Scope and Background Note
In this oral history interview, Modest Keenan discusses his educational experiences growing up in Union County, South Carolina at McBeth Elementary School and Sims High School, time spent in the U.S. Navy, use of the G.I. Bill to obtain an license in cosmetology and an associate's degree in accounting, and owning and operating his father's barber shop. Modest Keenan was born on November 6, 1935 in Union County, South Carolina. Tom Crosby interviewed Modest Keenan at his residence in Union, South Carolina, on July 15, 2009. Interview covers Keenan's education at McBeth Elementary and Sims High Schools from the mid-1940s to the late 1950s.
Tom Crosby: Today is July 15, 2008 [sic 2009].
Modest Keenan: Nine, nine.
TC: 2009, and I’m in the home of Mr. Modest Keenan.
MK: Yes, sir.
TC: In Union, South Carolina. And I’m sure, knowing him, he doesn’t have any problem with giving me his date of birth.
MK: November 6, 1935.
TC: November 6, 1935.
MK: Right.
TC: Okay and his name is Modest, M-O-D-E-S-T?
MK: Right.
TC: Keenan, K-E-
MK: E-N-A-N, two e’s, K-E-E-N-A-N.
TC: K-E-E-N-A-N.
MK: Yes, sir.
TC: Okay. Where were you born?
MK: Born right here in Union County.
TC: You were born here in Union County?
MK: Un-huh.
TC: Now when you say Union County, do you mean in the big city of Union or out in the county? You were born in the city of Union?
MK: I don’t know. I really don’t know.
TC: Come on, you do know you were born in the city or out in Union County.
MK: I don’t know whether. You see, the city limits and stuff changed over the years and I really don’t know because see my early years I can remember, as far back as I can remember
now and I can remember my dad and them telling about we lived certain places. Because I know my dad told me after we were born, we moved to Asheville, North Carolina for a short while.

TC: I see.

MK: But now my first remembrance of living anywhere and I was a little small boy and I was down on Water Street, at the end of Water Street. It was dead end down there. I lived down there when I was a little boy.

TC: I see.

MK: Prior to that my mama said we used to live on the corner of West End and Goins (sounds like) but I don’t remember that. And then prior to that they said we lived down here by where they call Hanging Ground.

TC: Hanging Ground?

MK: Right. Out here by where the fairgrounds are.

TC: Do you know why it was called Hanging Ground?

MK: Well, I think they hung a couple of black people out there and the name just stuck with it.

TC: Really?

MK: Yeah, of course, the history I read most people were hung right there at Union County Jail.

TC: Excuse me?

MK: Most of the people who were hung in Union County were hung at Union County Jail. You know, they had the whole contraption where you hung them with up there at the museum.

TC: Right. And located what part of that museum?

MK: Well, one time they had it in the front window and I went and told them I didn’t think that was the right place for that; they needed to take it out of there. And they moved it.

TC: Are you sure it’s been moved?

MK: It’s not in the front window.

TC: Okay, that’s good.

MK: I’m not saying it’s not in the building.

TC: Okay.

MK: But it’s not in the front window.

TC: At least we know that part of history.

MK: Right, it’s not in the front window.

TC: Okay, so you went to elementary school at McBeth Elementary?

