

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

GLENNON THREATT

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KIMBERLY HILL: This is Thursday June 16<sup>th</sup> and I am at the law offices of Mr. Glennon Threatt in Birmingham, Alabama. Thank you for having me.

GLENNON THREATT: You're welcome.

KH: We are going to be discussing his experience in school desegregation in the Birmingham schools. We are going to start with his elementary school, go through high school and then your general impressions of how desegregation changed Birmingham. Whether you think it was a good change or if there are other goals that needed to be filled.

GT: Well, I went to several elementary schools. My mother was a ( ) elementary school teacher, she was a physical education teacher at McCaw Elementary School. At the time, if you were a teacher you could bring your children to school when they were five. So, my mother took me to school with her and I started at McCaw Elementary in the Pratt City area of Birmingham when I was five years old. That was probably 1962, it was September of 1962. I went to McCaw for first grade. About half way through the first grade they skipped me to the second grade because I could already read. Then I went to the third grade the following year. I stayed at McCaw and finished third grade there. In fourth grade I went to Wilkerson School, which is over in between College Hills and East Thomas. Again, these are both all black schools at the time. While at Wilkerson in the fourth grade I got tested by a woman named Dr. Alexenia Young-Baldwin, who was an enrichment teacher. She is a Ph.D now, as a matter of fact,

professor emeritus at the University of New York. She is a whirlwind authority on gifted children's education. There was a push to desegregate not only the regular elementary schools but also special education, which was for people who were physically handicapped or challenged, special needs and also gifted and talented and musically inclined. So, she tested a large number of black fourth graders in Birmingham and out of the group that had the highest scores they put together an enrichment class to go to Washington Elementary School, which is where I went in fifth grade. While I was at Washington Elementary School something happened in the case apparently, and they selected three of us from that all black enrichment class to go and integrate an all white enrichment class at Elyton School. So, I would have been in fifth grade then so that would have been in October, November or December of 1967. I went to that class and I stayed there and finished eighth grade at Elyton. There were only three of us that were in that class. We had one teacher the entire day, one by the name of Meta Ayers, who is still alive in the Birmingham area. After I finished there, I went to Indian Springs Preparatory School as a boarding student. I boarded there for all four years. When I graduated from there I was the third black graduate of Indian Springs. I got a scholarship to go to Princeton University, and I finished Princeton in 1978 with a degree in Political Science. Then I went to Howard University School of Law that fall and graduated from there with my Jurist Doctorate in 1981. So, that is the background of my education.

KH: So you started out as a gifted student very young.

GT: I did, but I was just fortunate. Both my parents were teachers, and both of them read a lot. My father was a voracious reader; he used to read two or three newspapers. It was actually interesting, because at the time with what was going on with

the civil rights movement, you had to read newspapers from outside of the state because Birmingham news wasn't reporting a lot of the stuff that was going on. So my father used to read -- there was a black newspaper out of Cleveland, I think it was *The Chicago Defender* perhaps, but it was a black newspaper that was giving a lot of very, very good coverage on the civil rights movement. My father used to have to read that newspaper to find out what was going on here. There were two black newspapers in Birmingham at the time, *The Birmingham World* and *The Birmingham Times*. *The Birmingham World* is no longer in existence; *The Birmingham Times* is still here now. They were really more as I remember them kind of events and gossip related newspapers and not really that focused on hard news. So it was a very different environment for journalists even to have access to things that were going on, because a lot of the stuff that was happening here people didn't really want it to be recorded.

KH: Or they were under pressure not to record it.

GT: Sure, sure. [phone rings]

GT: My fourth grade teacher in the all black school had a Ph D., in elementary education. One of the things that was strange about the desegregation in the public schools in Birmingham was because what they did in many instances was they took the best, most qualified, most well trained teachers from the all black schools and put them in white schools and then they replaced them with white teachers that were right out of college. And so, it diluted the talent and experience pool in the black schools. Also, the first children that began to integrate the formerly all white schools were the children of lawyers, the children of doctors and teachers. They tended to be as a group, better students, certainly more economically advantaged than some of the students that were left

in the black schools. So what really has happened in Birmingham as a result of integration is that the black schools have gotten a whole lot worse and the white schools, which were integrated to some degree but not really integrated, have gotten a whole lot better. The disparities in education in my view may be worse now than they were in 1967.

KH: That's a good point to make.

GT: Well, because what you have is a city school system where, although only seventy percent of the population of Birmingham is black, about ninety five percent of the school population is black.

KH: You are talking about currently?

GT: Talking about currently, in the Birmingham schools. Because the white students have fled to suburban schools, and because of the constitutional structure of the state of Alabama we don't have home rule in Birmingham so it is very restricted on the city's ability to put additional funds into education. So, you have run down schools, low paid teachers and then you have extraordinary schools in the suburbs. Therefore, many of the blacks that can afford to move to suburban communities are moving there so they can send their kids to better schools. Just like Dr. Julius Wilson talks about, you have a situation now where many of the role models that used to be in the black community no longer live there. I grew up in a church where there was one black lawyer, a guy named Arthur Shores, who was licensed to practice law in the state of Alabama for I think sixteen or seventeen years. He was the only black lawyer licensed in the state and he went to my church. There were three other black lawyers that went to my church, and that was probably half of the black members of the Birmingham bar. I had several Ph.D.s

that went to my church. I went to The First Congregational Church here in Birmingham. It was really through my church that I ended up going to Indian Springs because what happened was that during the desegregation struggles here, my church was affiliated with a white congregation called the Plymouth Congregational Church in Mountain Brook, which is probably the most affluent community in the state. They started a discussion group called Black and White Together, where white teenagers would come and have church services with us and then we would go and have church services with them and then we would have meetings a couple of evenings a month to talk about things that were going on in our lives. I believe that the solution to bigotry is just for people to get to know each other, because a lot of bigotry is based on ignorance. Many of these kids, the only black people they had known were people that worked in their homes or folks that performed services for them. I had known some white people, but not very many. Until I got an opportunity to meet people there and many of them were talking about the secondary education that they were looking forward to and the colleges they were looking forward to. I started thinking about these kids and I thought these kids aren't any smarter than I am, if they can go to these private schools and if they can go to Princeton and schools like that then I can apply and maybe I can get in too. That was really how I ended up at Princeton, to be honest with you. There was a kid from my school who applied there and didn't get in, and he said that he thought they just weren't taking students from Alabama. I said I don't believe that's true, so I applied and they let me in and gave me a scholarship. It was an interesting time. My first exposure to integration in schools was very, very bad. It was bitter. I was spit on, I got in lots of fights and I got suspended from school twice in the first two weeks for fighting because of racial slurs.

The first month I was in that class none of the white students in the class would speak to me. The first time we had lunch I came and sat down my lunch tray at the table with the other students in my class and every one of them got up and left.

KH: And this was a small class wasn't it?

GT: Yeah, there were twenty-four or twenty-five students in the class. I had never been treated that way before, and so it was very, very difficult for me to adjust to. Even though I was aware of things that were going on, but it was very different dealing with it on a personal basis.

KH: Had you been around white people much before you went to Elyton?

GT: I had, but the relationship that you had with white people then was very, very different than it is now. You could go to stores for instance and shop down town. You couldn't try on clothes. You couldn't eat at the lunch counters. They had black and white bathrooms, colored and white bathrooms. They would usually have a bathroom for white men, a bathroom for white women and then one bathroom for colored. When we would go to movie theatres here you would have to pay in the front and then walk around to the back of the theatre and go up some stairs to sit in the balcony. Sometimes they would have segregated shows where they would have just shows that were only for colored, at the time and then whites would go to the theatre at different times. So, I had been exposed to whites. I had ridden on public transportation and stuff, my parents lived in the city -- oh and the other major exposure that I had to white people was because my dad had a concession stand at Legion Field, which is where the University of Alabama used to play their home football games in the 1960s. So, I had a lot of exposure to white folks then because I used to sell peanuts and popcorn and sodas to them. I started

working there when I was ten or eleven years old. My dad got me a job selling peanuts at the stadium. I had my first jobs when I was ten and eleven years old, so I had exposure to white people that way. [another person speaking interruption] I had always had exposure to whites because of my jobs, because of my dad's involvement -- because my father worked for the Birmingham Housing Authority and also because there were lots of Italians that owned businesses in the black community and we would go there and shop because they would serve us. My first exposure to white people, I guess were to the Italians that were shop owners and business owners in the black community.

