

Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County, Illinois

Herman Shaw Oral History Interview

Steve Hansen, Interviewer

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

February 12, 2018

Steve Hansen (SH): We can record it and you sign it and you then, you get to keep a copy and we'll keep a copy. And as I mentioned before we're gonna have the students will transcribe the recording and then send it to you for you to read, edit, and approve. In case you say something about one of your neighbors that you don't want, [both chuckle] we'll dig it out [This is inaccurate, Madison Historical does not edit the audio for an oral history]. And then after you approve it, the interview, both the written and the recording, will go on our online website for Madison Historical. And so prepare for posterity. So a historian fifty years from now can listen to us talk and make conclusions about what life was like in Madison County and Edwardsville in 2018.

Herman Shaw (HS): Ok, 2018. That is what we are talking about now, huh?

SH: Well, what we'll want to talk about is you and your life. And so we'll just go ahead and get started. I'm Steve Hansen. Today is February 12, 2018. It is Lincoln's birthday and we're at SIUE talking with Mr. Herman Shaw. And when were you born Mr. Shaw?

HS: When?

SH: Yeah.

HS: I was born in 1934.

SH: 1934? You don't look, you can't possibly be that old.

HS: [chuckles] Well, I'm 83 and I'll be 84 on April the 5th.

SH: And where were you born?

HS: In Union, Missouri

SH: And how did you, tell us about growing up.

HS: Uh, well.

SH: Your life as a young child.

HS: Well, I grew up in a small country town in Missouri. It was the county seat of Franklin County. And, I of course, I grew up black and poor [chuckles]. Those were, those were two, two characteristics that

after I got old enough to realize, that there were, that there were something unique about me, those were two things that I had noticed that had an impact on my life. And Union was like, I think most of the rest of the country. It was segregated. And I lived in an area that was predominately where the colored people, at that time that's what they called us, lived. My grandmother owned some property and she had a big house on the front of the lot and like a log cabin on the back of the lot. And that's where I was born in that house that was on the back of the property. And when, I guess growing up, I, we had a, we raised chickens and we had a well and an outside toilet. And my mother traded eggs with our neighbor next door, who happened to be a white lady who had some cows, so she always had milk and butter. And I can remember my mom talking with her at the fence. And they really talked like they were friends. They had lots of laughs and would talk for sometimes a half an, I know now, a long time then. But you know, as I think about it, it was maybe for a half an hour. And they really acted as though they appreciated each other, you know, and respected each other. But the rest of the community was...uh.. if we had to go to the filling station to get water, sometimes the well was dry. They would always, the men would come out and chase us and call us alligator bait and rastus. I didn't know what rastus was as the time, [chuckles] but I didn't think it was anything good [chuckles]. And we'd always run back, back and forth, and finally get the water and go home. And we had a church that was there that was for the colored people and they had a circuit minister. He went around, he came around, he got to Union maybe every fourth Sunday. And on the odd Sundays my grandmother would take us to Nazarene Church on Sunday and we'd sit. They had a row in the back of the church for us to sit. There was a school for coloreds. It was just a one room school, very small because the population wasn't very big. And all of us went there regardless. You were 10, 12, 13, 14 or if you were 3 or 4 or 5, whatever age they started. I don't remember what age I started school, but everybody went to that little one room school. It was that way, I guess, until I maybe was in fourth grade. My uncle was the teacher. And my mother, my uncle and my aunt, all three went to Lincoln Institute in Jefferson City. That's where they went to school there. As I think about it as an adult now, I just can't imagine how in the world my grandmother had made enough money or to send her children from Union to Jefferson City to Lincoln Institute. But somehow she did and all three of them ended up being teachers. So we left Union, maybe when I was, a...

SH: You were, so you were born right in the middle of the depression. Do you have...? (07:28)

HS: Yes.

SH: ...were you all aware of...

HS: Well, I know my father worked for the WPA, they called it. And a matter of fact, he didn't, there were lots of times when he didn't work at all, you didn't have a job. And that's one of the reasons we left Union is because my, my father was trying to find a place to work. And he, we moved from Union to Webster Groves, Missouri. And I don't know, maybe I was six, seven, something like that. (08:13)

SH: So it was before the war?

HS: Yes, yes. And, I guess maybe it was during the war because I remember collecting silk. There was some little pods that grew on a vine that they used to make parachutes or something and we would gather those pods and turn them in. And I don't know what they'd give you a mill or something, it had a something that was less than a penny [chuckles] that they used in Missouri. Now, I understand that they

didn't use those everywhere. They had half pennies, but in Missouri they had this thing called a mill. And it was not made out of metal it was made out some other material that they gave that to you as for collecting these things. And if you got so many of those mills you could get candy or something, you know.

SH: [chuckles] Does, this fascinating now, when you're growing up down in Union, you say your grandmother owned property. (09:24)

HS: Yes.

SH: Did she grow a cash crop or...

HS: Yes

SH: ...or is it, oh ok so

HS: She didn't grow a cash crop, but she grew a crop. We had a cellar, and all the food, basically all the food that we ate we grew in the garden. And we grew tomatoes, and you name it, all kinds of greens, corn. And everything was canned, put in jars and put in the basement. And we had fruit trees and we found blackberries and dewberries and all kinds of berries. Well, we'd pick them and we take 'em home and they would can 'em.

SH: Do you remember how many acres she might have a... (10:18)

HS: Oh, I'd, maybe, I would say five, six, maybe ten. Something like that because she owned the property those two houses were on and then back behind there, my uncle's house and my aunt's house and there were three houses back there that she owned or the Aitch, they were called, she was an Aitch family and if today you go into the Union area, Moselle, Robertsville, those places up there, they have a road that's called the Aitch Road. They have their own cemetery, and just a lot of Aitch's live back there. A-I-T-C-H. And, so, and again, I have my grandfather I didn't know. He died wither when I was very young or before I was born. I'm not sure, but I never met him. But my, but my grandmother, I grew to be a young man and she was still alive. She lived to be 100 years old.