MK: Right, I started there in the first grade. Miss Cornelia Herndon was my teacher.
TC: I see. Now I’ve heard a lot about Miss Herndon.
MK: Right.
TC: Would you like to make some comments with reference to her?
MK: Well, Miss Herndon was a very caring woman. She taught me in the first grade and she would keep me in at recess to teach me how to write and some other things she would keep me in for, you know. And I never thought about she was being mean to me or anything like that, you know. I just thought that it was a part of school. Of course, I knew her even before that before we went to the same church.
TC: She was very firm?
MK: Very firm, very firm. She had a-
TC: And very caring.
MK: And very caring.
TC: And dedicated.
MK: And dedicated and that’s one of the things that we got throughout my whole life in the black schools in Union County. Most of the teachers, I would say, you know, ninety, ninety-five percent of them were very caring teachers, you know. They wanted you to learn. They cared about you learning and they didn’t mind letting your parents know it if you were slack, you know. And they had corporal punishment so they’d do something to you too.
TC: You didn’t get very much of it, did you?
MK: I don’t remember a teacher, I remember a teacher whipped me one time and I don’t remember what it was for. But Miss Janie Goree, Wesley then, she was bad about sitting you down in the chair and she’d take a strap and hit you across your shoulder with it.
TC: Wait, she didn’t teach elementary school.
MK: No, but she did teach me. But you asked me about the whipping part and I can’t remember but one time that a teacher had to whip me and it was her.
TC: About what grade was that?
Mr. Keenan’s wife: He was probably correcting in front of a girl.
TC: Probably so.
Mr. Keenan’s wife: Yeah.
TC: You remember her name?
MK: Seventh.
TC: I didn’t know she taught down that low.
MK: She taught me in the seventh or eighth grade.
TC: Math?
MK: Un-huh.
TC: Oh, I see. I thought you were talking about maybe like in the tenth.
MK: No, I thought you were talking about really the punishment part.
TC: I was.
MK: And I think I can only remember one time that ever happened to me.
TC: Now how did she give you that corporal punishment?
MK: Oh, she would sit, all her students she would sit them down in a chair and she’d take a strap and whip them across the shoulder.
TC: Oh, yeah?
MK: Un-huh.
TC: I hadn’t heard that one before. In fact, I didn’t know she ever taught down that lower grade. Okay, so.
MK: I was in the second class that she taught when she came here to Union.
TC: Oh, really?
MK: Un-huh.
TC: Now you went to McBeth as far as the seventh or eighth grade? Probably was eighth.
MK: No, and the reason why I say that is because back in that time it was a whole mix up in there because actually they took some of the fifth grade students and sent them on to Sims High. That’s because they had more space over at Sims High. But the reason for that, they only had eleven grades up there then. You understand?
TC: Yeah, I do.
MK: So when they went to twelve grades, you know, they couldn’t very well bring the fifth graders up there.
TC: Right. In fact, when Sims opened in 1927 fifth and sixth grade were there.
MK: Yeah.
TC: Up thru the eleventh grade. I saw that in the paper.
MK: But part of us were down to McBeth Elementary. I was at McBeth Elementary, the part that, the section of fifth grade I was in. My other classmates were at fifth grade in Sims, up there at that Sims building.
TC: Okay, so I guess when you got to be round in the seventh grade, somewhere like that.
MK: I was at the high school.
TC: You were at Sims.
MK: Right.
TC: Yeah. Now was there a principal for that level other than Prof Sims?
MK: Nobody but Prof Sims.
TC: I see, okay. You have any comment about any other teacher let’s say-
MK: Other than Miss Herndon?
TC: Other than Miss Herndon down at McBeth?
MK: Oh, well now, I had some real good teachers down there. I remember Miss Mamie Abrams and she was a very good teacher. And if you wasn’t learning something, you know, she’d have you stay in at recess, you know. She taught you exercise you go thru for cursive writing and stuff like that. And then she would stop sometime and talk to you about life. She was a very good teacher. I enjoyed her class.
TC: So you are-
MK: She taught me in the fourth grade.
TC: I see. Any other teaching strategies you recall that they may have used in general about how they got the material across?
MK: Oh, it’s just that, you know, they just took time with you. They took time with everybody in class. At that time Mrs. Douglas, Jane Douglas-
TC: I remember her vaguely.