KH: So, can you tell me a little more about how the decision was made to move you to Elyton?

GT: Well, what happened was there was a lawsuit. One of the attorneys who was handling the lawsuit was a guy by the name of Demetrius Newton, who is now the Speaker of the House of Representatives for the state of Alabama. They had filed a lawsuit to force the integration of special education. After we had been placed in the all black enrichment class, because that was the way they had tried to fix the problem. What had happened before was that there was gifted education, but it was for white only, but then under separate but equal when blacks complained about it, they decided that what they would do is set up gifted education for all black classes in the all black schools. So, they came around and IQ tested the kids to qualify them to go into that class, I got placed into that class. Then of course the case was resolved because separate but equal is inherently unequal. So, they then allowed some of us to integrate that white class. I learned later from Dr. Baldwin at one of our reunions that they took the three kids in the all black gifted class that had the highest IQ's. It was myself, a woman by the name of

Deidre Newton, who was Demetrius Newton's daughter, and another guy by the name of Richard Walker. Richard is a chemist now and Deidre is a homicide prosecutor in New York, for the Manhattan District Attorney. So they chose the three of us to go to that class and we were placed there in sixth grade.

KH: So the class was twenty-five then.

GT: There were three blacks.

KH: Just three in the whole gifted class of twenty-five students. Then the rest of the school was also all white.

GT: The rest of the school was all white the first year that I went there. That school also had some children that were physically challenged. Polio, other physical disabilities and you started to see some blacks come in in that area also. By the time I was in eighth grade the school was probably fifteen to twenty percent black because it was sitting in the middle of a black community. I used to have to drive past two all white schools to get to my all black school, because I lived in an all black community. The elementary school Graymont, which is now the JCC headquarters, is a beautiful school. It has been restored, it is a beautiful school, but it was all white. After black people started moving -- let me back up and tell you. I lived in an area in Birmingham called Dynamite Hill.

KH: Yeah, I've interviewed a few people from that area.

GT: Well, I lived on Dynamite Hill. We were one of the first black families to move on our block. In fact when I moved into that neighborhood there were still white folks there. I remember living there and white people coming in the neighborhood and vandalizing cars, throwing bricks through people's windows, burning a cross in my

neighbor's yard when I lived on First Street. So, as the complexion of the neighborhood changed -- and interestingly enough, that neighborhood borders Birmingham Southern College which at the time was an all white university. As that neighborhood called College Hills, we referred to it as Dynamite Hill, but it is really now called College Hills, as that neighborhoods' complexion changed then the schools changed too. Because all the white parents that could started taking their kids out of those schools and then [black?] students started replacing them. What would always happen was that once one or two blacks started going to a school then in a few years it became all black, because all the white people who could leave left. That's commonly called white flight. I used to go past two all white schools to get to my black school when I was in fifth grade. One of them was within walking distance of my house. It was sitting right in the middle of an all black neighborhood at that point in time and it was still all white.

KH: Do you have memories of walking to school and walking past groups of white kids?

GT: Oh yeah, we used to have walk battles with them. There was a line of demarcation which was Graymont Avenue, because there also is a very large housing project that's right across the street from Legion Field called Elyton Village. When I was in fifth grade Elyton Village was all white, so we used to have fights and organize rock battles with the white kids from the projects. It was like a little demilitarized zone, which was like Graymont Avenue almost like in Korea.

KH: Or Israel.

GT: Yeah. The whites would stay on their side of Graymont Avenue and we would stay on our side of Graymont Avenue. Then as we started to box them in the

private home owners were able to sell their homes, but the white folks who lived in Elyton, because it was public housing, it was a lot more difficult for them to move. What you were left with were the poorest whites who were still going to Elyton, because all of the whites that lived in private homes left. So you had a lot of the children of black families who had tried to get their kids into integrated schools and we were left in a school where most of the white kids lived in a housing project. It was a bad mix of kids and there were lots of fights and lots of racial related incidents in that elementary school.

KH: Would you like to tell me in more detail about some of the incidents?

GT: Sure. The first day that I was in Elyton School, one of the white kids in the class called Deidre a nigger and pulled her hair. I got in a fight with him; they suspended me from school. I had to stay home three days. Came back to school, my parents talked to me and said, "Listen, you have got to understand you cannot react that way. You can't respond that way, because it's really important. What they are trying to do is get you put out of school so that they can prove that blacks can't behave properly. You have got to understand that there is some social responsibility and you just have to bite your tongue and not say anything, because it's really important that you stay in that school." That was a very, very difficult thing to do because at the time I was like ten years old. I just didn't do very well with people getting up in my face and spitting at me and stuff like that, I didn't take very well to that at all.

KH: Did your parents talk about it in terms of non-violence or the movement?

GT: My father did, my father never told me to let anyone hit me. He never told me to absorb punishment. He said don't hit anyone first. If somebody hits you, you should definitely defend yourself. That's not non-violent. I wouldn't have made it in

non-violent protests, and I never participated in any of them. I would not have been able to let someone hit me. The spitting was one thing and that was bad enough, but the hitting I wouldn't have been able to take that. But I really couldn't take it when Deidre was physically attacked and I didn't take that very well. The other guy, Richard Walker was kind of a pudgy kid and he was very withdrawn and soft spoken and I was the more aggressive of the three. Deidre wore glasses and had pig tails and she was a very, very soft spoken girl -- which is why it's so ironic that she would end up being a homicide prosecutor. I was really the most aggressive of the three and the more outspoken, and ended up kind of being the spokesperson for the three of us. The other thing that was weird about it is that the other students in the school didn't like us anyway, because they referred to us as the gifted kids with a snide sort of thing. Because we got stuff that they didn't get, we got to go on field trips and we had audio visual aides and stuff like that that the other students in the school didn't have. So there was an animosity between the regular students in the school and our gifted class. The other students passed classes, we didn't. We got to go to the youth gymnasium by ourselves; we didn't have to share it with other students in the school. We had access to the library all day long, and the other students in the school didn't have that. We got to go on field trips and have people from the symphony and stuff like that come down and interact with us. I guess the other students were jealous and reasonably so, because they saw us getting resources that they didn't have available to them.

KH: So, you had the threat of them not liking you anyway and then especially because you are black, it would be double --

GT: Sure, sure. Then, because a lot of the white kids in the school were poor. I mean, I remember white kids coming to that school with cardboard in their shoes. It was the first time I had ever seen anybody eat a mayonnaise sandwich. My parents weren't wealthy, but they were both teachers. We owned our own home, we had two cars, we took vacations . . . I didn't think about it at the time, but we had a lot more resources than some of the white students in that school. So, there is always a natural animosity because of that demographic difference. It was very, very strange now that I think back on it. I thought my teacher at the time was a racist and that she didn't like blacks. She was very stern and strict. Later on I found out from talking with her that she had gotten death threats because people told her she should refuse to teach blacks. It just goes to show that perhaps one of the greatest untold stories of the Civil Rights Movement is white people that participated in and did things- because now a lot of the black people who participated in the Civil Rights Movement have been recognized, but many of the whites who gave money and support and stuff like that never got recognized until stuff like the book that Diane McWhorter wrote. Her book really talked a lot about the role of white people in the Civil Rights Movement -- *Carry Me Home*. It's a good book, it's an excellent book, it is the best book. Diane McWhorter is her name; it is absolutely the best book I have read on the Birmingham part of the Civil Rights Movement. Because she was from here and her father was an industrialist who participated in the Citizen's Council that was responsible for maintaining segregation.

KH: Was she working under ground?

