as a hand-me-down.

TJ: I guess I'm asking you to think to a time when you were really little, but do you remember any of your experiences in your classroom, on those buses, interacting with classmates at Booker T. or Carver?

VH: Oh, sure. I got friends that go back sixty years. Sixty plus years. You know when you stop and you think about--. In fact, I stay in contact with a couple of guys, we were in kindergarten together. You know, so I'm talking about sixty-six, sixty-seven years. Well, sixty-six years. We go back to cribs, we know each other so long. So yeah, you know, once you have solid friends like that, you stay solid friends like that from elementary to high school, to different colleges and walk through life. And you come back and you see someone you once knew and you could sit around and recollect what it was like almost sixty years ago, you know, when you stop and you say, "Well, that's a buddy of mine." "How long have you known him?" "Sixty years, sixty." Not too many people can say that, but it's a good feeling when you can say it.

TJ: I guess a little bit lighter question: what were you like as a young student? Were you studious? Troublemaker? Do you ever remember- -

VH: As a young student? You mean elementary?

TJ: Yes.

VH: No, I was about average as an elementary student, nothing special during the elementary years. You had homework to do, you did your homework. If you didn't do it, you were punished. Simple as that. It was nothing talked about or "go stand in the corner." I'm talking about punished. But those years I remember just like yesterday.

TJ: Where did you attend middle school?

VH: There was no middle school. In Newport News, you went from elementary school to high school. You went from the first to the seventh grade in elementary school, and then you went from the eighth grade to twelfth in high school. Not like now, where you--what is it? Middle school after sixth grade?

DS: Six to eight.

VH&TJ: Six to eight.

TJ: Depending on the county.

VH: Yeah. Again, here you had four schools. You had Newport News High, you had Warwick, Ferguson. Carver and Huntington were the two black schools. So there were five schools altogether--high schools--altogether. More elementary. For example, versus two high schools in Hampton. So, there's the difference there. There were more people in Newport News than there were in Hampton.

TJ: You said, five black high schools, do you- -

VH: No, no, no, two black high schools. There were--. Ferguson, Newport News, and Warwick were the three white schools.

TJ: For a total of five?

VH: Those were three. And then Carver and Huntington were the other two high schools which were a total of five [high schools].

TJ: Okay. I guess this really, perfectly leads us into the next sort of line of questioning. First, I do want to talk about your experience in high school, but then also from your perspective of about desegregation. I guess the first question is: do you remember anything when you first heard about the *Brown* decision?

VH: Oh, I was too little to even understand.

TJ: [You were] Probably about four, five, six [years old].

VH: Yeah, [*Brown*] versus the Board of Education. However, I, later in the Air Force, ended up in Topeka, Kansas where *Brown v. Board of Education* took place. In Topeka! So it was funny how the circle evolved where I ended up in Topeka, Kansas. In fact, both of my sons were born there.

TJ: Do you remember your parents speaking at all about *Brown* or just culturally how it was perceived?

VH: Well, it was talked about at home. It was talked about amongst families. It was talked about in church because it was looked at as going to be an opportunity for fairness to come into play. Be it schools, be it socially, [be it] work environments, all that was to come into play. Once children started going to school together, it was looked at--that was the first step. And being able to get along together. You got to understand, we as a people didn't get along at first so, in order to socially progress in that fashion, it's best always to start with the littlest. Little kids, they don't

understand stupidity, not unless it's really bred into them. Otherwise they'll just get along just fine. You know, so as you get older is when you see the adjustment, and the changes that need to be made.

TJ: I think as you started growing up, you became more and more aware of these cultural, social, differences. So I'm curious then, what made you want to attend Ferguson High School?

VH: Well, let's back up, I didn't really want to come. [laughter] Primarily because I was gonna be alone. I was gonna leave all my friends behind, and, it's just like anything else, that you're not aware of, you're totally in the dark as to what to expect. You know you're gonna be going someplace where you're gonna be one of a kind, and you're not gonna be liked. And you wonder, "What's next? What's gonna happen?" So, no, it was not something that I was itching to do. My father said, "You will do."

TJ: So it was your parents.

VH: Yes, "This is best for you."

TJ: What did that process involve? Did you have to apply to a pupil placement board?

VH: No, back then, you actually--you went before the school board. And the school board, I'll never forget. [pause] We met in Hilton and we went before several school board members and they cross-examined you. You know, they wanted to know stupid stuff like: "Do you know your parents' names?" You laughing, but it was true. "You know your phone number?" "You know your address?" Things that would be frowned upon to ask somebody now: if they could spell their name, you know. You're looking at going into the eighth grade. It was mind boggling to a degree, but these were adults that were asking these questions so you had to satisfy them first before it was like accepted. So it was not just no "walk through the doors." No, no. Anybody that attended in the beginning had to go through that process.