MK: She was the principal down there and what I do remember about her she carried a long switch.
TC: Really?
MK: Un-huh, and if you didn’t mind her-
TC: Would she use it?
MK: Would she, yeah. Most of the time it looked like a switch from a weeping willow tree but most of the kids were afraid of her. And she wasn’t a hard woman. She was a very compassionate lady.
TC: And firm again?
MK: Yeah and firm again.
TC: Okay, so whenever a kid may have done something, not necessarily that she taught that kid?
MK: Right.
TC: If necessary that kid would get the switch?
MK: She would put it on them.
TC: I see.
MK: Yeah. We had another teacher down there and she was pretty rough but, you know, but when I say rough, firm, and that’s Miss Bessie White. She died up here in Spartanburg about three years ago.
TC: There was a McDowell, was she there?
MK: Miss McDowell taught me two years in school. Yeah, she taught me one year in the fifth grade and then I got her again in the sixth grade I think. I’m not sure but she taught me two years in a row.
TC: Okay, so how would you describe maybe the teachers at Sims High School, like in the ninth thru the eleventh say, in general?
MK: In general we had good teachers. We had good teachers. Most of the punishment would come down from the principal’s office. That’s where most of the punishment would come down.
TC: What kind of punishment?
MK: Whippings.
TC: Look, you’re in high school now.
MK: It doesn’t matter. Mr. Moorer would take you in that-
TC: Moorer or Sims?
MK: Moorer. They had a room that they kept football equipment in and that’s where he would take you.
TC: Oh, so Prof Sims didn’t do any whipping or?
MK: Prof had gotten pretty old.
TC: I see.
MK: He had gotten pretty old see.
TC: I didn’t know Moorer did any whipping.
MK: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. He might not did when you were there see but see I went to high school from ’51 to ’54, ’50 to ’54, something like that you see.
TC: And Moorer did some beating?
MK: Did he? Him and Mr. McAllister.
TC: Now these boys were in the ninth, maybe tenth grade.
MK: Yeah, and they’d take them in that cloak room. Well, not the cloak room, it was called, where the football player’s equipment room. That’s where they kept the equipment.
TC: So what did they use, a strap?
MK: Strap.
TC: Another strap?
MK: Un-huh.
TC: I see. Did Moorer ever put it on you?
MK: No.
TC: I see. You’d gotten beyond that?
MK: No, I didn’t need nobody to be doing nothing like that to me, no.
TC: At that age?
MK: No.
TC: But some of them they did?
MK: Some of them did.
TC: They got it?
MK: Yeah.
TC: I see. Okay, any particular course you liked best or?
MK: Well, I enjoyed the mathematics courses. Mrs. Wesley taught me geometry. I enjoyed her class. I learned a lot in there. Mr. Mack taught math. I enjoyed his class.
TC: Algebra?
MK: Algebra, math, whatever, all that stuff. In fact, he had started to teach, what’s that other subject that has something to do with algebra?
TC: Trig?
MK: Trigonometry. But what he would do, you know, he would tell you said now if I’m teaching you something that you’re getting real fast, then what you do is you stop doing what you’re doing and try to teach some of the slow ones. That’s what he allowed us to do.
TC: So that was part of his teaching strategy.
MK: That’s right. That’s right. And, of course, I’d tell them right quick I’m not going to do your work for you, I’ll just show you, you know, because I loved math.
TC: So that was your favorite area?
MK: Oh, yeah, I loved it. I loved it.
TC: Okay.
MK: I worked real hard to try to understand the English language but, you know, that’s very difficult for me but I did learn it.
TC: Did Ma Sims get you?
MK: No, no, Mrs. Glimp.
TC: Mrs. Glimp?
MK: Mrs. Glimp. She was from Gaffney. She probably wasn’t here when you came.
TC: She was, yeah, I had her for economics my senior year.
MK: Yeah, Mrs. Glimp was an excellent teacher, excellent teacher, you know, if you would try to learn what she was teaching. She wasn’t so hard about the discipline or anything like that but she really tried to teach. I can’t think of a teacher that I had, you know, and I’ve run across some of my classmates and they have made claims that they
didn’t do a very good job. I can’t say that. And the reason why I can’t say that is because places that I’ve been in my lifetime and the kind of competition that I’ve had to deal with. When I was in the Navy we took competitive examinations. Before I left here to join the Navy I took competitive examinations. Then I took competitive examinations in the post office, you know. And I have always done real well on them, you know, so I can’t-