GT: No she wasn't. She was a teenager at the time and later on she found out about her father's role. A lot of people misunderstand why we got desegregation in

Birmingham. It wasn't so much because of the protests and stuff like that, it was really because of the boycotts. The white businesses couldn't stand not having black customers. The way Birmingham is, not so much so now because the downtown area has expanded, but where most of the protests were going on at Sixteenth Street Church and Kelly Ingram Park was several blocks away from the white part of downtown. There was a black part of downtown called Fourth Avenue, which is where we shopped. There was only one professional building, the Masonic Temple Building, which is where the black doctors and dentists and lawyers and stuff had their offices all in one building. There were two black movie theatres, The Carver and The Famous, and they were all within a block of each other. So, most of the black businesses were centralized in sort of a four block area. Then you got to the white part of town. The protests didn't spill over into that area because if they did folks would have gone to jail. So they let you march and stuff like that in Kelly Ingram Park for a while until the children started getting involved. That was when they started using fire hoses and dogs and that kind of stuff. It was really when black people stopped shopping at white owned stores that the citizen's council got involved, because they were taking a very, very serious economic hit. Many of the five and dime stores, a large part of their business was black folk. When black people stopped shopping there, it was just like in the bus boycott in Montgomery when black people stopped riding the buses, the buses started going broke. So it was really to some degree for economic reasons that businesses decided to integrate, not because they thought it was the right thing to do...because it had always been the right thing to do.

KH: It just was the pressing thing to do.

GT: Well, and then also again there was a lot of pressure placed on white businesses not to integrate. If you let black people try on clothes then it would get out and you would be ostracized by members of the white community or white people would stop shopping at your store. So there was a lot of social pressure from the white community to force other whites to be racist.

KH: I'm definitely going to take a look at that book.

GT: It's an excellent book. The only other book that I read about the Civil Rights Movement that is as good is John Lewis's book. John Lewis's book is much more personal than Diane's book because John was a member of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (S.N.C.C.) when he was at Fisk University, and he was a Freedom Rider and so he was able to give a first person account of being on the bus when it was set on fire and being beaten at the Edmund Pettis bridge, and Diane never had those experiences. Her book is much more of a historical third person account, whereas John's book is up close and personal. It's a tremendously moving book; it's so powerful that I couldn't even finish reading it.

KH: Too many memories?

GT: Oh man, when you read about the Freedom Riders it's just horrible, what happened to them. I mean it's bad enough to be spit on, but it's another thing altogether to be padlocked in a bus and have it be set on fire.

KH: Yeah, when I saw the bus at the Civil Rights Institute.

GT: That's the bus he's been in! You ought to read his book, it's powerful. He talks about people who were Freedom Riders with him, several of them who are mentally ill now. One of the guys that was with him in S.N.C.C. and was a Freedom Rider with

him got beaten so bad that he is mentally retarded now. It was just horrible what happened, people were disfigured and John was beaten unconscious several times. That never happened to me, I never had to take any beatings by police. I got in fights with other kids, but I never got beat by the police. I got mistreated by police officers a couple of times, but I never got beat with night sticks and I never had any dogs sicced on me. My sister did, as a protester. My sister is ten years older than I am and she snuck out of school to participate in the children's marches.

KH: Did she get sent to jail?

GT: I don't know if she went to jail, she doesn't talk about it very much. A lot of people that were part of that don't talk about it.

KH: Since we just start with the school's desegregating, we really haven't talked with anybody about the children's march. I'd like to in my own time.

GT: You should, the children's march was a powerful, powerful thing. It got so bad that they used Rickwood Field as a holding cell, they used a baseball stadium to hold kids because they ran out of jail space. Conner said that he wasn't going to stop arresting them, so they just started holding them in -- but Diane McWhorter's book talks about all of that in detail.

KH: Sometimes it just still feels overwhelming to think about all of that.

GT: What's overwhelming is that it wasn't that long ago. I'm middle aged, I'm forty-eight years old and I remember this stuff clearly. So, it wasn't that long ago. The city has changed a lot in many ways, and in many ways it hasn't changed. There is no more du jour segregation. The thing that was odd about the south is Jim Crow. There was segregation in other places, but it was more custom than by law. Here for instance, if

a white person had allowed a black to eat at a restaurant he would have gone to jail, not just been ostracized, which is bad enough. He would have gone to jail, and they enforced that here in Birmingham. It wasn't like in some places when it was a wink and a nod, if you went into a white place and tried to order some food they would put you in jail. The police would come and they would put you in jail. The Supreme Court case that dealt with loitering came out of Birmingham. Fred Shuttlesworth was the plaintiff in that case, where they had a municipal ordinance in Birmingham that said no more than four people could congregate, unless they could prove that they were employed. So, they would go anytime there were groups of black people talking and ask everybody to prove that they had jobs. Then what they would do if you proved that you had a job, they would go to your employer and get you fired. That was the same thing that happened at the churches, the police and the clan would take down everybody's tag numbers and run them and find out who you were. When they found out where you worked they would tell them, and your boss would call you in and say, "What were you doing at that meeting?" and then fire you. [another person enters-interruption]

KH: We talked some about the really negative experiences you had in the schools, but I was wondering about how you recovered from that? What comfort did you have when you went back home?

GT: It wasn't anything that -- I don't feel permanently stigmatized by it, not did I feel permanently stigmatized by it at the time. We had a lot of very strong black institutions. I was fortunate to have both of my parents until my father died in 1974, I had an older sister who had done very well in school. She graduated from high school and got a scholarship to Talladega when she was sixteen years old. I have younger sisters

who have done well also. My mom had several sisters and brothers that lived here in Birmingham. I had lots of cousins. I went to a very active and vibrant church and I had lots of friends in my community, so I had a very, very strong support network. To some degree many of those support networks have deteriorated because of integration. The black community had a lot more pressure to be supportive of each other at the time, being supportive of black businesses, being supportive of black churches, because you didn't have any other options -- you couldn't integrate. If you needed a doctor you had to go to a black doctor because a white doctor wouldn't treat you. If you needed a dentist or a lawyer you had to go to black professionals, and so we had a thriving black professional community here. We had a much more thriving black business community in Birmingham before desegregation than we do now. That's not just here, that's a lot of places.

KH: I could tell that by observation, just driving around.

GT: Had it not been for some of the historical efforts that have taken place in the Fourth Avenue area, it would be much more run down than it is now. It had fallen into just a prostitution and drug strip many years ago, until some people that had a sense of the historical impact of that area went in and tried to save it.

KH: I didn't know it had gotten that bad.

GT: It was bad, it was bad.

KH: It wasn't even safe to walk in that area of downtown?

GT: There were prostitutes walking the street, openly.

KH: Can you think of any good experiences at Elyton that you would like to share?

GT: Oh, lots of them. I made some people that I'm friends with. A guy I met in that class named Barry Norris, who I still talk to now. In fact Barry is a nationally recognized organist and teacher, who still lives here in Birmingham. I still consider him to be a personal friend. Some of the other students in that class, in fact three or four of us went to Indian Springs together. Again, the racism that was going on here was governmental and it was being perpetuated by a small part of the white community. A lot of white people didn't agree with it and a lot blacks didn't, but everybody was caught up in it because it was enforced by law. It wasn't just a social compact, it was enforced by law. Also, whites would have been ostracized if they tried to interact with blacks. One of the white girls named Kay Cretcher who went to that school, her father was a liberal. He was one of the first grown men I knew that wore a pony tail. They had a bookstore on the south side here in Birmingham. She was the first girl in the class to befriend Deidre, because at least Richard and I had each other, Deidre was the only black girl. Kay was the first girl in the class to befriend Deidre. I remember the last day of school after the sixth grade, some students grabbed Kay and threw her down on the ground and cut her hair. She had almost waist length hair, and they cut her hair for being Deidre's friend. That was terrible. I still communicate with another guy named Keith Sides who is a Vice President of a local bank who is right across the street from me now, working for AmSouth Bank. I have been in touch with Mrs. Ayers. As a matter of fact I ran into Mrs. Ayers at a shopping mall in 1981, the summer after I graduated law school. I had not seen her, and I recognized her and hugged her and thanked her because she gave us all a tremendous education. She was a marvelous teacher. I told her I was giving the youth sermon at my church, and she told me she would come and she did. She came there and I

introduced her to a lot of people at my church and that was a very moving experience for me. I guess that was in June of 1981, which at that time was eleven years after I had gotten out of her class.