SH: 11:47 And she was able to hold onto the property all through the depression?

HS: Yes, yes, yes...

SH: That's great.

HS: ...yes she did. She ironed, and did, took in laundry and things like that. And she, I don't know that whether she sold any of the vegetables, the vegetables that she raised or not, but she had lots of them. And we all worked the garden and pulled weeds and whatever. But she raised asparagus. Almost every vegetable that you can think of she, she raised cabbage you know, plants and stuff, so.

SH: Oh ok, so then your father, your family... your father's looking for work and found some around... (12:22)

HS: In Rich...around Webster in Richmond Heights. There was a brickyard there. And so he went to work in the brickyard. And there was a streetcar. The Kirk, I think it was the Kirkwood Ferguson streetcar line ran from Kirkwood through Webster to, a, I think it went all the way down to the University City streetcar line. And down by the what was at that time they had a place called where the World's Fair had been and they're on Skinker and... I don't know what it is now, but right there in Clayton, anyway. And so he went to work in the brickyard there and we lived in Webster. And the first place we lived was in a house, I don't how many rooms, maybe three or four room house and had an outside toilet. But did have, if I remember, did have running water. And...

SH: Was this a segregated neighborhood? (13:56)

HS: Oh yes, yeah, it was segregated. But just a street divided between this, where this, colored people lived it was still colored at the time [chuckles]. On one side of the street and on back on the other side this street called Lafayette, and the white neighborhood started. And so we were right off kir, we were right off Kirkham Avenue which is really Brentwood Boulevard if you take it all the way out. And, um...

SH: Now was your father too old to be in because he had children to... (14:36)

HS: I think he...

SH: ...to be drafted?

HS: I think he, I learned later that he, I think he had been in the army and because he had some mental issues or something he got of the army. They discharged him and he didn't get a dishonorable discharge. Unable to adjust to military life or something, but he got out of the army. I didn't know until I was an adult that my father had been hospitalized for some mental illness. But we lived there and they had a, had a segregated school system there. Went to Douglas. It was kind of a complex. They had a elementary school, high school, all the way through the twelve grade there. All in in maybe, maybe five, six buildings they had on that property where the schools were. And I don't think there, there were more than one elementary school there and the high school, they only had one high school that colored people went to. And we stayed there in this, we moved three times while we were in Webster. We moved from there we moved to, to Kirkham Avenue, we, we stayed in the storefront. and then we moved out of the storefront into another little shack down on, I forget the name of the street now, Holland I think it was. That was right next to a creek that flooded a couple times every spring and we had mud on the floor and it was really kind of bad, again, maybe like, two rooms and by that time there was like four of us. And um...

SH: When you say four of us, counting your mom and dad, or four children? (16:59)

HS: No. There were four children and mom and dad. And um...

SH: And your dad was working at the brickyards? (17:07)

HS: Yes. And I don't know what happened but then we moved again. And we moved to Edwardsville then, and by then I was maybe like nine, ten years old, something like that.

SH: So that would have been just about at the end of the war toward the... (17:27)

HS: Yes.

SH: ...end of the war?

HS: Yeah, yeah I, I would like so, yeah.

SH: Do you have, do you have other than collecting these pods for the silk for parachutes do you have any other memories of, of the war going on around you? (17:34)

HS: Nah, not a lot, no. I, you know, at that young age, I was, I, I remember as we came down that highway from Union, it, going to, there was a, there was a section off the highway where that was all fenced in. And there were supposed to be, there were mounted police on horses and supposed to be ammunition sites buried over in there. You know, and I don't remember exactly where that was, but, but other than that I, you know, there weren't, I didn't know people that went off to war. Most of the people were old, the African American people were older people, you know. They just weren't, there wasn't enough of us there to in Union to have people going into the military. And when I moved to Webster, I, I just don't remember anything connected with the war at all there. And, and I'm not sure that if I, if I, if I talk to one of my other brothers they might. I was, I was kind of a little bit different from, from my brothers for several reasons. Some is, I think my relationship with my father was not good. From, from the very beginning as I remember, I was petrified of him. I just, I don't know why, but it was obvious to me that I wasn't, I wasn't his favorite son. And, and he was physically abusive if he ever had to discipline me it was using weapon with a switch, or whatever. But verbally, he was not, my name was not Herman it was, or son, it was snake-brains. And that, plus the fact that he was verbally abusive to me almost constantly. I just was fearful of him and, um, so, I was, I don't know. I spent as much time away from home as I could. I didn't, I didn't want to be around him. I loved my mother, but I thought that she should have protected me from him, you know. Yeah.

SH: You said your grandma sent, she sent your mother or your father to Lincoln Institute? (21:12)

HS: My mother.

SH: Your mother?

HS: My mother.

SH: So your mother was trained to be a teacher?

HS: Yes.

SH: And did she ever work as a teacher? (21:24)

HS: Yes, she did and, and she taught in, she came here and substituted for my aunt.

SH: Here being Edwardsville?

HS: In Edwardsville. My aunt was a teacher here in Edwardsville. And when she got ill they asked my mother to come and she came and she taught in Lincoln School here. And that's when she met my father, when she was teaching here, because he was originally from Edwardsville.

SH: Oh.

HS: Yeah. So that's how we ended up here.

SH: Coming back here.

HS: Coming back here, yes, because he was raised here. And I think his father had worked in Richard's Brickyard and so my father ended up coming back here and going to work in Richard's Brickyard. And...

SH: And this is like around 1944?

HS: Yeah, yes, ya I would think so, yes. And...