**TC:** And you contribute that to your elementary and high school?

**MK:** That’s right. It can’t be anything else because after I left school, you know, I took a test and joined the Navy and the guy told me said, well, gee whiz, if you go in the Navy and make good on these tests, they might want to send you to Naval Academy and they did.

**TC:** Yeah.

**MK:** They gave me the opportunity but I didn’t take it. You understand?

**TC:** Since you’re talking about the quality of the teachers, I read an article that Prof Sims said rather, when he opened Sims High, when Sims High opened in 1927, there were people there from other counties attending the dedication. And he told them that what you should do if you want a high school is to get with the black people and the white people and make sure you bring in some good teachers.

**MK:** Right.

**TC:** So it goes all the way back to that.

**MK:** Right, and he had good teachers. He had good teachers.

**TC:** And I think Mr. Moorer continued to do that.

**MK:** Yeah, yeah. I’m not aware of that because-

**TC:** You were not there at the time.

**MK:** I played football and he wasn’t there, you know. I don’t think he was in charge because most of the teachers that he-

**TC:** He became the football coach in 1946.

**MK:** Forty-six but what I’m trying to say is that administrative work for that school when he came there I think most of the teachers that he came there with or were already in place, they were the biggest part of them were there when I left.

**TC:** They were already there.

**MK:** And when I left they were still there. You understand?

**TC:** I do.

**MK:** So he didn’t have any reason to go out and hire anybody. Mabel McKissick was there.

**TC:** That’s a good point because he came there in ’46 and he didn’t become principal until 1951.

**MK:** Right, right.

**TC:** Yeah, he had been coach all those years.
MK: Right, right. He became principal in ’51, well, I had him ’51, ’52 and ’53.
TC: Un-huh, as coach.
MK: Yeah, coach and principal.
TC: Yeah, right, that’s true. So what position did you play?
MK: Quarterback.
TC: Quarterback?
MK: Un-huh.
TC: I see. Okay. What was it like to play for Mr. Moorer?
MK: Rough.
TC: What do you mean?
RK: Wait one minute now, the first few weeks of football season when it came to your conditioning, he didn’t have nothing to say to you. He put the captains in charge and they would send you thru your conditioning, which was I learned later on from a fellah who graduated school after me, he said he tried out for the New York Jets and he said the physical training that he had at Sims was a whole lot rougher than he had with the Jets.
TC: Really?
RK: Yeah. Conditioning is what I mean, the conditioning training.
TC: Got you. You’re aware that he attended workshops by some of those pro coaches, Lombardi and?
RK: I’m not aware of that.
TC: He did.
RK: I’m not aware of that. I know when my cousin came back there to coach and he coached me one year, that was Roosevelt Gilliam. He coached me one year. Now he came there with pretty high credentials. In fact, he could have played football with the Cleveland Browns. That was at a time, you know, they were just bringing in guys.
TC: Now what was his undergraduate college?
RK: Allen University, yeah. In fact, the first year he went down there they had a guy down there playing quarterback by the name of Davis and he went down there and I think he made a real good showing. Actually, from what I understand, he wanted the starting job but the coach down there wouldn’t let him have it because he already had Davis and Davis had been there for about two years starting.
TC: Oh, really?
TC: Yeah, I read where he was drafted by the Cleveland Browns to play.
RK: Right. He and (unintelligible) Shelton played on the same football team.

TC: Uh-huh. Now do you recall any particular game that was let’s say most, when you were quarterback, most exciting, any particular game? There were so many, right?

RK: There were so many. Well, it was a game that I remember and always will remember and, of course, I wasn’t playing quarterback in that game. But we went up there to play Carver High in Spartanburg. And they ran from the power single wing. Most of the time they ran to the right side, our left. And they came out there and they started, they were just wearing us out out there, you know. And we had a fellah on the team named Buddy Green. You remember Buddy Green?

TC: I don’t. I’ve met him.

RK: Robert Green.

TC: Yeah.

RK: This was his first year playing football but he came from the pulpwood bushes. Now he knew nothing about football. He didn’t know anything about football.

TC: Now what do you mean came from the pulpwood bushes?

RK: I mean he, well you know, doggone. Back then you didn’t have no, some of these fellahs would be out of school two or three years and they worked in the pulpwood bushes then they decided they’d come back to school. The parents decided.

TC: At Sims High School?

RK: Yeah, yeah and this was in the season 1953 when he came back.

TC: Now did other schools do this?

RK: Oh, yeah, everybody did it. But, you know, if you could come in there and make your grades you could play football. Buddy wasn’t no older than nobody else. Now prior to that now when these fellahs came back from World War II, they were allowed to play football. They didn’t have no age limit on it and it was that way throughout the whole football society. You understand? Athletic society and I’m sure that it was that way with white folks as well as the black ones because we didn’t have organizations for boys that, you know, 3A, 2A, 4A, all that kind of stuff. Whoever wanted to play and whoever you wanted to play, you played them, you know. Because I remember over at Gaffney they had a boy over there he was a World War II veteran and he played. They called him Shag and he played football for a long time over there. Nobody thought nothing about it because everybody played like that. But anyway-

TC: So they want to accuse us of that because of our record?

RK: Right, but they were doing the same things, the identical things. But now back to Buddy Green.

TC: Yeah and that game at Carver?

RK: That game at Carver.

TC: Okay.
RK: And Mr. Moorer said where’s Buddy Green and everybody looked around. Buddy coach is calling you. Buddy’s standing up there, he ain’t never played no football in no real game. Moorer told him said go in there and stop them. That’s all he said to him.

TC: And he went in?

RK: And he stopped them. I mean sometimes there were two or three guys blocking him down. If he’d get his finger in his shoulder pads or anything, he stopped them, strong guy, strong robust guy.

TC: So now who won that game?

RK: We did, seven six.

TC: Seven six?

RK: Right. That was in 1953.

TC: Nineteen fifty-three, the year before the streak.

RK: Right, my last year in high school, that’s when it was.

TC: So you remember or did you know the coach?

RK: I didn’t know the coach.

TC: I’m talking about Roy Henderson.

RK: I know who you’re talking about. I met Mr. Henderson.

TC: Since?

RK: Met him one time up there at Piggly Wiggly and we sat down and talked a little bit. But I never did know him.

TC: I see.

RK: And I read articles in the Spartanburg Herald about him, you know, where he talked about the game that they won.

TC: Right.

RK: But I was sitting at the stadium down here behind Union High when it happened.

TC: Now do you remember let’s see, when you were in high school we were playing on Thursday night over with Union High School?

RK: Right.

TC: Were all your years of playing football there?

RK: On Thursday night.

TC: Or at City Park?

RK: No, right back of Union High.