TJ: About how old were you when you had to appear before the school board?

VH: Thirteen.

TH: Thirteen? What ethnicity were the school board members?

VH: Strictly white.

TJ: Strictly white.

VH: Yeah.

TJ: You mentioned your father said, “This is what’s best for you, to go to Ferguson.” How did other family members react to you? I guess your father encouraged you to go there. How did your friends, people in your community, was there any reaction one way or the other?

VH: Well, sure. It was--. In fact, there was some negativity because it was like, you know, “You’re gonna get lost in the mix. What’s gonna become of you?” That sort of thing so it was--. There was support. But I’m speaking of cousins, *per se*, in the same age group. That was different. [cough] The adult members understood that it was a big step that was being taken. I realize, years later, just how big a step it was. As a child, I knew I was crossing a barrier but, really, could look back later in years and see just what I had to go through. But yes, from a very early age, you live with certain things and as time evolves, you know, you make adjustments. But the transition was somewhat ugly at times.

TJ: Did your decision to attend Ferguson High School, did that make any friendships you had a little more difficult? You mentioned you had some friends from sixty years ago--

VH: Oh, no, no. Nobody turned their back on me. No, no no. It was--. Once there was a social event--be it a dance, or football game or whatever--and I would see my old friends. Sure, questions would be asked about what it was like because there were gonna be some transitions the following year as to other black kids going to other white schools. When I say white schools

[it's] because they were predominantly white at that time. So, yes, there were lot of questions asked, and it was something that I could share, basically, but I didn't have all the answers.

TJ: So you mentioned, obviously going into this you were, a bit reluctant to go because you said you didn't wanna be all alone. As you continued attending, so eighth grade, ninth grade, tenth grade, were there other--as time went on--other black classmates?

VH: Yes.

TJ: You had?

VH: Yes.

TJ: What was that feeling like?

VH: Oh, a good feeling. [laughs] Walked down the hall and see somebody that looked similar to you, you know. That was gratifying. But then, after my first year--. In fact, in my first year, I started playing football. So from a social standpoint, by playing football, it took down some of the barriers because, I was accepted *per se* in that first year. And that led the way to making friends easier. Especially once I entered into football stardom, then everybody wants to be your friend after that takes place. So, but--. And you gotta understand, in order for the transition to work, and when I say desegregation or integration, there had to be some really good white people in place to make this thing happen. You understand what I'm saying? Yeah it just wasn't--. It didn't just transpire. So I could recall way back to the very first day that I showed up out front. I got off the bus. Mary L. Passage--she in fact has a school named after her now--she was the principal here. She had the warmest, most genuine grin and smile I've ever seen, ever! And it was just that warm when she spoke with me. But so I'll never forget her.

TJ: This was first day?

VH: First day. Off the bus, walking up the front steps. She was waiting on me. So, I'll never forget her, and when I heard they were gonna name a school after her, I couldn't think of a more appropriate gesture for a lady of that quality and class. And everybody loved her. You know, so it was not--. She was wearing all the right shoes. She just did no wrong, *per se*.

TJ: We mentioned already growing up community-wise, school-wise, pretty much every phase of life is segregated. As you started attending that high school, you obviously had your black friends already from previous schools.

VH: Yes.

TJ: Did you start creating friendships, true lasting friendships with white classmates?

VH: Oh, oh sure. But it was still different.

TJ: Mm-hmm.

VH: We didn't socialize outside of school. So, if there was a house party, nah. I didn't go to house parties. If it was sleepovers, nah. None of that. School dances, sure, because it was on school property. But outside of school, no. Oh, you know, on a Friday night I'd [get a] hamburger, McDonalds or that type of restaurant, sure. You would meet up with friends and chew the fat, but--

TJ: White and black?

VH: Yeah, mm-hmm.

TJ: So, primarily it was location based, then a more desegregated area, you might go to?

VH: Well, here again, being that this area was prominently a white area, [I] ran into more white friends in this neck of the woods, *per se*. Through different areas, say in parts of Hampton, you know, you can run into friends again there. But you pretty much stayed in your neck of the woods, *per se*.

TJ: So within the actual halls of the school, we mentioned what a relief it was when you did see some other black students beginning to attend the school.

VH: Yeah.

TJ: What was school life like in the actual school being [one of] the first and then one of only a few black students at Ferguson?

VH: What was it like?

TJ: Yes.

VH: How do you mean?

TJ: I guess, did you notice or experience discrimination in the school? You mentioned some positive experiences, were there negative experiences?