SH: What was the Edwards... okay, so you would have been like about ten. (22:31)

HS: Um hum.

SH: Do you, do ya have any remembrances of what the Edwardsville community was like?

HS: Yeah, well, it was just about like, I didn't know anything different from segregation and when I came here it was basically the same Edwardsville. We moved into a house up on what they call North Road up on you, go down Liberty Street, there used to be bridge down at the bottom and you cross there and then you went up a hill there. And it was, I mean when I say it was a shack, it was, it was a shack. It was very bad, you know. We grew up basically in, in that place because when we all got here you know we were all pretty young, we weren't very old. And It was, we had three rooms and then by then there were five, six kids. And my, my youngest sister, Caroline Turner, who used to work here at the University.

SH: I know Caroline

HS: Ok, [chuckles] she, she was the baby. And and we lived there again we had a well and outside toilet. All of us, in this, in these three rooms and it was not good [chuckles]. But, we, the school was segregated just like every place else. And of course, you couldn't go into restaurants in Edwardsville at the time. And I had at that time, I, I guess I was old enough to, to realize that, that it shouldn't be that way. You know, it's a, that, I guess before then there was no pressure on, for, for me to even deal with the fact that we were different. You know I, being poor it seemed to me it didn't make any difference what color you were if you were poor like we were, your life was gonna be, [chuckles] is gonna be rough anyway.

SH: How, how, how, how was segregation enforced? For you personally, I mean was it, yeah, how was it enforced? How did you... (25:30)

HS: Well.

SH: ...did, did white people say, call you a name and say you can't go in there or...

HS: Yeah.

SH: ...or was it just...

HS: Well, here in Edwardsville, you know. In Webster, you know, we had a, there were certain stores. I, I never tried to go in, I didn't have any money to go in the restaurant, to try to go in a restaurant to go eat so that wasn't a problem. But there were stores that we, you could go in to buy groceries and in certain areas and so you went. And I didn't pay much attention. But, when I got to Edwardsville I was little bit older and a little bit different responsibilities. And I'm on the playground playing at Lincoln School on the weekends, there was white kids in the neighborhood, you know, they'd come over and we'd play together but we didn't go to school together. And something's wrong with that picture, you know. And we couldn't go uptown and go to the root beer stand or to the drug store and get a soda.

SH: How, how how do you, how did you know you couldn't do that? (26:51)

HS: Because we'd try to go and [chuckles] they would, they wouldn't serve us.

SH: Okay.

HS: You know, and that went on until, even in, when I went into integrated schools here, I was a sophomore when the schools were integrated. But you still couldn't go in. When the basketball team and after a game if we went uptown to, if they went uptown to go to Musso's or one of the restaurants that had something to eat. I couldn't go in, in Musso's and, and believe me I tried, and, and you know. And they would tell me, you know, you can't come in here and so I'd have to leave. I went in at a place called, down below the high school there, I can't remember the name of it now, but it, but there was place down there. You couldn't go in there. You'd go into Wildey, and, and they had two theaters here, Lux and the, the Wildey. and you could, there were only certain places that you could sit in the movie. They had one section over to the side in the Lux and upstairs in the Wildey, in the balcony, which was [chuckles] not a bad place to sit but you couldn't sit downstairs you had to sit up there and in a certain section. And I had noticed that I would go in and they had the fire escape door and I'd let the fire escape down and other kids [chuckles] come up and come up in the Wildey. But I noticed that when Miss Robertson, Rella[?] Robertson, she did a history for the same lady that I am talking about and she had done the same thing when she was a kid and she lived to be over 100 years old. So, I'm saying that the same process of, of the segregated upstairs in the Wildey and people letting other kids up, you know, up those, that fire escape had gone on for long time.

SH: Does the high school, so the schools became integrated? (29:17)

HS: In 1950.

SH: 1950.

HS: '50, school year '50-51. Yes, and I was a sophomore, supposed to be a sophomore then.

SH: Do you have any idea why?

HS: Why?

SH: Yeah, why were this, it...

HS: Well.

SH: ...because it wasn't court enforced.

HS: Yes it was.

SH: Oh, it was?

HS: Oh, yes it was, yes. A matter of fact the, the court said that we should have integrated before. It was mandatory that they did it and they wouldn't do it, they didn't do it anyway. Well the state finally said that well if you don't integrate your schools we're going to cut off your funding. So they did [chuckles] so, so they were forced, they were forced to integrate schools here.

SH: Did you, did you feel any resentment or, or have any trouble when the schools integrated? (30:06)

HS: No. No. We, I wasn't gonna go because I had, I hadn't done well in school at Lincoln School. And as a matter fact I, I, I stayed behind a year in, in Webster because I, my, my, I wasn't learning as fast as I should have learned. And so I, I stayed back a year there. So, I wouldn't go to school a lot of times. I'd go down on the canal or railroad tracks or something I wouldn't go to school anyway. I skipped a lot of school and so when they integrated schools I, I was gonna quit school. And the football coach, guy by the name of Warren Harris, came down on the playground during the summer and he asked somebody who was, he said he was looking for Herman Shaw. And they told him, they showed him me and he came over and he talked to me. And he said that he heard that I was gonna quit school and I don't know who he heard that from, but, and he said, "Well, why you gonna quit school?" And told him because I didn't think white people was going to treat, treat us right over there. That wasn't really the reason I just didn't think I could cut the mustard, you know, academically, so I wasn't gonna go. But he said, "Look, you can always quit." He said, "You come over there and you might like it." and he said, "And I want you to play football for me." Well, I didn't know how to play football because Lincoln didn't have enough boys to have a foot, we just barely had enough to play basketball so he convinced me to come and try and he did teach me how to play football and how to run hurdles and, and I know now that he deliberately did it. He developed a play called "The End Around" that was just to help me have an opportunity to get in the game and play and maybe have some success. And he put me in the first football game that year. I played varsity, and I didn't play, I played freshman, sophomore, and varsity. He dressed me for varsity and I sit on the bench. And we went to, the first game he put me in was in Benton, Illinois and he told me to call "The End Around" and I called it. They threw the ball and I didn't get it, it went back behind me and when I went to pick it up they buried me. [chuckles] So he took me out of the game and he said, "It wasn't your fault, don't worry about it, you know." And so, the next game was a home game. And he put me in, told me to call that play and I did and I scored a touchdown. And he took me out of the game, sit me on the bench, you know, and told me that was, "Way to go." And the next two games he put me in for just that one play and, and after the, the, on the third game that I went in the guy said, "There's that Shaw watch for that End Around!" [chuckles] But I still scored a touchdown anyway and it didn't make any difference. And so I got a lot of people in town, you know, well oh, I couldn't come through town, you