TC: Okay. Did you go to the games at City Park?
RK: Yes, I did.
TC: Here in Union City Park?
RK: Here in Union, yeah. They had a tin fence all the way around the stadium.
TC: Really?
RK: But they didn’t have nowhere to sit down.
TC: Someone told me that yesterday. I said I’m going to see if Modest.
RK: No, because I used to go there and-
TC: No bleachers?
RK: No bleachers so whenever the ball went down to that end of the field, everybody ran down to that end of the field, see. And when it came back the other way, everybody just ran down the sidelines to the other end of the field.
TC: Are you talking about like in a scoring kind of situation?
RK: Right, right.
TC: Okay now were there any whites attending the games at City Park? Do you remember?
RK: Now you’re asking me something because see I was-
TC: Kind of young.
RK: I was kind of young.
TC: Maybe fourteen or fifteen at that time?
RK: Probably younger than that. Probably ’48, ’48, ’48, ’47, somewhere along there. Studying how I came to play Sims High down here behind Union High. It was high school and they put that game down there because there were a lot of white people who wanted to go.
TC: I see.
RK: But they didn’t like the idea of standing up. And so they reserved that area down there for the whites.
TC: I had that one year.
RK: Okay, okay, well, you know where they sat.
TC: So rather than playing the game at City Park?
RK: Right.
TC: Because whites wanted to see the game.
RK: Wanted to see it.
TC: They moved it over to Union High?
RK: Right.
TC: Which games had not been played there before.
RK: Right, right, right. Joe Jeter and Jesse Jeter, all them guys played back then. That was way back there in the ‘40s. It was right after Moorer came here.
TC: Yeah, well how about let’s say your junior-senior year, you were playing at Union High then?
RK: Right, sophomore, junior and senior.
TC: They’d started playing over there then?
RK: Huh?
TC: They had started playing over at Union High?
RK: Oh, yeah.
TC: On Thursday nights?
RK: Yeah, yeah.
TC: And about how many white people would you say would be at the games?
RK: The stands would be full.
TC: Maybe a hundred?
RK: Well, I don’t know. It depends on how many people it would seat. It was a lot of people, a lot of white people there. A lot of white people followed us everywhere else and the reason why they did it see a lot of those guys was betting money on Sims High.
TC: That’s what I heard.
RK: And what they would do is like if we’re going to play Spartanburg, some of these white people would say, okay, we’re going to bet you that our team’s going win. They might even bet on the score. But it was, you know, they had got into Sims High so much that the Lions Club would give us a banquet every year.
TC: Right, because Union High wasn’t very good at that time.
RK: No, no, no, no. They didn’t have, no, no. They got beat down just about every week.
TC: I remember that.
RK: Yeah.
TC: Do you wish to call any names because someone was telling me some names yesterday of some whites that betted on the games. Do you prefer not to call any now?
RK: I can think of one. He’s dead, Pete Levine.
TC: That’s the name I heard.
RK: Right. I could, you know, because he’s dead and he can’t deny it but I don’t think he would deny it. But it was that kind of a situation where, you know, if a lot of money was changing hands they don’t mind giving that little bit of ground up down there.
RK: Now there were people who used to stand outside the fence and watch the games because when you went down to the east goal down there, there was a fenced in area there, but that was in somebody else’s yard, but that’s where they would watch from. All the guys would drink whiskey and they was on the visitor’s side.

TC: Really?

RK: Yeah.

TC: So they could just act up if they wanted?

RK: Yeah, they’d go over there and drink. It wasn’t no acting up, just go over there and drink their liquor, you know.

TC: They didn’t want the home people to see them?

RK: Well.

TC: They just felt more comfortable over there?

RK: They were more comfortable see because there was a bunch of bushes in back of the visitor’s field and see they could go back down in there and drink their whiskey. And then they’d come back all liquored up and everything but there wasn’t no, no, no, and I don’t want nobody to think that that kind of thing existed here in Union. Our people did not fight. You understand? Fighting and stuff that went on the game, no. Of course, I didn’t witness anything like that my three years in football.

TC: You mean fighting among the spectators?

RK: Yeah.

TC: That didn’t occur?

RK: That didn’t occur. Now there was different places that the teams went before I started playing like in Anderson and Clinton, they would have to win the game on the field and fight to get on the bus to get back to Union.

TC: I see.

RK: But I never witnessed anything like that.

TC: Were there any fights at Union?

RK: Not that I know of.

TC: During the-

RK: Not that I know of.

TC: After the game we’re talking about.

RK: Not that I know of.

TC: Really?

RK: Not that I know of.

TC: That fighting came after you graduated.