KH: I can tell she was a good teacher, everybody went on to a really good career.

GT: Oh sure, she had some good students too, but she was also a very, very good teacher. It was something being part of integration, because what integration ultimately did, the black people who really benefited from it were the students whose parents did not have the means to send them to private school or the ability or the will to get them into better black public schools. All the black public schools were not the same. You had some black schools that had very, very good teachers and a very active PTA and the level of instruction and the level of learning was much higher than at some of the other black schools. There's going to be a pecking order in anything. My parents were both graduates of Parker High School, which was probably the best black high school in the state of Alabama. In fact at one time it had more students than any other public high school in the United States. When my mother went to Parker the students went in shifts.

KH: I've heard about that.

GT: Two shifts a day. It was called Industrial High School at the time. Both of my parents graduated from Parker. My mother moved to Birmingham because there were no schools beyond the sixth grade for blacks in Sumter County which is where she grew up. My father came in from Sylacauga County for the same reason. So I had some very, very good experiences and I'm not bitter about the relationships that I had with people. I have bitterness because of the institutionalization of the racism, and the fact that from a governmental standpoint we didn't do anything about it sooner. You can't

change the way people relate to each other, you can't legislate decency. But you can legislate things like fair spending for public schools, like public accommodations and public transportation. Services like sewer and gutter and trash pick ups were always worse in the black areas than they were in the white areas. The police protection and the fire protection were always worse in the black areas than it was in the white areas. Those are the sorts of things that I am bitter about because the government should have done something about that. That was wrong. My parents worked and they paid taxes, they paid the same taxes that any white person paid that made the same amount of money, and so their access to governmental services should have been the same . . . and it wasn't.

KH: Do you think that the discrepancy was worse in terms of residential or in terms of keeping up the schools?

GT: The residential discrepancies changed immediately, because once black people started moving into white neighborhoods the white folks left. A black person would move onto a block and all the white people would have for sale signs in their yard. Before then there were unspoken agreements from real estate agents not to even show houses in certain areas to blacks. So, that was the way that they really controlled it. Or, if you went to a bank for financing they wouldn't finance you if you were trying to buy in a certain area. That was the way that it was controlled. The city of Birmingham was residentially integrated long before it was institutionally integrated. When you look at things like the police department and the fire department and the opportunity for blacks to work as county employees for instance, that lagged way behind the residential integration. In fact now, in many of our institutions like county government for instance, the majority of the employees are white. In city government there is a disproportionate

number of whites compared to the population, not that there should be a direct correlation or that I'm saying there should be quotas, but it should be representative and it's not.

KH: So what effect does this have on people besides just the practical things of not having reliable services in their homes, does it have some kind of psychological effect?

GT: What it did is it caused a lot of people to move. It was why I left, because I thought that I didn't have a future here. When I left to go to college, I told my mother I am never coming back here. I'm never coming back, this is a racist place, I don't think I have any opportunities here, I'm not going to be able to succeed in the good old boy network because I will never be a good old boy because I'm black...and I'm never coming back here. Many of my mother's friends, many of my parent's friends left. They left and they went to Chicago, they went to Cleveland and they went to Detroit. My mother's best friend and my God parents, moved to Detroit because they had Master's degrees and they were making less than white teachers that did not have Master's. When my mother went to teach at West End High School, she had a Master's degree and she was working as a subordinate to a white coach that did not even have a college degree, and making less money. We have judges in the state of Alabama that are not even lawyers. In some rural communities, you can be a probate judge without even being a lawyer in the state of Alabama. I still practice now in a lot of rural communities and when you go out to these rural communities you find that a lot of things haven't changed. They're still basically segregated, it's not Jim Crow du jour segregation but it's still segregated in fact.

KH: So on the books the color of your skin matters more than education, or they just don't even factor education in to the job requirements?

GT: What happens is that black people here used education as a means of escaping. They just didn't see equivalent opportunities here. I'll give you a perfect example, many of the black lawyers that I know that went to law school prior to 1970 -- they didn't want to integrate the University of Alabama Law School, so they would pay for you to go to law school out of state. They'd pay your tuition, they'd pay your room and board, they'd pay for your housing and they'd pay for your books. The only other option was to have a black law school. If you wanted to go to medical school and you applied to the University of Alabama, they would pay for you to go to Meharry or some other black medical school rather than to have to set up a black state medical school. Up until the time that the University of Alabama Law School was integrated, if you graduated from the University of Alabama you didn't have to take the bar, you were automatically admitted. When it integrated that changed. That's a tremendous thing, because a lot of folks never pass the bar.

KH: Hmmm. These are things I have never heard about before, changing standards as soon as integration happened.

GT: Oh, sure. Well, they moved the fence. It was exactly the same thing with the voting rights act cases, where you would come in and you would have to take a citizenship test in order to vote. They didn't make white folks do that. They had black folks coming in there, many of whom were relatively uneducated and many instances some of them were illiterate and they would ask detailed questions about the constitution that even a law professor can't answer. Then they would use that as a means of exclusion

when they didn't know enough about the constitution. When that didn't work, they just put guys up there with baseball bats...which usually worked. It's one thing that makes me so angry now, about black people that don't vote. If they realized what we went through to get to vote, they would realize that it's an insult to all the people that got beat down, shot, lynched and they just can't get up off their asses to go vote. There is no excuse for it. There is absolutely no excuse for it, and I just don't understand it. We have elections here and a high turn out might be thirty-eight percent.

KH: The national turnout is like just shy of fifty percent.

GT: Yeah but in Alabama the black people should be one hundred percent. Many of the people who are old enough to vote are old enough to remember what happened.

KH: That's true.

GT: And if you remember what it was like here before 1965 there is no excuse for you not voting.

KH: Maybe they still have that sense that their votes won't change the government that has been so unresponsive before.

GT: Well, apathy has settled in and I go back to Dr. Wilson's theories. Even though I don't agree with a lot of things that he says, I thought this was just so much on point. He talked about what happened during segregation, he said you had a much more cohesive black community where you had black professionals and black people of wealth living in the same communities as black people who didn't have wealth or education. So they had role models in their community. Now what has happened to a large degree is that-- my wife and I for instance live in Vestavia. We're the only black couple on our

block. I'm not the only lawyer and my wife is not the only architect on our block. So, it's much more class related than it was racially related. Now, not only are you left with a predominantly black inner city, but it's also predominantly poor. So poor people, not always, but they tend to be less educated. If you are less educated and poor, there is a higher likelihood that your children will be less educated and poor. And then the ones who get educated and are not poor leave, because they can.

KH: They assume the opportunities are somewhere else.

GT: Well they are, they want the American dream and they don't want to be trapped in an inner city where the crime is going up and the social services are deteriorating. We got black mayors in a lot of black cities because the white folks left, not because we out voted them, they left. So there is a lot of political animosity between the city of Birmingham and the surrounding communities and it's destroying our communities. One of the reasons that we can't progress is that we don't have any regional cooperation for things like transportation. Whenever we try to get regional transportation it is perceived as being an opportunity for blacks to get to the suburbs and they vote against it. We had a voter sponsored initiative here in the spring of 1998 right after my wife and I moved here, called MAPS-metropolitan area progress or something like that, I forget what the acronym was...the money was to be used for regional transportation and having entertainment being in downtown. People voted it down. The people in the city, which was seventy percent black overwhelmingly supported it. The people in the suburbs were opposed to it.

KH: Do the suburbs always tend to swing the votes here?

GT: Absolutely. Up until a few years ago, we had never had a black elected to county wide office. Chris McNair, who's the father of one of the four little girls that got killed in the Sixteenth Street Church was the first black elected to county wide office in Alabama. In the 1980's before we had a black elected to state wide office, post reconstruction.