know. Jerry, he owned a clothing store uptown, I forget the name of it now, I think it's closed.

SH: Ember's?

HS: Ember's, yes, yes. Oh, he just, he'd stop me he'd talk to me forever. [chuckles] And so, I just, I got in the choir and sang in the choir. I had, I was in a barbershop quartet. I sang with some of the guys. I took voice lessons from Miss Wheateye[?]. And just a lot of things happened that, you know, caused me to at least have some self-esteem, you know. I felt better about who I was. And, but academically, I, you know, I, I was a very poor student. Just, just, my back, if you don't have the fundamentals, you know the back, the basics, then you're in trouble and my reading skills were so low. And they just impact everything that you do academically. And but, because I was good athlete, and I played all four, and I got a Varsity letter in all four sports my sophomore year. And my second, my junior and senior year, my junior year, I did too. Now my senior year, I, I quit and didn't run track and didn't play baseball. That's brave[?] because I, I upset about something that happened. The, in the process of growing up and playing sports and things, I had a, I had a kind of a, a relationship with a white girl. And that was just unacceptable. And so, the, the men in town especially, they just, the white men [chuckles] they just got, they got down on me and they just, they just made it kind of rough for me. And even though the, the principal, Mr. Brock was the principle at the time. He came to Sunday school and picked me up after Sunday school one morning and he asked me and he rode me around and asked me about her. He said, "Well Herman," he said, "things are going to be a little rough." He said, "but you keep your head up," and he said, "now things are gonna pass." And I never saw her again. They just, they, I don't know what happened to her. I don't know...

SH: Were you ever physically threatened? (37:22)

HS: No, no. Well, I don't know. I was with her and some, some of my white friends, you know. We were out at the lake swimming and they came out there and they got after me and they told me to come on out of there. Well, I didn't come I out, I [chuckles] swam across the lake. I got out over someplace else and Dale and them came around and picked me up and took me home. And there were people that said things to me that were rude. Some of the fathers at the basketball game that, that winter came down when their daughters were talking to me or something they came down and said something you know don't be talking to him or something, you know. Because the kids, they, they didn't care one way or the other, you know. At least most of them, I don't think they did. They never said anything to me negative anyway, none of them. And like I said, some of them, we'd, like, go on dates together. We'd just go riding around because we couldn't go any place [chuckles], you know, but we'd ride around and go to the lake and swim things like that together. So..

SH: Which lake is that?

HS: Dunlap

SH: Dunlap?

HS: Yeah. And so, I quit those two sports and I just said to hell with them. I'm not gonna go out there and bust my ass. [chuckles] It's how I would have felt, you know. I said I'm just gonna let it go. I, I had a scholarship offered to go to Illinois State [phone rings]. I'm sorry about that. [phone rings] I'm not gonna

answer that, I'm just gonna turn it off, okay?

SH: Okay.

HS: [phone rings] I guess I could just let it ring. [both chuckle] Yep, that's good. So, I, but, you know, in, in, in town, by then I had gotten to a point where I just would argue with, with, with Luco[?], who was my, my basketball coach. But he was also one of my teachers, he taught Concept. I would just argue about the fact that it wasn't right for segregation and for us to not be able to eat in restaurants. I went to Benton on a overnight with the basketball team and we went to a hotel in Benton where we were supposed to be staying overnight. And Luco[?] took me to, to me, said he has somebody he wanted me to meet he took, me took me over and introduced me to the bellhop and told me that was who I was gonna be staying with that night. And that just made me, I was just, if I could have walked home [chuckles] from down there I would've. But those kind of things were just things that I just, just thought how can intelligent people think [chuckles]. And I still feel the same way right today. I just think that it's, and I guess there's always...

SH: And, and yet you, you still, you play basketball even though... (41:11)

HS: Oh yeah.

SH: ...even though you were disappointed with...

HS: Oh yeah.

SH: ...Mr Luco?

HS: Yeah, yeah, but I let him know, and, how I felt. And as a matter of fact I was gonna quit at one, at one basketball game. I would have, I would've turned my uniform in and quit, but Warren Harris, who was my football coach was also the, one of the assistant coaches, basketball coaches. And he told me, he said, "Put that uniform on, on and get back out there." And he said, "Because you can't let something like this make you give up on life." He said, "You're gonna run into this until people get smart enough that they won't be like this."

SH: Was Harris white? (42:08)

HS: Yes, Oh yes, oh he was a white man. Yes, he was white but he was a good person and...

SH: What, I don't exactly know how to ask this question but looking back... Let me, you finish your story. You, you then graduated from high school, you had...

HS: Yes.

SH: ...a scholarship to Illinois State?