VH: Oh, I can recall a couple of teachers that were very negative and, in fact, downright hurtful. And I, for the life of me, tried to keep it to myself. There was nobody I could go to and talk to about it. I imagine I could have said something, but it was almost like I think I wanted to leave well enough alone, you know. But as time went on, those few teachers realized that I wasn't going anywhere. I was here to stay. So, it wasn't me that was gonna have to adjust, it was gonna have to be them that had to adjust.

TJ: Did things-- Was there a noticeable improvement between your first year and then your last year at the school?

VH: Oh, yeah! [laughter] That was a major transition because here again, by playing football and then receiving all the accolades that I was receiving, everybody wanted to be your friend then. Because of who you were. So it wasn't so much the color issue, when, you know, you were scoring touchdowns. It was: "That's him!" But once that transpired, it did make things not just easier for myself, but I'm sure for the other black students as well because we still had to prove

that, you know, that we didn't grow up with little tails hanging out of our damn pants and that we wanted pretty much the same things as everybody else.

TJ: We have already touched on football, I guess we can get into that more. We understand that playing football was an important part of your high school experience and, as well, I think, integration [became] more generally cross-country. At this point, Jackie Robinson [of] Brooklyn Dodgers, other than that--.

VH: Sure.

TJ: Marion Motley, other men in the NFL had taken that first step. But even in high school though, that was a little bit longer in the process. I guess first off, to say for the record, were you the first African American to play football at Ferguson?

VH: I was the very first African American to participate in organized sports on this side of the water. So Ferguson, Warwick, Newport News.

TJ: Ever.

VH: Everybody. And all Hampton. Now, the Norfolk Seventeen were the very first black students in the area, which were Norfolk, to participate. [They] participated years before I did. They were right after the *Brown v. Board of Education*. So, but, it's ironic how, over the course of time, that you kind of reach out and connect with one another, which I did--with a couple of students from that side--later in life. And we were able to share [our] experiences.

TJ: What do you think made you choose football?

VH: [sigh] Probably because I played it all the time. I had a football in my hand from the time I woke up in the morning 'til the time I went to bed. You know, everybody in my family played, and it was something that I enjoyed doing. I loved baseball but couldn't really tune in on baseball growing up because we weren't allowed to play with the white kids in this area, playing baseball.

That was segregated. You know, we could stop and watch the kids practice or play, you could watch from afar, [but] you couldn't go sit down to the bleachers. But you could watch them from afar, watch the game being played, [but] no, you weren't gonna be playing baseball. As far as basketball was concerned, you had to be a part of the school to be able to play basketball. But now football was--that was my thing.

TJ: So, first year you attended eighth grade, correct?

VH: Yes.

TJ: Did you that year-- .

VH: No, no, no. First year I attended was in ninth grade.

TH: Ninth grade, okay.

VH: Mm-hmm.

TJ: Did you that first year, try out for the team?

VH: Yes.

TJ: Okay.

VH: Tried out for the JV team, and then ended up starting and then after--

TJ: For junior varsity?

VH: Yeah.

TJ: Okay.

VH: And then after the [football] season progressed, I was doing so well that I actually got moved up at the end of the season from junior varsity to varsity. So, [I] got a chance to play with the big boys then.

TJ: This is as a ninth grader?

VH: Yeah.

TJ: Uh-huh. I guess your initial reactions--just as a ninth grader--to having made the JV team, how did that feel?

VH: Well, one thing it really did was it really helped because the guys on the varsity team were here again much older, you know. And I had a couple of friends that were varsity players that made it quite clear: "You have any problems with anybody, you come tell me. We'll take care of it." And that's what really helped smoothed things over.

TJ: Did you ever have any negative experiences? On the football team, with teammates? Or some reactions--?

VH: Oh, no, no, no, no, no. Coaches didn't tolerate that. You had a beef, you just dealt with it on the field. But no, there were no color issues.

TJ: Were all the coaches white?

VH: All coaches were white while I played.

TJ: You said there were no issues. How were you received by the coaches?

VH: Very warm. Very warm. That was what really made me enjoy football, so was the fact that this was something that I could do and people were glad to see me coming, you know. So as I look back at the coaching staffs--and there's one in fact I run into now periodically and that's because he was so much younger than the rest of 'em were then. He was a great guy then, he was a great guy now. We--in fact I saw him about three four months ago--we were chewing the fat and talking about what it was like back then. You know, even though we've talked about it before it's still one of those things that you know, you can rekindle. Especially with a person like that. Yeah but no, the coaching staff was great.

TJ: Just purely from a coaching standpoint, what were the coaches like? Not socially, how they interacted with you, but just like, your opinion of them as coaches?

VH: Well they were, first of all, they were leaders and they were men who were respected. And they demanded respect, they got respect. Everybody looked up to them, so that was an added plus. They were someone that you could always go to if you had a problem. And it was really comforting to know that there were people like that somewhere close by.