KH: I guess that's because more people were voting then. [END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

GT: If you were an educated black person in the early 1960s here, it was just a tremendous push to leave. What were you going to do? The only thing you could do was teach, cut hair, or try to open a little business. A lot of things that are available to us now, professions like fire, police, public safety, and law enforcement were not open to blacks. There wasn't going to be a black policeman under Bull Conner. The fire department was the same way. County government, which is one of the largest employers in the state, that wasn't here. The steel plants, you could work there but you were basically restricted to being laborers. So, if you were some parents and your kids got a college degree, why would you want them to stay here? There was nothing for them to do unless they wanted to teach.

KH: How early did you decide you were going to leave?

GT: Probably when I was about nine. Well, I wasn't going to go to the University of Alabama. I had bad experiences with them working at those football games. When the University of Mississippi, Ole Miss used to come here to play there band used to play Dixie at half time and they would wave confederate flags. That was accepted, and I was like I'm getting the hell out of here as soon as I can. So, I got a chance to go to Princeton. When I went to Princeton I got an opportunity to meet black people from more progressive areas of the country and it made me realize that I wasn't ready to come back here. I changed a lot and the city changed a lot, and it was the combination of those two transformations that allowed me to be able to live here. I stayed away from Birmingham for -- I left in 1974, and I moved back in 1997.

KH: And now you feel like you're ready to be back?

GT: Oh yeah. The city has changed a lot. I mean, we still have a lot of work to do but it has changed a lot. We have a black mayor, we've had black mayors for the past twenty years. We have a black fire chief, a black police chief, and several black owned businesses. I would have never thought that I would have the opportunity to be an adjunct professor at the University of Alabama, I mean when I grew up they didn't even have black students. I'm an adjunct professor on their faculty now, and so things have changed a lot in a relatively short period of time. From a historical standpoint, about half of my life, but from a historical standpoint twenty-five years is not very long.

KH: That's part of why we do these projects, because people will think it's long and then they'll think that they don't need to know about how things were -- [person speaking interrupts conversation] back when schools were desegregated because that can't possibly apply anymore.

GT: You absolutely need to know it. Not just from the standpoint of being informed, but it allows you to understand the institutions that still survive. I was reading a story recently in the Wall Street Journal about how Morgan Stanley and several other investment banks found out that they got started because of investments in slaves. So you have institutions that have institutional wealth still in this day that is the result of slavery. Not just the exploitation of labor, but slavery.

KH: Clear profits from slavery?

GT: Sure. Buying and selling of slaves. You had people that owned land and businesses here -- if you ever want to read some interesting stuff about Alabama, you ought to read about convict labor. That will blow your mind, because what happened was that the mines more so than anything else, to some degree the steel mills, but the

mines used to have arrangements with the Alabama Department of Corrections to get prisoners to work in the mines for free.

KH: I've heard some stories about it.

GT: Horrible. Horrible, people were dying. Not only were they not getting paid, but they were dying in these mines. If the mines needed additional work they would just go round up some brothers and put them in jail on some trumped up charges, then let them go work in the mines until their need for work went down. Then they would let them out. That was worse than slavery because at least slaves were given a place to live.

KH: Yeah, these guys were just worked like animals.

GT: Uh huh, they were worked like animals and they were in jail for completely trumped up charges. It's horrible, it is one of the worst black eyes in the history of this state. In my view it is even worse than the fire hoses, it is worse than the police dogs, nothing is worse than bombing of churches, but it is second to that. That a state agency would incarcerate people who were innocent just so they could work for free in coal mines.

KH: There was a little exhibit about that up in Vulcan that I saw on Monday, but yeah, just the tip of the iceberg.

GT: And then you have the same companies who benefited from that, like the McWanes for instance, that are still polluting in the black community. They just got convicted of it last week. For spewing polluted water into Village Creek, this is a waterway that runs right down the middle of the black community in Birmingham. They would have never done that in Vestavia.

KH: Yeah, because they would have gotten caught.

GT: Sure.

KH: Let's talk a bit about Indian Springs.

GT: Indian Springs [High School] was an unusual place, it was started in 1957 by a guy named Harvey Woodward, who owned Woodward Coal and Iron. He gave I think it was seventeen million dollars which was back when a million dollars was really still a million dollars. They bought seven hundred acres of land down in Shelby County and it was set up as a trust. All the students in the school had to be white Anglo-Saxon Protestants from below the Mason-Dixon line and all the teachers in the school had to be white Anglo-Saxon Protestants from above the Mason-Dixon line. All the teachers had to live on campus. At the time it was an all boarding school and the students were required to work, they had a farm and horses and all that stuff back in the 1950's. They had a circulating board of directors of I think seven or eight, wherever the number was, the members would go off in staggered terms so that they'd allow them to re-elect each other so that it was a constantly cycled group of people. It required a unanimous vote of the board to desegregate the school. So I think it was 1968 when they got their first Catholic and Jewish students, and then in 1969 they got their first black students. It's a beautiful campus, at the time it was in the country, but now it's on 119 which is a pretty well developed area. On the back side of it is Oak Mountain State Park. I went there on scholarship. I met the coach, and one of the teachers there went to Pilgrim Congregational Church. I met them through the Black and White Together Group that I was with in my church. They met me and they talked to my parents and in fact Coach Fred Cameron developed a friendship with my father because my dad was also a high school coach. Coach Cameron was a basketball coach down there, and so they became

friends and talked and he asked my parents to let me take the P.S.A.T., the preliminary school admissions test, or whatever it was -- it's the test you take to go to private high schools. I took that test and scored in the ninety-seven percentiles nationally. As a result of that test, I got contacted from prep schools all over the country -- Andover and Choate and Exeter and all those schools. I went down to Indian Springs and I got the opportunity and my parents got the opportunity to meet Dr. Armstrong, who was the headmaster at the time. They talked to us about the background of the school and that they really wanted some black students to integrate that school. In fact, the second black graduate of Indian Springs is a Professor at University of North Carolina. His name is Julius Scott.

KH: I don't think I have met him.

GT: Julius Sherrod Scott. I think he's an English Professor, if he isn't there he left in the last three or four years.

KH: I'll look him up when I get back.

GT: Yep, we called him Scotty Scott. He graduated from Indian Springs in 1973. The other black graduate that year was a guy by the name of James Montgomery, who is now a tax lawyer in Washington. The third black graduate was a guy named Arthur Gaines, who is now in prison for murder down in Texas. He went in the military, went to Rice, and went in the military in ROTC. He killed his wife in a domestic related dispute, got on an airplane, confessed it to the stewardess and they turned the plane around and flew him back -- he was trying to leave the country -- they turned the plane around and he surrendered himself at the airport. He's been in prison since then.

KH: That's awful.

GT: It is awful. It is awful, because he is a very, very bright guy. He only went there for two years. He came there from Woodberry Forest, which is a very exclusive prep school in Virginia. I liked Indian Springs, it changed my life. It really did.

KH: You heard about it from the teenagers in the church program, but when you took the P.S.A.T. did you feel any interest in going to any of those other prep schools?

GT: I did, but my parents were not inclined to let me go out of state. When I went down to Indian Springs I fell in love with it, because it's just a beautiful campus. They have lakes and beavers and deer and we used to fish and hunt doves on the school grounds and stuff like --it was like moving to summer camp. Also, I was away from home and I enjoyed boarding but I was close enough to come home on weekends if I wanted to. It was only twenty five or thirty miles away. My parents were very comfortable with it and my parents were also very comfortable with the school because they knew the Camerons. They had known them, not just individually, but collectively through church and for a number of years. They knew them the entire three years that I was at Elyton. The other thing that was a strong factor for me going there was that three other guys that were in my eighth grade class went there.

KH: Yeah, you mentioned that before. So, you had all talked about going there?

GT: Sure, and we had been down there to visit and they brought us down there for interviews. I used to love to sing, and they had a nationally renowned glee club. Our glee club went to Europe when I was in my junior year. They had gone to Russia the year before I came there. We participated in a national choral competition and won first place in Kansas City when I was a sophomore. We went to New York my freshman year to sing. We sang with the Vienna Boys Choir when we were in Vienna.