HS: Yes, yes. And I went to Illinois State. And I was, I played first string football as a soph, as a freshman and first string basketball as a freshman at Illinois State. But I only was able to stay there two years before I wasn't eligible any, you know, because I couldn't keep up with the academics. Because I, I

played three sports at Illinois State and I was gone a lot, you know. And you go to college [chuckles] I mean, you have a lot of away activities as an athlete. And, and I'm playing three sports. And my sophomore year I went in and asked the athletic director if I could not run track because I wasn't on a track scholarship, I was on a football scholarship. And I told him I said because my grades are gonna, I need to get some help with my grades so I keep my grades up so I don't lose my scholarship. He said well you're gonna lose it anyway if you play, run track. And I said but I am on football, it didn't make any difference, so, and I, you know, so I did flunk out. I, I flunked out and...

SH: This would have been in the middle of the 1950s?

HS: Um hm. Let's see I graduate in '53 so it would've been '54, '55, '56.

SH: What was it, what was college like in those days? Was, was that, did you feel the segregation there as well? (44:19)

HS: Well, somewhat. Most of the black athletes they lived in a place called the barracks. And you, most of the, all of the, the ones that were in the barracks that I was in were African American. And of course we, there were places that, for example, the baseball team went to, went to Florida for spring training, no black could. If you wanted to play baseball you had to wait until they came back from spring training, [chuckles] before you could go. They wouldn't even take you down there. So, yeah, there was, there was segregation everywhere. It was just, it was just a way of life. And, and you know, I, but it made me think a lot because by that time I got to an age where you just have to start thinking, you know, why, why is, is it like this, you know. And as I looked around, you know, I mean it was the same almost everywhere. You know, even, you know, in other countries, it wasn't like some guy told me once, he said, "If you don't like it, take your ass back to Africa." And that was a guy that lived here in, in Edwardsville. And, and I think at the time if, if Africa would had been where California is, I might've tried to [chuckles] get out there. But, but being where it is I was, there was no way for me to get there. But, as I got older I found out it wouldn't of made any difference because there was a lot of foolishness going on in Africa and it wasn't just South Africa, it was all over Africa. Because Africans were killing Africans, you know, black folks were killing black folks over there, too. You know, because you didn't, you weren't a, you were Zulu or a Watusi and should have been a so and so and so and so, and so, I just got to a point where I just realized that all this craziness is, is just a human flaw, you know, it's just something that human beings do and I not, I'm not, I don't know what we gonna [chuckles] do about it. You know, it's just like, they sing the song "Study War No More" but you, we study, study war all the time, constantly. I don't think since I've been in the world, you know, that there has not been a time when there was peace on Earth. It doesn't exist. It might be someplace where there's no war going on but somebody's fighting all the time. And it's, we're constantly trying to come up with the biggest bomb, the bigger bomb. And...

SH: In the, in 1950s when you left Illinois State, were you aware of the growing civil rights movement... (48:09)

HS: Yes. Oh yes.

SH: ...around you? Or was that just kind of one long constant struggle...

HS: No, no. I was a...

SH: ...in this, this was new?

HS: ...it was, it was, I became aware of it now, it was going on but I just, you know, just, trying to struggle and stay alive and make something of my life with the handicaps that I had. I had to think about what am I going to do with the rest of life, you know. How am I gonna, how am gonna make things happen, you know, given the problems that I had. I mean, bought a reading machine and tried to improve my reading. I went to work at the state hospital and that was in Alton, and that was, and I think that was probably the turning point in my life. And all the civil rights stuff going on. I just got to a point where I figure, I have to find a way to deal with it but that cannot be a priority for me right now because I've got to find some way to get a occupation or something so I can take of myself, you know, and have a family. It was something that I really wanted a family so. I went to work at the state hospital and I think I focused on trying to be the best therapist that I can be. And that worked for me. That helped me I was able to do some things with patients and for patients and for people that shaped my whole, my whole future. And I had found, I didn't know it at the time when I was filling out the papers I remember they had a question that said Why do you want to work at this job and I said because, I said, I just thought it sounded good anyway, I said something about wanting to help people or something like that and I found out that was, that was really true, you know, that I really had a gift. That was my gift, you know. That I was able to do things for people. As a matter of fact, I went to the ethical society in Clayton and worked with a couple of psychologists over there who were, they were doing groups with people that were able to function in society but they had ish-, mental issues, one kind is some anorexics and people. And people were maybe schizophrenic or something but they, they were able with medication get, have, hold a job and things. And, I, one of the guys I was working with asked me, he said, "Herman have you ever thought about working with young people?" And I said well, I guess thought about it I wanted to be a coach but I don't have but two years in college. But he said "Well, what if I could get you an interview with some people would you want to work with kids?" I said sure I'd love to. So he happened to be on the school board at University City. And he went and asked, had me set up an interview for me to talk with the superintendent of schools and the high school principal. And they hired me and they come over there to go to work called me the technical assistant to the principle. And I went there.

SH: When was this?

HS: It was in '69, 1969. And I went to U City High School and I stayed there 32 [chuckles] years. So, I was blessed, yeah.

SH: So you from, from when you left Illinois State until '69 were you working at the... (53:04)

HS: I worked ten years at the state hospital.

SH: at the state hospital?

HS: Yes, yes. And I went to Manteno for training and, and

SH: That's Manteno, Illinois?

HS: Yes. And...

SH: Which is a state hospital.