RK: Well, we didn’t have no reason to fight. We were beating everybody. Other
people had a reason to fight but we, if somebody came here there wasn’t no fighting.
People were treated real nice. We fed them before the game. We fed the football team. And after
the game we give them dinner.
TC: Someone told me that some white guy paid for the food. Are you aware of that?
RK: Well, now.
TC: I think it was the same guy.
RK: Pete Levine?
TC: Yeah.
RK: Well, now, just like I told you now, the Lions Club gave us a great big banquet.
TC: That happened each year, didn’t it?
RK: Right and they would have-
TC: At the end of the season?
RK: All kinds of food.
TC: At the end of the season?
RK: Yeah, the Lions Club did.
TC: Tell me about.
RK: Go ahead.
TC: We played some schools from North Carolina.
RK: We played Spindale, played Hendersonville, and we played Stephen Lee.
TC: From?
RK: Asheville.
TC: And how did those games go?
RK: Stephen Lee never beat us. Hendersonville didn’t either.
TC: Never?
RK: Never.
TC: During your time?
RK: During my time. Well, after I left I don’t think they ever played one another
again.
TC: I see.
RK: And we went to Spindale, they didn’t even have nothing like a football team. Now the
team came over here from Thomasville and it was a post season game. That must have been
1949, season 1949.
TC: By the way, if I may, I have all the, there was an exhibit of football in the South Carolina
State Museum.
RK: Yeah.

TC: This past year.

RK: Yeah.

TC: And the guy he had one of his workers to go to the Union Times at the University of South Carolina Archives, so I have the scores and the write-ups in the paper of every game of Sims High from ’51 thru ’54. And all of those names, those Foster boys, guys and so forth, almost like play by play.

RK: Right.

TC: Yeah. And I’m going to have them at the museum during the reunion this fall.

RK: That game was played and from I understand, the coach actually apologized to Moorer for bringing a semi pro team over here to play a high school team.

TC: But we won.

RK: We didn’t win that game.

TC: You didn’t?

RK: No.

TC: I see.

RK: No. We scored first but we didn’t win that game.

TC: That must be part of what you hear.

RK: Thomasville is the name of the school.

TC: Is that Tryon?

RK: Thomasville.

TC: In North Carolina?

RK: Thomasville where they make furniture.

TC: You also played somebody from Tryon too.

RK: They didn’t win nothing.

TC: Anyway, okay, so any other comments you wish to make about athletics at Sims High?

RK: Well, there have been some very good athletes to go thru Sims High.

TC: Oh, I’m sorry to interrupt again.

RK: Go ahead.

TC: I started to say something a moment ago and I forgot. You often hear that Sims High played ninety-six games without a loss and then you hear some say ninety-three games without a loss. And I think why you have that difference there of ninety-six and ninety-three, ninety-three were all conference games without a loss, I have found out thru the Union Times. And that
ninety-six was some games that weren’t conference games that we won. You understand what I’m saying?

RK: I understand what you’re saying but-

TC: You don’t quite agree.

RK: When you go to talking about conference games, as far as I know, during my years there and the years before that, there was no such thing as conference, no such thing as a conference. Now you might be talking about there might have been ninety-six because of the post season games that they played.

TC: I think so.

RK: Post season games.

TC: Things like that.

RK: But we lost one post season game and won the rest of them. You understand?

TC: During your time?

RK: Huh?

TC: During your time?

RK: Yeah and the times before too. You understand what I’m saying?

TC: I hear you, yeah.

RK: See? So Thomasville came here in 1951 and played a post season game and beat Sims.

TC: I see. Okay, any other, so did you consider going on to college or did you go on to college?

RK: No.

TC: Trade school?

RK: No, no, no. I joined the Navy. I don’t know, I guess maybe I had matured a little bit and I didn’t feel like I wanted to put that kind of burden on my daddy. It was seven of us, you know, and there were two of us graduating school at the same time, me and my second brother. He started to school when he was four years old and I started when I was five. At that time you could start, if somebody could get you in there that’s when you started. And the reason why he went with me is because I wouldn’t go unless he went. We were just like twin brothers really. But now I joined the Navy.

TC: I see.

RK: I joined the Navy, which was in my way of thinking, one of the best things I could have done because I think I got a better education by joining the Navy and going around this world and seeing how other people live, visiting countries that a lot of people read about but never saw.

TC: Right.

RK: You know, and I met people and talked to people that people read about.