KH: Wow. Was that your first time out of the country?

GT: Oh yeah. That was my first time on an airplane. The first airplane flight I took was from Atlanta to Frankfurt, that was my first time on an airplane.

KH: You got the really, really long one for your first time.

GT: Yeah, that was a long flight.

KH: It must've been kind of scary.

GT: Yeah, I remember my mother giving me money and putting it in a handkerchief and pinning it to the inside of my pants.

KH: Yeah, my parents gave me those kinds of tips too.

GT: [Laughs] I loved Indian Springs and I got a tremendous education there. When I got to Princeton and got an opportunity to be in classes and stuff like that with students that had gone to these more well known and more prestigious prep schools, I never felt that I met anybody that had a better high school education.

KH: And you are still on the board?

GT: Yeah, I'm on the alumni council there. I actively help them to try and recruit and raise money. I helped in the selection of the new headmaster, which was a tremendous find for the school. It's a great, great school.

KH: When you got there, did you hang out with the other guys from your school?

GT: To some degree I did, but those guys...I was really into athletics when I was at Indian Springs, I played basketball, soccer and ran track. Also, I had a black roommate who was from Houston, Texas, who is now a Chemist also, living in Houston. He and I developed a real close friendship because he was a long way from home. So when I would come home on weekends he would come with me so that he could go to church

and get his hair cut. We developed a real strong friendship. There was another guy that went to Indian Springs with me, whose brother finished Princeton with my wife. In fact, she saw him two weeks ago when she was up at Princeton for her twenty-fifth reunion. It's just really interesting how you don't think about it at the time, but that the schools you decide to go to are some of the most fundamental decisions that you ever make in your life. If I had not gone to Princeton I wouldn't have either of my daughters right now, because I met both of my wives through Princeton.

KH: It seems like you keep in touch a lot.

GT: Oh yeah, I talk to people that I went to Princeton with almost everyday. Well, now particularly because I have my friends who went to Princeton and my wife has her friends that went to Princeton. My daughter's godmother is a Princeton graduate; my best man was a Princeton graduate. I talk to a lot of people that I went to school with.

KH: Are you going to be sending your daughters to Princeton?

GT: If that's where she wants to go. If she is fortunate to get in, it's a lot harder to get in now than when I went there and it's certainly more expensive -- it's about forty-three thousand dollars a year to go to Princeton. So, even if they gave you a thirty thousand dollar a year scholarship, it would still be expensive.

KH: Yeah, I've only been there once. I didn't apply there for college, it was a lovely place.

GT: It's beautiful, in the middle of a black community.

KH: I didn't walk around enough.

GT: There was a community of flags at the stoops. Yeah, Princeton is the second oldest school in the United States. The College of William and Mary may be the only one that is older. It was a colonial college.

KH: Yeah, I did know that, I didn't know it was a community of slaves.

GT: Oh yeah, even if you go in some of the dorms there now people used to have servants at Princeton. Some of the dorm rooms are set up for a student and their servant.

KH: I think I could tell that when I was staying there.

GT: Paul Robeson is from Princeton and applied to Princeton and they wouldn't let him in.

KH: Just because he was black?

GT: Yeah. I mean the guy was an operatic singer, he was an actor, he was extraordinarily bright, he was an all American athlete and he was from Princeton -- his dad worked on the campus and they wouldn't let him in.

KH: Yeah, I'm glad those times have changed.

GT: Yeah, they have. I was actively involved in the anti-apartheid movement when I was at Princeton. They had lots of money invested in South Africa. I almost got expelled from school for protesting, we took over the administration building at the school my senior year.

KH: What year was that?

GT: 1977, it was the fall of 1977. I graduated in June of 1978, I almost got put out of school.

KH: Did you talk them out of it somehow or did they just change their minds?

GT: No, the school just decided to put the people on academic probation instead of expelling them.

KH: We could talk some about your experiences while you were attending Indian Springs, but I have really wanted to ask you about your role on the alumni board at Indian Springs. Have you been involved in planning reunions?

GT: I've been involved in that, I've been involved in recruitment, we talk about curriculum, we do fundraising of course and for the last year I have been the only black member of the board for the alumni council. It's difficult for a school that costs seventeen thousand dollars for day school, to recruit black students. The black students who can afford to go there can get in usually and are academically qualified to go there. That's the other thing, not only do you have to have the money to go there, but you got to be smart. So if you're a black kid who's smart enough and your parents have enough money to send you there, then they can also send you to fine arts, they can send you to Altamont which is in the city, they can send you to the Alabama High School of Math and Science -- which is free, they can send you to the honors program at John Carroll which is about half that price. Or you have options to go out of state to school, so what has happened now is that in the 1960s and 1970s the white institutions were getting poor blacks from inner cities to integrate their schools, but now they are getting black kids that have the same educational background as the white students that go there. The black students that go to Indian Springs now, usually went to private school all the way through elementary school. They were not like me. They're much more like the white students who go to Indian Springs, the only difference is race. Their background is very, very similar. Their parents have the same types of jobs, they earn the same income strata and

they live in the same communities. Typical black student at Indian Springs now, their parents are doctors or lawyers, they live in Vestavia or Mountain Brook; it's not like it was. When I went there they were finding black kids from the inner city and bringing them there because -- some of the first black students that came to Indian Springs were part of the A Better Chance program. Now they do have some Oprah Winfrey scholars there now, which is a very, very good thing. I think they have three Oprah Winfrey scholars who are at Indian Springs. Oprah Winfrey has a scholarship program that sends inner city kids to boarding schools, and three of the black students that are at Indian Springs are Oprah Winfrey scholars.

KH: Are they gifted students?

GT: Yeah, Yeah, Indian Springs is real, real high academics. It's a tough school to get in and it's even harder to stay. When you look at their graduates, they typically have graduating classes with forty students and three or four Ivy Leaguers and several people go on to the honors program at Vanderbilt, Emory, Swanee, William and Mary -- you know good Southern liberal arts schools. They have a very, very illustrious set of schools that the graduates of that school go to. I'm proud to be a member of their alumni council, because I think, and I believe this to be true, that I'm part of the council not just because I'm black, but because they believe that I have something to contribute. Nobody wants to be part of a group just because of your race.

KH: Do you find that the reunions are attended well?

GT: Yeah, we had my thirtieth reunion in 2004. One of my classmates is the publisher of *The Birmingham News* and he lives in like a three million dollar estate out in

Mountain Brook. We had the largest graduating class in the history of the school, I think we had fifty four graduates, and we had over forty people to come to the reunion.

KH: That is, everybody's still left with a very positive impression?

GT: We had a guy come here from France, who was living in France to come back for our reunion. Several people came from the west coast, a couple people from Massachusetts, Vermont and New England area. We had a classmate of mine that came back here from France.

KH: Why was your class the largest graduating class?

GT: We were the last class before the school was coeducational. The year after I left they admitted women. A lot of people didn't want to go there anymore. I opposed coeducation at the time. It ended up being better for the school in the long run, but in the short term it cut the enrollment.

KH: Why did you oppose it?

GT: Because I thought that it would fundamentally change the school.

KH: What would be the changes?

GT: Well, when you have same sex education you don't have a lot of the pressures that are negative in coeducation. The guys are not competing for female attention. I've read several studies that show that girls that go to same sex education tend to do better in technical fields in math and engineering. Up until about the fifth grade level girls and boys achieve similarly in math and science, and then at that point which is right around puberty, it starts to change. Guys become more aggressive, they speak out more in class and girls become less inclined to be involved in the competitive fields, so they go into softer social sciences. That's why you hear some of the goofy comments

like the ones that were made by the President of Harvard, where he was talking about that perhaps there was some genetic disparity between men and women that made men more suited towards engineering and technical related fields. Which I think is just stupid, it almost reminds me of Richard Shockley's opinions having to do with race. It's just sad, real, real sad. It did change the school; we used to go to class in our pajamas.

KH: And when the girls came?

