

**Mr. Ivan Simms, Faculty member at Madison Senior High School; Longtime Resident of
Madison, Illinois**

**Transcript of Interview for the Madison Historical Society Oral History Project.
Interviewed by Aaliyah Merritt, Madison Senior High School Social Studies Student
Date: October 20, 2023**

Ivan Simms [IS]: 00:00 [Recording Starts]: Now let's talk.

Aaliyah Merritt [AM]: 00:01 Good afternoon. Today is October 20, 2023. I am Aaliyah Merritt, and I am here with

IS: 00:10 Mr. Ivan Simms.

AM: 00:12 Okay, Mr. Simms, I'm here to ask you a couple of questions today, and I want to ask your opinion about Madison. Do you think the environment has changed, like when you were here, when you were younger, compared to the generation now?

IS: 00:27 Yes, some good, some not so great. Are you talking about the schools in general?

AM: 00:38 Yes

IS: 00:38 Or the community?

AM: 00:39 The school and the community.

IS: 00:41 School and community? Okay. Well, when I was coming up, when you got in trouble, you got in trouble. And it wasn't no "the teacher is lying," more often times you did what the teacher said you was doing. As far as school, the work was a lot more rigorous. It was a lot more intensive. Less people in the hallways, less tardiness. Um, is there anything specific you want to know?

AM: 01:17 Like the police and getting in trouble in the community?

IS: 01:22 It was, the community aspect of it was about the same. The community, I wouldn't say it was the same, but I will say that there were--- there has been some things happening in the community that probably didn't happen as much. Especially in the community. There was a lot of, what I want to say, community involvement. Meaning that, yeah, if I got in trouble, and your mom saw it, your mama got on me, and then your mama called my mama, and then, my mama got on me. And then my mama got on me. After my mama got on me, my daddy got on me. So, it was like it was always, you were held accountable for what you did. You just didn't get in trouble, and somebody saw you do something, and they kind of turned a blind eye. Like when you got in trouble, you got in trouble. Oh, yeah.

AM: 02:36 Okay, and is there anything that you miss about the old Madison, like things around the community that they don't have now?

IS: 02:43 Yes, we used to have a program called Teen reach. Back when I was in the eighth grade, it was called Teen Reach. And what Teen Reach was, it was kind of like 21st century, but it was on another level. Well, we went on field trips, we played games, we did homework. But it was more of life lessons that were taught to us while we were there. It wasn't a lot of playing around, we actually learned and had fun at the same time. School-wise, I wish that students would understand that teachers are actually here to help them. There's not one teacher in this building that is not here to help them. We are human beings too; teachers and staff members here are human beings as well. And they have bad days, just like you have bad days. And I don't think some students quite understand that. I suspect that we're human beings too. And we make mistakes too. I just had a student today that I had to apologize to because I made a mistake. But that's accountability. We all are human beings. We're all going to make mistakes, but let's work together to be, what's the word I want to use, to make the community better, make the school better, well, I think we ought to work together to understand that we are all humans and we are going to make mistakes but we all need to have the grace to be able to learn from those mistakes.

AM: 04:25 I also want to ask; do you see how the kids act now? Are there any changes?

IS: 04:35 Yeah, kids now are a lot more, I don't want to say disrespectful, because not all when they speak---they're a lot more boisterous. They want to know "the why." Kind of when I was coming up, why wasn't--- it? We didn't ask questions why, we just kind of did what we were told to do. And if we got in trouble, we knew our parents would cover for us because that's what they told us to do. But we didn't ask too many questions "why," we just kind of did what we were told to do. Students these days, they ask a lot of why's, "why I have to do this" and "why I have to do that, what's going on, and why I have to do this" and "why do I have to be here," and this, that, and the other. Which is not necessarily a bad thing, because I think that's okay. But, I wish students would do it a little more respectfully, instead of getting loud and saying disrespectful words, I wish they would be a little more respectful in their approach. If they come in with the right approach, and they come in, then we can talk, but when you come in yelling, we don't, you know, we don't get nowhere. And that's the way we were raised. We were raised to talk to people. We were raised to like respect and say what we needed to say, but within the confines of respect, because we knew how far to go and how far not to go. I think now we just kind of, students these days, just say how they feel, which is okay, but with no reserve. You got to be a little reserved, have some reserve and be--- it's a word called "tact." Be respectful, that's all. So that's kind of the biggest difference I see with students now. And the students, back then, like I even see it in sports. We worked hard. These student athletes these days don't really work hard, they just...

AM: 06:45 They try to make it like they think they're going to win without working.

IS: 06:51 Exactly. They think this is going to be, "here you go, here you go, 40 points!!

AM: 06:55 They think there should be somebody giving them handouts.

IS: 06:56 Yeah, yeah, here are 40 points today, you just scored 40 points you didn't have to do---naw; we actually worked for what we wanted and what we needed, and I think students today don't understand the value of work--- Understand the value of really putting in time. They think "I do it one time I'm supposed to understand it." But things are not always that cut and dry. Sometimes you need multiple times of doing the same thing over--- they have some rule that says like, 10,000 hours or something like that. It makes you a pro at what you do. So, if it takes that long to understand or be a pro at what you do, then you know you have to put in some time. And what I think students lack today is just an understanding of work ethics, and how hard you really have to work to become somebody.

AM: 08:01 Ok, I have one more question. Is there anybody around Madison when you were growing up to whom you look up?

IS: 08:17 There was this teacher. She was a P.E. teacher, and her name was Ms. Wales. She was a, she was one of the one of the most influential people in my life here at Madison. She was like my kindergarten, first grade PE teacher, but she always made sure she found out how I was feeling. I don't know if she did anybody else like that, but every day she would come up to me and ask me "how are you doing?" And I remember that from kindergarten and first grade. I remember her always saying "how are you doing today? Are you doing, OK?" I'd be like "Yep, or Nope," she would always say "well, let's make today a great day." So, Miss Wales was one of my biggest influences here at Madison.

AM: 09:15 Okay, well that's all for this interview. Thank You.

IS: 09:27 No problem. Thank you.