TJ: Can you remember any particular coaches that were especially influential or any by name?

VH: Oh, all of them for that matter. My head coach, which was Wayne Begor [phone rings] and then there was [phone rings] Dick Tyson, [phone rings again, then stops]. I don't know who these people are [referencing the number that just called him]. Dick Tyson, Mickey Byrd, Coach (Heesacker? 37:59), Dan Henning. Dan Henning, in fact, went on to be an NFL coach. He was a coach for the Washington Redskins, several teams: San Diego Chargers. While in high school, while I was in high school, while he was coaching here [at Ferguson], Norfolk had a taxi squad for the San Diego Chargers. So, it was like a farm team, and he played quarterback for the Neptunes. And then that's what projected him into the NFL. He later, you know, they later learned how wise a guy he was and how sharp he was, that he went on to become offensive coordinator for several teams. And then from there, he went on to become head coach (39.01) Yeah he was right there in the thick of things, back during the beginning. But all my coaches I dearly loved because they were genuine and they always looked out for me. When you're at home and you play a game, that's one thing. When you go outside of your area and you play, you know, it's not necessarily that people are gonna be as warm to you as being at home. But, no, I had, and I still do [have] a lot of fond memories of the days in sports at Ferguson.

TJ: I think you already started to lead into one of my next questions I had in mind is: we've talked about how you're received by your teammates, how you're received by your coaches at

Ferguson. What was it like going to other schools though? With players and then coaching staffs?

VH: Well, [reception from other schools worked] to my advantage because my skin is so light. It was a little hard to tell me from anybody else during the summer months because we all had the basic same tan, you know. So unless I took my helmet off, you didn't know. I kept a bald head during the summer months. Whereas my white friends, white playmates, had hair on their head, my head was skin because it was just too hot during the summer months to practice in a football helmet. But when we went to away games, it really wasn't noticed until, at the end of the game when I took my helmet off that--you know, I would be recognized as somebody other than a white player, you know. But it was--and by that time, it was cool. Everything was good 'cause the game had been played. And everybody got along. That was one thing about sports is [that] it brought about a fellowship, to leave that stupidity aside from what we were doing out on the field, on the court, from baseball down to whatever. That made a big difference.

TJ: Is this your team, the other team?

VH: Yes, yes.

TJ: Did you ever have any negative reactions, or positive reactions too, when it came to opposing crowds if you went to another school?

VH: Well, yet again, nobody knew until I took my helmet off at the end of the game. Well, I take that back. During the beginning of the season it would be warmer, and I would have my helmet off and I would be noticed but nothing derogatory 'cause I was away from it. And I'm out on the field. I didn't have time to give five cents about what somebody was saying in the bleachers. My father had to deal with that because he came to every game--he did not miss a game--and he sat to his self for the whole time that I played. Up until, I would say, the beginning of my senior year

when stardom took on. You know, it was kosher to be accepted. So it was--. I noticed that there would be people sitting with him then, so that was a transition.

TJ: Let's talk about that. I think in a research, it was 1966? You scored seventeen touchdowns during the season, does that sound correct?

VH: Mm-hmm.

TJ: And then--

VH: Scored more than that. But those were that was all I was credited for.

TJ: Mm-hmm, wow. Then as result you made the all-district team aas well.

VH: Yes.

TJ: Was this your favorite memory playing football? Were there others?

VH: Well, when I made all-district I made the all-state team. All-district is the schools in Hampton and Newport News. All-state is the entire state so we won those accolades as well, which was a really good feeling when you stop and think about everybody playing in the state, you know, and to receive credits from other coaches from other schools from around the state, to be acknowledged. So that was really a great thing.

TJ: Did you ever consider after such [a successful] season, playing past high school?

VH: Playing what?

TJ: Playing past high school.

VH: I did, I played in college.

TJ: Okay.

VH: Yeah, it was another transition going from black to white, back to black, because I attended a predominately black college.

TJ: What college was that?

VH: Virginia State University in Petersburg.

TJ: Did you also--. Is it running back you played?

VH: Well, went in as a running back, but my knee was banged up, so I had to sit out for a few weeks. Then I came back as a linebacker, so I started and played as a linebacker. But I played, so it was not--. Even as a freshman, I was going to find me a spot, so I did play.

TJ. How many years, [cough] excuse me, did you attend Virginia State?

VH: Well, I actually attended for two and a half. I actually also attended Johnson County Community College in Overland Park Kansas, where I worked towards a construction technology degree. I knew that's what I was going to get back into once I finished school.