GT: Oh, no, no you couldn't do that. Guys started dressing for them it was just completely different, the environment. Even when it was all boys, there were girls out there every weekend because all the girls used to come out there because the kids of the wealthiest families in Birmingham went to school out there. So, we used to have dances. We had a sister school called Brookhill, which is actually where Deidre went to high school, Deidre Newton. We used to have a lot of combined social activities with them. I liked it, I liked living on campus. Brookhill is no longer in existence, it merged with a school called Birmingham University School to become Altamont. Unless I'm mistaken Deidre was the first black girl to go to Brookhill.

KH: So I guess they recruited her to desegregate their school?

GT: Well, again it was a natural extension from where we were. I think there was another white girl in our class at Elyton that went to Brookhill. Once we got put in the white enrichment, gifted class then we were exposed to the opportunities that the white kids had been exposed to all along. It wasn't so much that Indian Springs didn't want black students, they had the problem with the trust, but they didn't know any black students and didn't have any way of identifying them. It was an unusual thing for students at an all black high school to take the P.S.A.T.

KH: So your group was really the first, you were the first ones to get exposed to that whole area of Birmingham's education.

GT: Sure, sure.

KH: So, after that did a lot more gifted black students start going to these schools?

GT: Well, they did. The other thing that happened was that they started other gifted programs and then they eventually started magnet schools. So, you had the School of Fine Arts and Ramsey was called an alternative school, but they had an admission exam. So that was one way of letting the higher achieving academic black students to get to go to a public school where they had programs that were specifically designed for them. The problem, and it was the reason that I got skipped, if you were a black kid that was high achieving they didn't have any programs for you. When I was in the third grade I made straight As and an F in conduct.

KH: An F in conduct?

GT: Yeah because I was talking all the time, I was bored. They didn't have any thing there to challenge me because the teacher had twenty seven other students to teach. If you have one or two gifted kids, you can't teach them and you really don't need to teach them because they are going to get it on their own.

KH: They could have almost put you in special education just because they didn't know what you needed, so they would think you were just troublesome.

GT: Yeah.

KH: I wonder how many more gifted programs the board of education started.

GT: I know there was one at Lincoln Elementary, because a friend of mine was in that class and they were a year behind us. I also knew the woman who taught that class, because she was in my school, she is dead now. Her name was Charlotte Haywood. It seems like there were a handful more.

KH: Do you think Indian Springs was the best school that you went to out of all of them?

GT: I can't say that, because Princeton might be the best educational institution in the world, if it's not it is in the top five or ten. It would be very, very difficult for me to say that any school is better than Princeton, but from the standpoint of high schools in the south I absolutely believe that Indian Springs was the best high school in the southeast of the United States at the time...and may still be today. But it is the best high school for a certain type of kid, it is not for all children. If need a highly structured environment then Indian Springs is not the school for you.

KH: It sounds like it was run sort of like a college.

GT: It was, it was based on the Summer Hill philosophy of learning.

KH: So you had a lot of free range to come and go to your classes?

GT: Absolutely we did. We had humanities classes in the ninth grade.

KH: Did you have humanities classes before you went to Indian Springs?

GT: No, I didn't even know what humanities were. I took Latin in the ninth grade, in the eleventh grade, I took French in the ninth and tenth and then Latin in the eleventh. They had a Latin program for forty years, in fact my Latin teacher still teaches Latin there now. Again, you didn't have other options. You didn't have the Jefferson County International Baccalaureate School, you didn't have The Alabama High School of

Math and Science in Mobile, you didn't have The Alabama High School of Fine Arts, Ramsey was not an alternative school it was just a regular white high school and John Carroll was not as challenging academically then. John Carroll High School wasn't even on the Bruno campus, they were still over here in Southside back in 1970 when I started at Indian Springs.

KH: How did it feel to be that kind of trail blazer?

GT: It was a relief to have left Elyton, because Indian Springs was a whole lot more collegial type of an environment, the people were a whole lot friendlier to me there than they were at Elyton. At Elyton, after the first year or two, I made friends with the other people in my class, but I still didn't make friends with the other people in the school. When I was at Indian Springs, everybody in the school was all together. I was also in Glee Club and we had ninety students in Glee Club out of a school that had a population of two hundred. The people in the Glee Club were very close because we practiced five days a week.

KH: So when you graduated there you automatically had a lot of friends.

GT: Oh sure. You also traveled with them on tours, because we did a fall and spring tour. We went to Europe together, we went to New York and Kansas City, and we went all over the place. It was a very, very cohesive and closely knit organization because we spent so much time together.

KH: Were you still spending time with friends that you made while living in College Hills?

GT: No. No. No, one guy from my neighborhood went to Indian Springs with me, but he only stayed a year. He was my best friend, he's dead now. The other people I

never even saw. As a matter of fact, it made it very difficult for me to date because I was at a predominantly white all boys' boarding school, so I didn't know any black girls. So my mother got me involved in some black social organizations so I could meet black girls my age.

KH: Did you end up dating some of them?

GT: I did.

KH: We like to ask about interracial dating, did you see any going on at Indian Springs?

GT: Oh hell no [laughs] No! No man, if that would have happened at Indian Springs, you would have gotten a beat down. They wouldn't have --

KH: Really?

GT: No, no that wasn't accepted. Also, you got to remember at the end of the 1960's it wouldn't have been so much the white folks, but other black people would have ostracized you for dating outside your race. When I went to Princeton it was at the end of the revolutionary movement, the black students were still wearing army fatigues and carrying Chairman Mao's quotations around. It was very, very different. We were at sort of the tail end of the revolutionary movement because of the takeovers at Columbia and other schools like that, so interracial dating was not acceptable. You started to see it more my senior year at Princeton and now it's very common, not just at Princeton or Indian Springs, but in public schools as well. It did not go on, it just wasn't accepted.

KH: On either side?

GT: No, no, no. If a black guy had gone out with a white girl and another black girl found out about it, they would have never dated you.

KH: Did you have any sense that the administration at either school was putting some kind of racial --

GT: None at all, we weren't dating when we were at Elyton because I was only thirteen when I got out of there, but at Indian Springs there was no pressure from the administration there. It was a very, very liberal environment, but it just wasn't something that was socially acceptable.

KH: Even on things besides dating like maybe befriending other white students?

GT: Oh sure, I went home to visit some of the kids that went to school with me. I was friends with them and still am to this day. As to whether or not I would have dated their sister? No. I had one bad experience involving interracial dating in Indian Springs. We had gone to Martinsville, Virginia to sing in a high school there, it was an all white school. I met some girls there that were in their choir. They put us up, when we would travel to these different places the communities where we would sing, either the churches or the schools would try and get parents to house us so that we wouldn't have to get hotels. We stayed with some family there in Martinsville, Virginia and I met a girl from that high school who was in their choir who was white, and we talked and stuff. Then their choir came down here the next year to sing in Birmingham and we hosted them at Indian Springs. We started talking, I mean we couldn't really date because we were living in different states. I remember one of the guys in the choir telling me that -- and I had considered him to be my friend until this incident, he thought that it was a bad idea for me to be talking to her. I was really, really surprised by that because I thought he was cool and I did not expect him to have that reaction.

KH: Just because you talked to her too often?

GT: Well, he saw me with her when they came to our campus. She was a very attractive girl, and he remembered her.

KH: So after that you didn't talk much with him anymore?

GT: No, no, sure didn't. Haven't really spoken to him since that happened and that's been thirty five years ago now. Yeah, some things don't change. The acceptability of . . . I'll give you an interesting statistic. The last statistic that I saw on interracial marriages in the United States, ninety percent of them the man was black. So when it becomes really accepted, then it will be relatively even. It won't be black men dating white women, it'll be black people dating white people and marrying white people.

KH: You know, we're not there yet.

GT: No we're not there yet. There are certain cities in the United States that are more favorable for interracial relationships and people know that and they move there. I have a couple of friends that are an interracial couple, they moved to Seattle from Texas because they are more accepted there. Denver is a city where interracial couples are accepted, so a lot of people that date or married interracially move there for that reason. The thing about interracial dating is that when you have kids, your kids really catch it. I have a real good friend here in Birmingham, who is a woman who is the product of an interracial marriage. She caught hell growing up, because she grew up in South Central Los Angeles and her mother was the only white person that she said lived in Compton. She went to three or four high schools because of the problems that she had being accepted. She was neither white nor black, and I can imagine what it must have been like growing up in South Central Los Angeles in the late 1960's and early 1970's, with a black daddy and blue eyes.