HS: Yes it's a state hospital there, yeah. And I just went there to, for training and then I came back to Alton State Hospital and I just worked on. on the wards, I worked on a viol-, on a violent ward there. And I just changed things on the violent, well they put me in, made me in, put me in charge. [chuckles] And they shouldn't have did that because I went out and got some furniture, and donated, and brought it in. And had the people in the shops to build some dividers because in those wards it was just one big open mass and people just walking just back and forth. And a person if he had any sanity about him he could, he had no place to get away from all that madness, too. So I put mason dividers divided it all off and put some nice soft chairs in some places and the lamp[?]. And made it like, more like home, you know. And, and I got some blow- back from some of the guys from the state but then there were other guys at the state that said and hell, it's working, said, let's don't, let's don't, look how much. I reduced the population of the, of the wards because I started having people go like a day, day treatment center where you could bring people into the hospital and then you could come back and pick 'em up in the, in the afternoon and they took that portion of it and moved it, moved it out to Shurtleff College and just, then pretty soon they had a mental health clinic there in Alton. And I was working with a guy named Dave Shaw and some other people, you know. And we just set up a whole system of things that we could do with patients beside putting them in with all those people that were really, really, really sick, you know.

SH: Um, hm.

HS: There's sick and then [chuckles] there's sick, sick, you know. And it just made a lot of difference. And so

SH: But did you maintain your home in Edwardsville or did you move to Alton? (55:55)

HS: No, I, I, I, I moved to Alton at one point, yeah. And as a matter of fact I moved over there and got married and stayed over there.

SH: And when you got the job at, at University City High School, did you, did you move there?

HS: No, oh no, no I was too country. I moved back to Edwardsville.

SH: [chuckles]

HS: [chuckles] And, and stayed here and commuted and went back and forth. I just, I didn't want to live over there. This was, this was my home by then. I had established and working on different committees and different things. Working with human relations people here in Edwardsville. Trying to make things better here. I decided this was my home. And so I came back here and started arguing with people about different things. And,

SH: What, what, what is some of the changes you've seen in the community and in Alton as well over the years? (56:59)

HS: Well, here we got lucky. We got, they stuck a university in here and I think that's, this university here is the biggest change. It took a one horse town and made it, I think a very desirable place for people

to want and come and raise a family. I, I, I think that, I don't think the university has done enough to reach out to the community to try to, but I don't think the community has reached out enough to the, to the university. To, I mean, they don't realize how, I don't think as a community, I don't think we realize, I do, but I don't think there's enough of us that realize that this university brought some people in here [chuckles] that helped us grow as as a community. I mean, we were just kind of stuck and would've stayed stuck if this university wouldn't of come in here. And now that we've got Lewis and Clark and the university, I mean, that's just, that's just a big plus. So, I think this is, this the place. This is the institution that made Edwardsville, what I think is, one of the best communities around here today, you know. The people, and I don't know. I think a lot of good people came. There's a lot of good people in Edwardsville before, but I think one of the things that happens is good people don't, they don't get to together and work like the bad people do. The bad people get together and they get their little gangs and they call themselves the Barracudas or Rats, the Termites, ISIS or whatever. And they get organized and they sell their drugs and they do all these bad things and just mess up stuff. And we kinda get, we don't do like we ought to do I think we ought to realize how important it is for us to get ourselves together. 59:45 And to be the Rotaries and, and I, the only thing I find short of the rotaries that they, they're very selective about who they let in and some of us good people on the outside, don't get to be, we don't get to join up with them and do things, you know. But...

SH: So looking back, what are some of the, the influences that you, that you feel that, that help shape your life as, as a black man, as an African American? (1:00:10)

HS: Well, let me. I, I have to go to the bathroom, see [chuckles].

[Recording stops, then starts again]

SH: Okay, so we're back.

HS: Right.

SH: We're talking and I just asked you the big question. (1:00:37)

HS: [chuckles]

SH: [chuckles] So what are, what are this, what are some of the influences that, that you feel shaped your life as a, as an African American growing up in a white society?

HS: Well, I have to say my mother was the first person that had an influence on me. My aunt, my grandmother, and they were the first people that had influ-, influence on me. I think, maybe, my brothers. My youngest brother had a tremendous influence on me. He, later on, but early, I'd, I'd say those three women had a tremendous influence on me. My high school football coach, Warren Harris. I think he saved my life. And a, [sighs] maybe, I'd have to say Roy Jason, Emil Jason's father, had an influence on me. Tremendous person, I think he was the first black man that I knew that was, I, there were, I'm sure there were lots of them out there, but I saw him take care of his family. And, and every chance that I got I would go to his house when I was a young man. And he, had some horses, mules I guess they were, and he would be out plowing the field with that, those horses and planting crops. And he, he took care of his family and I paid attention to that. My mother and my aunt and my grandmother, they were all religious

people. But I don't know, for some reason that, they were good people and they were all in, just, just didn't seem to let anything stand in the way of them trying to help people. And the prejudice and the racism and whatever that was going around them it, it, it didn't make them angry people. They, they were still reaching out and they still, you know, that there are good white people and there is some that is not so good. And that's the lesson that I learned from them is everybody that's white is not bad and everybody that's black is not good [chuckles].

SH: Do you, do you feel like, like you, you've lived the, the American dream? (1:04:44)

HS: [sighs] No. No. I, I, I, I, I don't know, what is, I guess, I never thought about it that way anyway. What is the American dream? To me, the American dream ought to be to, for us to love each other and help each other. You know, to, for us to wanna make other places where there are people that aren't doing well, get them to a point where they're doing better, you know. But we should, people on Earth ought to help each other. That's, that's, that's just a dream period. Now if that's the American dream, yeah then, then I, I, I just think that we've got a long ways to go before we get there. And that's my dream, is, I just, I want us to raise some younger people that are better people than what we, than what we've been able to demonstrate that we are as a, as a population. You know what I mean, of older people. There are good people that are, that are among us but it doesn't seem like we're making a dent in, [chuckles] or something, I don't know. It just, it's just so much other terrible stuff going on every day. You know, you look at St. Louis, it's just, it's not like Edwardsville, it's not like St. Louis, I know. But my goodness, them people over there killing each other every day, every, you know, it's, it's just a mess.