TJ: Okay. We'll definitely continue down that line of questions, post-high school. I do want to bring it back, a couple more questions about high school, athletic career, and then also social life. I think we were talking about your senior year. The year you graduated in 1967, from Ferguson High School, you were voted Mr. Valentine and best dancer, is that correct?

VH: Yes, sir. In fact, I saw my dance mate maybe two months ago, ran into her in Sam's Club. Hadn't seen her in forty years.

TJ: Wow.

VH: In fact, we were getting ready turn out Sam's Club, right there in aisle six. [laughter] Yeah , she and I were voted best dancers.

TJ: And this is voted on by the entire high school?

VH: The class, your senior class.

TJ: Ah.

VH: Yeah, you were voted on by your peers. It couldn't have been a few friends. You had to be really good at what you did to be voted on. You know, there was best dresser, most likely to succeed. So everybody was voted on, but I was selected for that [best dancer].

TJ: Do you have any other memorable moments like that, whether it be football or just in school?

VH: Well, [pause] I still knew people outside of football, which was a good thing, but here again, there was no socialization outside of school. Yeah. Once you leave school that's it. Oh, if I saw you in the store, sure we'd stop and talk. But, no, there wasn't any mingling outside or at homes or so forth.

TJ: How did your white classmates view you playing football? You mentioned as you continued to grow in your role on the team, it was definitely a popularity thing.

VH: Oh, I was looked up at. Just about weekly, you know, I had an article in the paper. Back then there were two Newport News newspapers, one was in the morning and one was in the afternoon. *Times Herald* and *The Daily Press*. And I would sometimes be in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon, or sometimes both. So the exposure was there.

TJ: How would you say, in general, both white and black communities reacted to you playing?

VH: Oh, it was looked upon both evenly as something that was positive. You know, it was something that, from a black standpoint, it was like, "Well, we could play football or baseball or wrestle just as well as anybody else." When you stop and you think back about sports back then, you ran into an era where blacks didn't play certain positions, like quarterback. There were no black quarterbacks back then. Not in predominant white schools or colleges or, especially, on the pro-level. You know, that took years coming before that transpired. But the other positions, they were more welcome. But the quarterback spot, that was primarily set aside for my white friends. They were quarterbacks. I never wanted to be a quarterback anyway, because you was [pause]

too “don’t touch me.” [laughter] I wanted to reach out and touch you. No, sports really cut the way and also took a lot of tension out of the air.

TJ: I guess now to sort of finish up about your athletic career at Ferguson High School, and also in college, would you say it had any sort of lasting impacts beyond your time at school? Have you had people talk to you? Have you learned something personally from it?

VH: Well, I think one thing that was really good to come out of it was the fact that I had learned long [before] a lot of people that, you know, we [blacks and whites] could get along. And the transition that I saw at an early age, you know, some people had to wait until they got to college before they even found out the experience. So I learned the experience at a very early age, and that was something that I couldn’t go back and explain. You had to experience that firsthand. So those years, those early years, will always stay with me. It will be in a lot of ways some of the best years of my life. Really are.

TJ: 1967 is the year you graduated. Your high school graduation ceremony, what was it like being one of the few black students there?

VH: Well, here again, it was the end of a time in my life where school as I knew it, *per se*, was coming to an end. And you look at from elementary school to high school, and that’s where you’ve been for the last umpteen years. And now it’s over. You know you are going down a different walk of life now, and you step off into college. The friends that I had made, I knew we weren’t going to be seeing each other as often, other than say when we came home during the holidays, maybe bump into each other in the supermarket. But, the end of high school was a new beginning, and when it was time for college and college recruiters, you didn’t have your Virginia Techs and your Virginias that were so anxious to recruit a black player back then. That was, “No, we’re not ready for that either.” You know, so it took several years after that before that even

transpired. But I knew along the way that the experience that I had here at Ferguson and in Newport News would help me, carry on and through life, you know. And it did. It really did.

TJ: So you've now graduated, you mentioned Johnson County Community College and then Virginia State.

VH: And the Air Force.

TJ: Air Force. Ok, that's where I was headed. So while in college, did you immediately decide to go in the Air Force? Were you doing a ROTC program? How did you go from college to into the Air Force?

VH: I was in a ROTC program, Army ROTC program, and when I banged my knee up, the paperwork didn't get to the draft board in time. So I got a draft number of twenty-eight. No, no. There was no way in the world I was going into the Army, so I tested for the Air Force and instead joined the Air Force instead of having to go into the Army. And that's where I went, the Air Force. That, too, was a hell of a transition because the Air Force didn't have, or was not known for welcoming blacks as well. So back to square one again, you know. And being out in the middle of the country, in the midwest, in Topeka, Kansas, again where the *Brown v. Board of Education* all took place, that's where I was stationed. So, those ideals and ways, you know, it was almost like when I got there, [people told me] "Well, you don't know what we're all about." [I responded] "Well, you don't know what the hell it's like to grow up in the south son. So this is a piece of cake compared to where I came from. Don't even bring it." So, again, another transition. But, I did the bulk of my Air Force [service] in Kansas, and then after Kansas, back to school I go.