KH: Yeah, could be kind of tough growing up in South Central any way. Did anybody do things that surprised you favorably? Like you thought they might be racist?

GT: Not really at Indian Springs. I talked to you about the experience at Elyton with my teacher, but I didn't even find that out until years later. Indian Springs was a very, very different environment because it was so controlled. There were eighty students that lived on campus, we lived in the dorms, and we had teachers that lived in the dorm circle. We used to go over to there house to study after school. Like I said, we wore pajamas to class, so it was a very, very unrealistic environment.

KH: How much connection and relationship do you think it takes for people to not have to worry about prejudice?

GT: I think it needs to be more than just school. I think it needs to be through religious institutions and through other social related organizations, because socially to a much greater degree than we are in schools . . . because schools can be controlled; you can pass a law that says that schools have to be integrated. You can't pass a law that says a church has to be integrated. The saying is that the most segregated time in Alabama is Sunday morning. So, the overwhelming majority of churches in this state are still all white and all black. You go to some mixed race churches where it will be predominantly white with a few blacks and Asians or Hispanics, or predominantly black with a few whites or Asians or Hispanics. The majority of churches in this state are all white or all black. You can't enforce that, there is no way you can pass a law that says a church has to have white members or has to have black members. Other social organizations; country clubs -- Shoal Creek is a perfect example. When the PGA tour was playing here, people protested it because Shoal Creek was a country club that didn't have any black

members. So they went out and made a guy an honorary member so they could keep the tournament. One of my clients now is the first black paying member of Shoal Creek. He's forty seven years old. I bet still they don't even have ten black members. When you start talking about having access to people in business and stuff like that you need to be able to belong to the Rotary Club and Kiwanis and country clubs and stuff like that. I would dare say there are almost no black members at Mountain Brook Country Club. That's where you get the opportunity to develop the relationships that then translate into business and professional opportunities, and you can never penetrate that if the only interaction you have with people is strictly business.

KH: So in your case, schooling helped you to achieve that.

GT: Sure because I know those folks, because I went to school with them.

KH: What do you think could have been done differently to help people who weren't in gifted programs to have that sort of experience?

GT: Interracial athletics. Up until 1969 I think it was against the law for black and white students to participate in interscholastic high school athletics in this state. They had a black high school football championship, they had black high school championship and they had a white high school football championship and a white high school basketball championship. It was just in either 1968 or 1969 that there was ever a game between two of these segregated schools. It was when Banks High School played Parker, they beat them like fifty five to three, down at Legion Field. Beat the tar out of them. They had better coaches, better facilities and better equipment. The black schools got used books, they got the football helmets the whites had used already, they got the

uniforms, unless the parent's association or booster club raised the money, they got the stuff that the white schools didn't want. [telephone ringing interruption]

GT: With my twenty year old, as she grew older I let her watch "Roots." What I didn't want to do is to convey bitterness because it's difficult to talk about things that have happened to you without sounding bitter. In an hour and a half interview you can get a better sense of me as a person because of all of the things we have talked about, the good and the bad. When your child sees something on television about the 1960s or they see the images of the police dogs and stuff like that and she says, "Daddy didn't you grow up in Birmingham, did anything like that ever happen to you?" It's very difficult to talk to them about that in a balanced manner. It's difficult for a child that grew up in Washington D.C. -- because my older daughter grew up in Washington D.C., it's difficult for her to come here and see the lack of opportunity and the obvious racism and class related segregation that occurs here. My daughter went to Florida A&M, and when she got down there -- Tallahassee is still very segregated; it's like Birmingham, but it's the state capital of Florida. She's twenty now and she's a graduate of college and she understands the balance and she's gone to school there and gone to white private schools and black public schools in her educational history. So she has a balanced understanding of it and it's a lot easier to talk to her now. My five and a half year old is tough sometimes. She's in a summer camp now where she is the only black girl. Last week, she was in another summer camp where there were two blacks there and one of the white girls there wouldn't let her play a little game they were playing. They said, "We don't want to play with you because you're brown." That's difficult to explain to her, and I have to kind of do it because her mother is West Indian. She didn't encounter those

things growing up. She grew up in Guyana and then she moved to Washington D.C. which had the largest black middle class and the most prominent black middle class of any city in the United States. That was where she grew up, so she had a completely unrealistic view of the way black people interact with whites in the United States by moving to DC. She comes from a well-to-do family in Guyana, and Guyana half the people there are East Indian or Portuguese, so they don't discriminate against blacks. They have other people to discriminate against. For my younger daughter who has always gone to predominantly white schools, it's just very, very difficult to explain to her why kids that don't know her don't like her.

KH: Does she have any sense of racial prejudice at all?

GT: I don't know that she sees it as race, she associates it with color. We have people in my family that look like they are East Indian and we have people that are darker than I am, particularly on her mother's side. So, when a child says "you're brown," she doesn't think of that as ethnicity, she thinks of it as discrimination because of skin color. I don't know if I'm being clear about that, but there is a difference. If an African American with a light complexion was there with her she wouldn't expect them to be treated the way she was treated. The thing that was weird about the South was that if you have one drop of black blood you're black. People who have blue eyes and straight hair are black, like in New Orleans. In New Orleans they had quadroons and octoroons. When I talked to my twenty year old about that she said, "They have what?" Yeah, you were mulatto which is half white and half black, you were quadroon which was one black relative, one white relative of your grandparents, you were octoroon -- it's just weird the things we came up with to deal with that stuff.



KH: One black grandparent is quadroon --

GT: Is that quadroon? Because you have four grandparents.

KH: If I have one great grandparent who's black --

GT: Okay, then you are octoroon. That's weird that we came up with these things. In Alabama, if you have one drop of black blood you are black.

KH: Still?

GT: Still. Up until the last census people didn't have the opportunity to put biracial, even the respondents of the census, even on their tax returns. I've had people come in and talk to me complaining that their kids went to school and they had to be either white or black. She's like, my child has one white parent and one Hispanic parent or one black parent and one Hispanic parent, why do they have to put down black? That's like saying they don't have a white parent. I never thought of it as a big deal because to me everybody here that wasn't white was black, because we didn't have any Asians or Hispanics when I was growing up. The first Asian person I met was when I was a junior in high school, it was a Korean kid who came here and went to Indian Springs. His name was Jun Kim, and he was the first Asian that I ever knew personally. I never knew a Hispanic person until I went to Princeton. It was odd to me because the first Hispanic I met was Puerto Rican, and he was as dark as I am with nappy hair. He considered himself to be Hispanic, his name was Sergio Sotamundo, and he looked just like me!

KH: Yes, the census is still trying to figure out how to make that cultural distinction and also make a race distinction.

GT: Hispanic is not an ethnicity, all it means is that you come from a country that speaks Spanish.

KH: It has a cultural --

GT: That's like calling me English, because we speak English here, it doesn't make any sense. A guy that works here is a good friend of mine and he's Puerto Rican, so I asked him what do you call people who are from Guatemala, other than Guatemalan. It seems to me that a Guatemalan doesn't have anything more in common with a person from Madrid than I do with a white person from Fairfield. That just doesn't make any sense. Why are they grouped together? Guatemalans and Hondurans tend to be mestizo, they're more Mayan than they are related to white folks from Madrid. Many of them don't even speak Spanish! That's the thing about it, a lot of the people that are grouped into the Hispanic category don't even speak Spanish.

KH: They have nothing in common.

GT: They don't have anything in common! They speak Indian dialects, or Mexicali is one for instance. I run into that all the time in court because I have a lot of clients now that are not English speaking. Some of them are Spanish speaking and some of them are not, but they are called Hispanic even if they don't speak Spanish.

END OF TAPE

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed August 2005 by Chris O'Sullivan