SH: You, you've got, you, you, you've talked about when you came back to Edwardsville, and maybe I have a sequence wrong. When, when you're, as an adult... (1:06:39)

HS: Mm-hmm

SH: ...a young man...

HS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm

SH: ...married and everything that, that you wanted to become involved in the community and help...

HS: Mm-hmm

SH: ...make the community better.

HS: Mm-hmm

SH: How did you do that? What were the things you got involved in?

HS: Well, they had a human relations commission in Edwardsville and a, I worked on that.

SH: As a volunteer?

HS: Yeah, oh yes, yes, yes, yes, just a, they were

SH: Who set that up?

HS: I don't know. It was just something that was here and I got involved. And I, we don't have it now but I, I was talking to somebody, oh what was her name, can't think of her name now. But, she was on the, a white lady, she was on that committee with me. And we, we did a lot of things. We, there was a mural on the front of city hall and...

SH: [chuckles] yeah.

HS: ...we, we changed that thing.

SH: [chuckles]

HS: And we fought

SH: That thing, this mural.

HS: Yeah, yeah. We fought and fought and fought wanting to change that. And we finally got that thing changed. And we, we fought, and we got to the point where, you know, we could go into restaurants and eat and sit down and not be hassled, you know. And you could go to the, the root beer store and get a frosty mug. You know, there were, there was, there was a time when they wouldn't give you a frosted mug even. Even after they'd let you, you could, they would serve you, but they would put your, put your, you know, root beer in a paper cup.

SH: [chuckles]

HS: And they'd say, "Three frosty mugs and one paper cup root beer."

SH: [chuckles]

HS: You know, that's just crazy stuff, I mean put, put glass in your chilli. You know, I, just add some, that didn't happen in Edwardsville, actually that was Cottage Hills. But just get ya to a point where felt like you could go to a restaurant and, and ask for some food and people won't spit in it or, or worse. You know what I'm saying? That they'll just treat you just like you're just another customer. And, and, and, and, what, what you know, that's, that's an achievement. You know, that happens now. I don't, I don't, most places that I go in I expect that my food isn't gonna to be sabotaged just because I'm black. Now you know there's, there's some places you can go in and you can be white and somebody will sabotage your food [chuckles] because they just some ornery folks working in a restaurant. But, that, that might not happen as much now as it used to. It used to happen all the time. So, I think that we have grown as a, as a community here. But less than[?] there, I guess all over the country things are better, but there are still some places that if you go into and you're black you really had to be very careful. I, I, I have to kind of go back a little bit. When I, when I went into the service I learned, that was another lesson that I learned, too. Because when I...

SH: Was this after Illinois State?

HS: Yeah, yeah, yeah after Illinois State. Between Illinois State and the state hospital I went into the service for two years. And I went to Leonard Wood, and, and I didn't stay there because you couldn't go into town if you were, if you were black. Because down there in them boot hills, down in Missouri, I'm telling ya, there was some folks down there that would have killed you if you would've gone into town there. So I wouldn't stay there and I was asked to stay there and play, play basketball. And I said no, no, I don't want to stay down here. So, I went to Georgia, to MP school and, and when I got to

SH: Which, which fort? (1:11:21)

HS: Camp Gordon, Georgia and Augusta.

SH: Uh huh.

HS: And, and I went there to MP school and when I, I went and put my uniform on and I went downtown. And I couldn't of walk on the sidewalk if a white man was coming down the sidewalk I was, I had to get off. It didn't make any difference that I had my uniform on you had to get off. And I didn't know that until the, the, the guys were coming down the street and telling me, "Nigger, get off the sidewalk." [chuckles] And I ,you know, and I didn't hesitate, I didn't, I didn't give 'em any, I didn't even hint that I wasn't gonna [chuckles] get off, I got off. But I just said to myself, if I get back on base, I'm not coming back down here anymore. So I, but I left there and I went to Germany. But when I got to Germany I found out that there were certain guest houses that I couldn't go in over there. Because, not because the Germans didn't want me in there, but because the white soldiers from America didn't want me, didn't want me in there. And if you went in there, the guy that owned the place said, "I, I don't want trouble." Ah ha, I don't want trouble either. I just want a beer. And he gave me a beer but the next thing you know somebody throw a glass at you, a bottle or something, and you had to get out. They just, they just, even though you were in the same uniform that they were in it didn't make any difference. You had to get out of there, they didn't want you in there, so it's just

SH: How do you, how do you maintain a positive outlook on life when you face so much... (1:13:07)

HS: Well.

SH: ...racial adversity?

HS: Well, I, let me, let me just put it this way, when you, when you look at the fact that Africans are killing Africans. It, it, you just have to realize that you, you have something going on that has to be corrected. And just don't, don't just always look at like a black and white thing. You have to look at it as a, as a, as a, as a, as a problem that human beings have to, have to find some way to resolve the fact that there's this kind of a class system or some kind of system. Something going on here where there's somebody always gotta be the whipping boy. Or somebody's not as good as, but, but when you start trying to deal with it, you, you can't rationalize it away. You have to look at it and say this wrong, now let's, let's work and see if we can't get this fixed. But anger doesn't fix the problem.