TC: It’s another education.
RK: Right.
TC: Is what you’re saying.
RK: Right.
TC: Just like going off to school and visiting places.
RK: Right.
TC: Meeting different people.
RK: Right. Now Brenda Wright, she, I think she retired from Jonesboro up there or she did teach up there one but she taught me and taught us in high school because had a bunch of veterans come back going to night school. And she made a statement to us she said, you know.
TC: Excuse me. Why did you go to night school?
RK: Because I had GI benefits, GI benefits so I went to night school and I got my cosmetology license. And I got an associate degree in accounting going to night school.
TC: Thru the night school?
RK: Right, at Sims High.
TC: I didn’t know they had that degree.
RK: What, associate?
TC: Un-huh. I see.
RK: Well, that was in ’67, ’68, somewhere along there.
TC: I remember night school. I remember that.
RK: Sixty-seven or sixty-eight, somewhere along there they had an associate degree, which is a two year degree. At that time it was a two year degree and I got the copy of it downstairs.
TC: Congratulations.
RK: I don’t go around.
TC: When I think about an associate degree, I think of a college degree, you know.
RK: Yeah, I don’t go around broadcasting that because it doesn’t, you know.
TC: So that’s how you got your cosmetology degree?
RK: I got my cosmetology license.
TC: And your?
RK: Associate degree.
TC: In?
RK: Bookkeeping, accounting. And see my daddy, I learned barbering under my daddy.
TC: I see.
RK: See?
TC: Yeah.

RK: And, you know, I got a lot of benefit out of being a veteran because had I not been a veteran I wouldn’t have been able to build this house. See when I came back here in 1966 and had twenty-five percent of the total cost to build this house in the bank.

TC: Very good.

RK: And these banks here wouldn’t loan me the money even if I was investing twenty-five percent of the total cost in it. At that time they weren’t asking but for ten.

TC: Did you try?

RK: Yeah, sure I tried.

TC: And they wouldn’t do it? Oh, you just said that they would not.

RK: I went to local bankers.

TC: And they would not?

RK: Union Federal Loan Association, I went to them because they were loaning money for houses, to build houses. (unintelligible) State and First National down here weren’t loaning money to build houses. Union Federal Loan was doing it and I put my application in and they told me you can’t have it.

TC: Did they say why?

RK: Well, they told me no black person in Union could build a house like this one but Dr. Long.

TC: Really?

RK: That’s what I was told. And so I talked to Mrs. Janie Goree, Janie Wesley, Janie Williams’ husband, Mr. Williams, and he had built a house in Carlisle. He got a direct loan from the V.A. And I talked to Morris Jackson up here on the by-pass and he had built a house with a direct GI loan. Now those two people and I think Moses Brown has built his house. Those were the only three people I knew of that had built houses, you know, brand new houses that I could talk to. Moses, I didn’t talk to Moses because I don’t think he was a veteran. But I talked to Morris Jackson and I talked to Mr. Williams, Johnny Williams and they directed me to go to the V.A. in Columbia and told me what I would have to do and everything. I followed their instructions to the tee and the money went thru just like.

TC: Now you want to tell me your businesses here in Union, what they are?

RK: Oh, well, I purchased the business I’m running now, the barbershop. I purchased it from my daddy a couple of years before he passed. And it was in another location. We were renting and I decided I wanted to own my own place. And this building down here now, it was leased or for sale and I approached Darryl Wade about it and he told me that he would sell it to me. I told him at the time I wasn’t prepared to, you know, to go thru with a loan on it yet. I had to go and get my finances together and I told him would he accept a written agreement that I could lease it from him for a year, provided that I bought the building within a year and he said okay. And so we went over here and talked to his lawyer and my lawyer too at the time, James Arthur. He drew the contract up and in about seven months I was ready to buy.

TC: I see.
MK: So I bought that place up there. Then we built the beauty shop up there and my wife is a beautician, she did hair here in the house.

TC: That’s adjacent to you, right? Next door?

MK: Right, next door. So we moved the beauty shop from here up there next to my barbershop. I able to purchase, there are three lots in there. I was able to purchase three lots there. I own rental housing and I have owned houses that I have sold to different people.

TC: That’s very good so you’ve been quite successful in your life. Now you also lived in New York for a while?

MK: Connecticut.

TC: Connecticut?

MK: Right, New Haven, Connecticut.

TC: Oh yeah? I see. How long were you up there?

MK: Five years.

TC: And then moved?

MK: Back here.

TC: Back here. I see.

MK: No, I was up there for, let’s see, eight years. I worked at the post office up there for five years but I lived up there for eight years. I was four years in the Navy so I was away from home for twelve years.

TC: So how long have you been back here?

MK: Sixty-six.

TC: You came back in ’66?

MK: Sixty-six.

TC: I see. Okay, well I’ve enjoyed this interview. I’ve learned a lot. Do you have any other comments you’d like to make, maybe about something we’ve already talked about or something that we haven’t talked about, to mention that you’d like to say at this time? It could be elementary. It might be high school or whatever, if you have any additional comments.