TJ: How long were you in the Air Force?

VH: Almost three years.

TJ: So, what years would those have been?

VH: That was from--oh let's see. Finally finished in '76, so '73-'76.

TJ: Now you said you graduated from an ROTC program?

VH: No, I didn't graduate.

TJ: Okay, that's right.

VH: Mm-hmm. I was in an ROTC program.

TJ: That's right.

VH: Army ROTC program.

TJ: Okay.

VH: Not going in nobody's army, not the way they were sending people home in body bags. So, that's why I joined the Air Force.

TJ: What rank were you?

VH: Oh, I went in enlisted, which is E-1, and you work your way up.

TJ: In your time in the Air Force, it wasn't particularly long. Were most of your coworkers white, black? At that rank, at different ranks, was there a noticeable difference--?

VH: Well, (58:38) we get back to the white thing again.

TJ: Okay.

VH: So there were very few blacks. But here again, you are looking at the military and you're thinking that things are going to be changed, but no, not really. Especially the Air Force, because the Air Force was one branch of service where you didn't see a lot of blacks nor were they welcome *per se*, you know. It was almost like the Coast Guard whereas in the Navy and the Army, sure there were many blacks, and there was understanding, *per se*. But I had been used to difference, so the Air Force didn't scare me a damn bit. What are you going to do? Integrate me?

[laughter] No, it wasn't going to be a problem at all, so no. But that too within itself was big change.

TJ: 1976, you finish your career with Air Force. You went back college. Where was that?

VH: Here again at Johnson County Community College. I had made my mind up that I was coming back to Virginia to work for my father--he was a general contractor--and get back into the trades. Whereas he was a masonry contractor as I was growing up, so I learned the trade at a very early age. So coming back and then getting my feet wet, and then getting back out into the construction field is where I actually fitted the best, so that's where I stayed.

TJ: You mentioned your father was already in that [area], did you end up--. Was he still in this area? Did you come back here?

VH: Yes, he was in this area.

TJ: Okay.

VH: Mm-hmm, he was in Hampton.

TJ: And so then you started your full time career?

VH: Yes. Started with him until I broke away and started my own little thing. But I worked with him for several years before making that move.

TJ: So by the 1980s, then you're, as you were saying, doing your own thing.

VH: Yes.

TJ: Your own business.

VH: Mm-hmm.

TJ: Okay. Timeline-wise, backing up a little bit, just a more general perspective of the country, you attended high school during much of the sixties. Then college and work, occupation, was more in seventies and eighties. The sixties obviously were very well known as a period of civil

rights time. Do you ever remember anything that you personally witnessed, in terms of protests? Or things on the news? Or just even a general cultural feel of the time? I guess let's start with your time in high school. How was that viewed, the whole civil rights movement?

VH: Well, I got my [pause] real first feel from civil rights in high school, but didn't really venture out into the real world with it until college. And that's where I saw the black power movement. I saw where, for the longest [time], you know, we talked about, "We're going to try this and we're going to try that," to where there was no more trying. It was, it became, by any means necessary, to fight back. The days of nice guys was over with. I'll never forget, it was a Sunday afternoon, friend of mine and myself, we rode up off campus to the county, right outside of the school. We were going to get some KFC [Kentucky Fried Chicken]. And we got pulled over, just before we got to Kentucky Fried. And the reputation for the cops out in the county was crude, I mean really crude. And stop took place, it seemed like it took forever. But in the end, then we were on our way, and then we went in and got the chicken. And just on our way back outside the door, two guys approached us and said, "Hey, I'm glad you guys were able to stop and get your chicken. Which way you going?" [We said,] "Why?" [They said,] "Well we just wanted to let you know we had your back." [We said,] "What in the hell you mean, had our back?" They said, "Well, we were right across the street," and the guy said, "I had a high powered rifle, aimed at the cop's head, and if he had done anything out of line, we would shoot and kill him on the spot." I'd never been so scared [laughter] because, what if he had shot and killed him? You know, it would have looked like we had something to do with it, you know. That scared me to no end, to no end. And they weren't playing either, these guys were not playing. You just don't have a clue what it feels like really to get kicked in the stomach until somebody walks up to you and tells you something like that. But those were the times. You

know, you didn't--. You know, you would have thought [phone rings] no, not, not in this era. Yeah. Yeah, during that time frame, yeah. So, I saw some of that, couldn't understand why people couldn't work things out a lot easier. But nobody was willing to talk. So without dialogue, there was no way there was going to be a smooth transition. With coming to school first, and here again, learning to get along on this level made things easier. But once you get to college, and you around people that have not had any exposure, it's a whole other game there.