SH: How do you think your children are facing the world differently than, than you? (1:14:27)

HS: I, well, I, I, I think they're, they're facing it differently because I don't think young people as a whole

have the same type of resentment and hostility that, that us, as an older population have. I think that they have, they, the majority, the majority of them have, don't have the, the animosity. I think that there are some areas where there are young people that are white people that are, somebody's telling them that, that we're better than them. And, and they really get brainwashed into thinking that that's, that we've got to save the white race or whatever it is, whatever that they tell them, you know. It's almost like the, like the gun people, you know, brainwash people into thinking that you've gotta have a gun. [chuckles] You know, I think that there's some folks out there that are almost as bad as saying hey, look you know you, those white people, those black people are trying to take your jobs and stuff. You know they're trying to take your women. They are trying to do this to you. They, you know, whatever you know we're better than they are. And it's, it's and they get, they get brainwashed into that. And, and, and I would hope that the majority. Again, like I said, if the good people don't realize that it's just as important for us, to, I think constantly, the human relation commission is an example. We don't have, all the good work that we did. Now, we got to a point where I guess we felt like we, we've, we've solved all our problems. That, that human relations commission should still be functioning right today. And, and doing, you find things to do, people to talk to, young people to talk to and say, you know. And have them involved in community buildings find some plus things to do together. We have a Hispanic population that's moving into the area. We should be connecting with them and trying to, just try to build positive relationships with people. And don't let, don't let the Trumps [chuckles] don't let the Trumps, [chuckles] don't let them get a hold to us. You know, we just, we got to do better than, than what we're doing, you know. That's what I think anyway, you know. And I've been out here and talked to Dr. Pembroke and, and I'd talk to Dr. Chatman and I just trying to encourage us to, to try and be creative and come up with ways to get the community together. You know, get us working together with the university, and the university working with the community to, to make this place, not just good, I want to make it awesome. You know, just make it a center of, I mean, how many communities do you have where you have a, a, a junior college, and a college and a university and a center for the humanities and two YMCAs and just thousands of good people running up and down these streets every day. I mean, I see 'em all the time. The people don't even have a clue who, what my name is or anything and they're speaking and you know that. And you can tell they're genuine in their, in their speaking to you because you can just see it in their face. And so, I just think, man, all these good people around here and we, we ought to be doing all kinds of things. And I think that if we set an example for our kids they'll realize that if they want to have a good community and want to live in it you have to work at making it that yourself. You know, but we've got to set the example for 'em. So we can't just say, well, we don't need the communi-, human relation commission anymore. We, we've got to keep it going. Get kids that'll talk to 'em or do whatever we have to do. Work on this relationship between this university and the, and the community.

What'd they call it town and gown? [chuckles] (1:19:36)

SH: [chuckles]

HS: Yeah.

SH: I really appreciate you taking the, the time to talk and do this interview. Yeah, I guess I have two questions. One is who else would you recommend that, that I interview for a, for a oral history? (1:19:40)

HS: Are you just, are you just looking into interview African American people?

SH: No, no.

HS: Okay.

SH: No.

HS: Okay.

SH: Anybody.

HS: Okay. Well, I don't know whether the, Richard Mueller is a guy that I would say interview. Guy I went to school with and he's about my age. And a good person. Let's see, [can hear banging noises] Houston Laury. [Can hear voices in the background] I wish my brother was here who, my, he's my youngest brother but [can hear voices in the background] he's a professor at a, he's a retired professor from University of Florida, Gainesville. And he's the one I told you that I, that he's, he's an awesome guy. I wish you could interview him. He's, he's a, he's a, he's a person that [cough] I used to have to tell him. He, he was so angry at white people that he couldn't hardly play sports because even in practice if one of them fouled him. [chuckles] You know, like you keep playing, playing basketball and somebody fouls you, I mean hell, he'd want to fight. I mean he just was angry. And, he, and I'd just talk with him all the time, you know about, you know just, you can't be like that, you know. You just, you gotta learn how to control that. But the one thing that he, he was very competitive, he didn't want, he, he wanted to prove to everybody that he was just as smart as, as you are, you know. And but I remember when I came home from the service and I went up to, he went to Illinois State also. And he said I got somebody I want you to meet and he took me over to this guy's house. And it was a white fella, and he said this is the first [chuckles] white guy that I have ever really liked. [chuckles] And, but, but he is, he's a person that I watched him. He got his leg broke when we were young and he just was a determined person. He went, I, I can just see him right now running up and down the street trying to build that leg back up, you know, so, he broke it up in his hip. And just limping, and limping, and limping. And he got to a point where that leg was strong enough that he could, he played all kinds of sports and, and he can jump about seven or eight inches higher than I could. Maybe even more than that, just tremendous, and I know, I know it was all because he just worked on those legs and worked on them, you know, until he got up the strength. And I've just seen the way that he goes out and sets his goals for himself and he's, he's able to do a lot of things that, to let me know that, if you want to get somewhere in life you've got to work your butt off to get 'em, you know, and set your goals for yourself. And he overcame that hostility that he had and he's, he's a, he's a very smooth gentleman now. [chuckles] So, I, I, I, I know he won't be in town for a long time but I wish you could talk with him.

SH: Well perhaps, and I don't know if we can do this, but perhaps we can interview him by telephone and, and, and record him. (1:24:17)

HS: Well that would be awesome if you could.

SH: Yeah, I'll, I'll check with, with some folks around here and see if we, if we can do that and if so I'll, I'll call you and see if I can get his telephone number.

HS: Okay, okay, that'll be fantastic. What was the other question?

SH: The other question is that, did you have any, any, anything else that you wanted to a, to say that about, about life in Madison county...

HS: Oh

SH: ...or growing up?

HS: No. I, you know, I, I think that you talk about living the American dream I won't say that I would say that I was, I am fortunate and I feel blessed to have come to Edwardsville. I think if I wouldn't have come here, I think that him, I wouldn't have met Warren Harris. I don't have a clue as to what would've happened to me. I had, I, I don't know, I just know, I just know that my whole life changed because of meeting him, having an opportunity to go to the high school. And, and even though I didn't finish school, going, that college, that trip to college, and out. And the ability to, to work at U city and go to school at night at Webster College and, and get a degree.

Those things kept me, or helped me just be the person that I am today. You know, and so yes I think, I think I've been very fortunate say that. And that's, that's it. [chuckles]

SH: And I appreciate it.