MK: Well, the only comment I would like to make and that’s to the black community and that is, you know, I really don’t think, now this is my own opinion about it. I don’t think integration served us very well.

TC: Why?

MK: And the reason why I don’t think it served us very well is because we missed the idea of family, togetherness, and you went to Sims and you know how close we were, you know. And I think that meant a lot. It made us whole to be able to have all of our classmates and all of our friends very close to us. And when one person hurts, everybody hurts, you know. Now there’s not a sense of unity so far as the young people are concerned, you know, and I think the young people-
TC: Excuse me. And part of that would you agree is due to family structure, part of it or some of it?

MK: I don’t think so because, you know, when I was young I remember the family structure was basically about the same.

TC: Are you sure? I think the number of single families, I mean one woman.

MK: You talking about a woman being the head of the household?

TC: Yeah. It won’t quite as bad as it is now.

MK: Well, I don’t think that had a whole lot, and the reason why, the only thing that I say is different now than it was then is, and when I said you lost the sense of family, is because some people can walk out there and see a kid into something and you try to correct him and, you know, he’ll get somebody to get on his back about why are you saying that to my child. Wherein, years ago and even when you had a woman was head of a household and you spoke to a child just the same as she’s speaking to him. You understand what I’m saying?

TC: I do. I do.

MK: And the reason why these things happen is because of the social difference in the black family now from what it was then. Now I don’t know how far you want to take that but, you know, I can take it to any limit you want to take it to.

TC: As far as you wish.

MK: Yeah. And the reason why I say this is because once they started integrating the schools and our kids started mixing with white children, and I don’t have no bad feeling about no whites now, don’t get me wrong.

TC: I understand.

MK: Don’t get me wrong. But what I’m trying to say is once they got mixed up there and there was a certain laxity, laxity.

TC: Permitted.

MK: Permitted with the white children that was not permitted with us. And what happened is when started mixing we saw that happening we say, our kids started saying, well, I can do that too. You understand?

TC: Un-huh, I do.

MK: So now when we get all bent out of shape and go out there thinking we can do the same things and they cut you off. You understand where I’m coming from?

TC: Yeah, severe penalties.

MK: Sure, sure and you know that this is true.

TC: Un-huh, right.

MK: And the reason why I’m saying this is because- 

TC: And the lack of understanding and empathy by the teachers towards many of those black kids.
MK: Well.

TC: Not all of them but some of them.

MK: Well, I’m going to tell you something. Nineteen years ago, let me see, my youngest daughter, me and my wife raised a marvelous daughter. She’s been out of school since 2000 so 2000, this is 2009 and that’s nine years. She’s been out of school nine years. From the sixth to twelfth grade is six years so that means sixteen years ago Margaret Holloway asked me to come down and some of the other guys they called up to come down because they were having so many problems after black boys. And I went, two other fellahs went. I’ve been going ever since. But what I found when I got there and what I have found over the years that the white teacher was actually afraid of those black boys.

TC: Yeah, yes, that’s part of it.

MK: Sure and so rather than approach them from the standpoint as “I’m the teacher and you’re the student,” they just would rather write him up. Give him a white slip, let him go to the office, let the principal deal with it, send him home.

TC: Or put him out of school.

MK: Put him out of school.

TC: Yeah, whereas, what would Moorer do?

MK: *(Laughter)* He’d whip your behind and send you back to class. Or he’d send you home and tell you to bring your mama back the next day but he wouldn’t put you completely out of school.

TC: And then also he would make them do things around the school as a punishment.

MK: Yeah, yeah. But it’s made a big difference in the way that we look at each other.

TC: Right, I agree, yeah.

MK: Because now when I was growing up, I knew there were a lot of women who raised children. I know them.

TC: The only thing is the number is much greater today compared to then.

MK: Well, you look at it there are more people today in the world then, you know.

TC: Well, yeah, but I mean proportionately.

MK: But I can think of guys, I can think of guys, I was raised up on East Main over there near that ice plant. I can think of guys over there that the women actually took care of the family by, out of white people’s kitchens.

TC: Yeah, I know.

MK: You understand?

TC: I know, yeah.

MK: And the man he’s sitting around somewhere drunk throwing his life away out in the street, but ain’t no difference.

TC: That’s not to say that the women can’t do a good job, didn’t do a good job.
MK: Well, that’s who had to do it.
TC: It just makes it so much better when there are two that are working together.
MK: But that’s who had to do it, Tom.
TC: If they’re good.
MK: But that’s who had to do it and they did an excellent job.
TC: I agree. Okay, any-
MK: I think that ought to do it.
TC: Okay, well I certainly appreciate your time and your interest. You have said a lot of interesting things, some that I didn’t know. So I appreciate it. Thanks again.
End of interview