TJ: When it comes to these political movements, protests, political ideology, did you ever consider joining any of these, or supporting them in some sense?

VH: Well, sure. Once I was off to college, there was not a day that was all outside of school that I was not reminded that I was black. You know, there was no more going back to Ferguson High and having things nice, smooth, and easy. That was over with. This is the real world now, you had to see life as it really was. Now you didn't have to be an arrogant militant, but you couldn't let people run over you either, you know. And, here again going from high school straight to college, and then, you're seeing--this is before your time--the denouncing of the war, the Vietnam War. And then blacks were for all the more reason not wanting to fight for a country that was looking down upon you, you know. So, that was the mindset. But if you got your walking papers, you had to go whether you liked it or not, you know. Another choice was go to Canada. Not going to Canada, so.

TJ: What do you view as some of the most important accomplishments of the civil rights movement?

VH: Hmm. Well, when I saw the March on Washington and the masses of people from the Lincoln Memorial all the way to the Capitol, I knew something was good, was going to happen. It was going to take some time, but something good was going to happen. And it was time for a

change, I mean a major change. I look back even to little old me. And what actually transpired in 1963, even in its own way, had some sort of direct effect on how things transpired. So when I see little kids now, playing, getting along, I love it because that's the way it should be. Or when you walk past a classroom in school now and you see people of all colors in the same classroom and they didn't have to go before the school board and give your name, your phone number, and look like a little silly fool. You're all in there now together because you should be. So I think that things happened for a reason, and that they've changed for the better.

TJ: Did the civil right movement of the 1960s accomplish all of its goals? Do you regard, or what do you regard as the unfinished legacies of the movement?

VH: Well, I think there was too much expected at first. Alright, let's hurry up and do this. And as soon we finish this, we are going to do this. No, that's not the way it's going to happen. And it's taken, in some cases, longer time than anticipated, even for the movement of women. You know, we look at the first woman [Hillary Clinton] running for president [on a major party platform], that wouldn't even have been a thought in anybody's mind back in the sixties, seventies, or eighties, you know. Or nineties, for that matter, you know. And for her to have gotten this far, that's major. When you look at immigration now, how immigration is looked at, because it's a political view--. Some people don't want to see other people even though they came just like those people. You know, it's going to come out in the wash, but it's going to come out. So when I think back about the mixing bowl, as I looked at it, it took all of us to get to this point. No one or two people could pull it off. I saw the March on Washington, the gradual changes. I saw step forwards, and then I saw some steps that went backwards. But it's just that it's been even better to see that things were still progressing, and I'm glad to be a part of it in my own little way. But still a part of it.

TJ: What are your thoughts on the current state of civil rights in the United States?

VH: Well when you stop and you look at the police shootings, I see where you can see the ugly head of it, starting to stick up. Because some of these shootings, you question as to, “Well, wait a minute now. Did the man have a gun, or was he just blatantly shot?” Like the [who] woman shot the guy. She was the last one that got busted. You know, what’s bringing about this fear? You know? I have sons, makes me wonder. For that matter, me. I got stopped [laughter] oh, maybe about five to six months [ago], as I was coming down Warwick Boulevard in front of your campus. And got pulled over. And I didn’t even know it [but] the expiration of my truck was like two days old. And when I realized what the policeman was talking about, I say, “Well, I sure as devil didn’t mean for it to happen. I’ll go ahead and get that taken care of.” He said--. What was it that he said that really blew my mind? You know what, he implied that something like that couldn’t have gone unnoticed. Well, yes it did. It really did go unnoticed. But it was not a big thing. All I had to do was take my truck and get it inspected and then that was the end of it. But just briefly, I felt like we had gone back in time a little bit. He didn’t give me a ticket, but he seemed like he was on the edge. But it was so crazy when I was coming here. After I’d gone back there and tried to get to the front, I said [to myself], “You go around the other way” and then, when just as I was getting ready to make a left to come in off Warwick Boulevard, it was the same cop again behind me [laughter]. I thought, “Oh, you want to stop me again slick? To see if I got the truck inspected?” [laughter] But anyway, the, you know, little things cross your mind. But times have changed. You look at the evolution. You look at the uproars from the last few years of the violence that led from shootings in Baltimore, and Chicago, and LA, and several other cities, and how it was all color related. And this is 2016, you wonder what’s precipitating all this. Something’s wrong, something’s really wrong. And I think it gets back to dialogue and

addressing from the city governments, addressing certain issues. I think once things transpire, it's almost like they'll run smoothly forever and [if we] don't worry about them, we don't have to go back and look at things that we need to brush up on. But we do, so. [pause] But--.

TJ: Ah, go ahead.

HV: But that's what I think about when I look back.

TJ: You mentioned you have some sons. Are these your only--. How many children do you have?

HV: I have two sons. Great young men, college-educated, professionals, very proud.

TJ: Growing up, did you ever have conversations with them about similar stuff that we've talked about today?

HV: Sure.

TJ: What was it like raising them, with that kind of perspective of your own life?

HV: Well I'll tell you, because, here again, my boys were born in Kansas, and the communities in Kansas in which we lived were predominantly white, so--.

TJ: What year were they born?

HV: Oldest, seventy-one, his brother was born in seventy-four. So the communities that we grew up in were predominantly upper-middle class, and they were the only blacks in their schools. So when we moved back from Kansas to Newport News, they were in for a culture shock, because the schools in which they attended were predominantly black. And my youngest, it was like "wait a minute, wait a minute" because he didn't have a clue until after he had been there for about almost a year to where he could, you know, be settled down. But that was a major change for him. The oldest, he was just ready to do his thing so it didn't matter so much for him. But, youngest, that was a major, major transition.

TJ: What would your advice, I guess, to your sons, to other young people like us, who didn't really grow up during the civil rights? What were the kind of things that you would say to us, with the perspective you have?

HV: Well, I would say don't take anything for granted. Be yourself. And you never know when you look at people as they pass by, how they walk in their shoes, what it's like for them, because you don't know. You could be rudely awakened because you take things for granted, and you shouldn't. I remember when I was a young man, my dad said, "There's a guy downtown, and he had on about nine sweaters and five coats, a hat, and he had all kinds of buttons on him." But my dad said, "You know, if I had more time, if I catch him at the right time, I'd give him twenty dollars just to sit and talk to him for five or ten minutes, just to see where he's coming from and where he's been." And it couldn't have been no more than about six or eight months later, I'm in the car with him again. And there's the guy. He pulls over. And the story that the guy told, it was unbelievable. He had been all over the world. He was riding his bike now. He had ended up back in this area. It was one of his favorite areas of the country to be in. And to be homeless. But he had really a remarkable past, he just had fallen on hard times. So you never know what somebody else has had to go through, you really don't, to get to where they are, or to where they want to be.

TJ: We're getting close to the end of our questions. I do want to ask, is there anything in our line of questioning have we missed? Something more that you would like to contribute to our interview?

VH: Well, I think we touched on the basic topics. I think that this kind of forum could go on forever because it's something that always needs to be addressed. I think if you get back to your room later tonight at nine o'clock and say, "Damn I wish I had asked him," [laughter] call me

and ask [laughter] because you can't remember everything, you know. This is a topic that goes on and on and on and on. You know, so don't hesitate. I have friends on both sides of the color line that have asked me, "Well, what was it like?" [phone rings] It's still fascinating for people to ask, "Well, what was it like? Tell me about this, tell me about that." Well hell, you want to go find out? Come on, I'll take you down to the ghetto and we'll walk down through a certain area of the city at eleven, twelve o'clock at night and see what it's like. No, don't want to know that bit, do we? Now there are certain places that I really don't want to go, but the experience is what people are looking for, and if they can feed off of your past, so be it, so be it. But I, again, have nothing to be ashamed of and the walk through life. Hell, I'm looking at, almost sixties. Well, I'm going on sixty-eight. When I graduated from Ferguson, I was seventeen, so, fifty years ago. You stop back, and you look at all of the experiences. They've evolved just like this building has, from a high school to an arts center, and the bricks still look good. Even the old (85:22), so things can work itself out.

TJ: How do you feel, that your old high school has now been turned into this?

VH: I really like it, because Ferguson Center isn't going anywhere. You know, they might knock down Warwick, but they are not going to put up another classical arts center, you can forget that thought [laughter], you know. But this is really something that's going to be here, and it's going to be part of the university. When I look at everything that's around--. See, there was no parking lot back there. The old gym, I see the top of it right here. When I came up, got off the elevator, and I looked at the floors, I recalled a terrazzo floor, which is the marble floor we're looking at out in the hall. So some of it is still in place. They didn't tear it all down, but some of it's new too. No, I'm glad to see this, I really am.

TJ: I think that brings us to the conclusion of our line of questioning. We did go about the ninety minutes that we said. I just want to thank you so much.

VH: You're more than welcome.

TJ: For everything you were willing to discuss, that we talked about. Clear answers to questions.

So Mr. Hundley, thank you. Yeah, I think that's the conclusion of our interview.

END OF INTERVIEW

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