

MO: Hi, my name is Michael Odman. Code test one two.

MO: Yes, so background information, your name and when you were born.

JM: Joseph Miles and I was born in Troy, Ohio, May 12, 1936. And we moved to Greencastle in 1941. My dad had a job. He was, my dad was born there, but he transferred to Ohio to work in an airplane factory at one point. But then they returned here in 1941. All his family was here.

MO: He came back to take a job, you said? Uh huh. Where was he working and what kind of?

JM: He was working at the Elks Club. He was the manager of the Elks Club here in town. He was a bartender and a manager. And he stayed there until he died in 1961.

MO: At the Elks Club?

JM: Uh huh.

MO: Was this an all African American club?

JM: No, this was strictly all white. But he worked there along with two other black gentlemen at that time. He was a manager and he had one bartender and one guy that was the custodian.

MO: So, where in Putnam County did you live?

JM: Here in Greencastle.

MO: In Greencastle? Does it have a street name?

JM: Yeah, we lived on Illinois Street.

MO: Can you describe your neighborhood at all?

JM: It was a mixed neighborhood. Probably half and half at the time.

MO: Were there any houses or... I'm sorry, was there a school near?

JM: Uh huh.

MO: Probably you went to...

JM: I was five when I got here.

MO: So did you attend elementary school?

JM: I went to Ridpath through the sixth grade. Then junior high was... then the high school was together. So I went from junior high to high school.

MO: At Greencastle High School?

JM: Uh huh.

MO: Was the elementary school and the high school segregated at all?

JM: Uh, no.

MO: The elementary nor the high school?

JM: Uh huh.

MO: Did you feel any kind of segregation in Greencastle in general?

JM: Oh yeah, it was back in the day, yeah it was pretty... I mean, not as school, but more or less in the restaurants and the movie theaters. We had two theaters here, but... Well, yeah, three, but two of them were more or less segregated. And then one of them was fine.

MO: But the school wasn't a problem at the school?

JM: Uh huh.

MO: Did you... so you had a good experience?

JM: Yeah, it was pretty normal, I guess. There weren't that many... there was only two black kids in my class. One girl and myself. And, uh... But I mean, I've known a lot of black people in Greencastle.

MO: Did you participate in any extracurricular activities?

JM: Nope. I started working in the fifth grade. And I sort of worked to help... we had a big family. So I sort of helped to alleviate some of the financial burdens. So I always worked and took care of myself, more or less, from the fifth grade on.

MO: When did you first start working?

JM: I first started working shining shoes after school. And I did that for probably five or six years. And then I worked at... I learned the shoe business. There's a shoe repair and shoe shine. I learned to do that. I also worked at one of the local restaurants. And I worked... I had a part-time job each summer at the university as a little kid model. So I got pretty good money for that.

MO: As a model? For school?

JM: For the art class.

MO: Oh, so they would paint you?

JM: Yeah.

MO: That's neat.

JM: Yeah. And that was about all my job experiences until I graduated and I went into the service. So I stayed in the Air Force for 22 years.

MO: And where were you stationed?

JM: I was stationed... went through basic training in upstate New York. I left basic training and went to Wyoming for school for six months. Left Wyoming, went to

Illinois for a few months for school. Then I went to the Philippines. I was actually stationed in the Philippines three times. Stationed in England for two years and I stationed in Vietnam for one year. Then the rest of the time was in the states all over. Virginia, North Carolina, Nebraska, New York. So I had quite a few.

MO: And then after the service you came back to Greencastle?

JM: Mm-hmm.

MO: Did you go straight to the service after high school?

JM: Yeah.

MO: Okay. When you came back, what employment opportunities were there here in Greencastle?

JM: IBM was here. In fact, I worked for IBM for three months. They used to hire people 90 days at a time. And I worked there for 90 days. And then that was my cup of tea working in a... working in a... the department that they had me in. So then I worked as a golf pro at the golf course. And then I worked at where I'm working now at the furniture warehouse. I've been there 27 years.

MO: Wow. Do you think, do you ever... so it was never really a problem finding work?

JM: No, not for me. I mean, I'm sure a lot of people might have had, you know, some bad experience getting what they wanted to do, but I've got a good job and it's been pretty beneficial till date.

MO: You mentioned IBM. Do you know when they came to Putnam County?

JM: 1954.

MO: And what kind of impact do you think that had on Putnam County?

JM: Oh, a very good impact. Socially and economically and everything was upgraded because that was a good paying job. So when they closed, they closed here I think in 1986.

MO: And then I had information that you also worked as a bartender.

JM: I did all DePauw's bartending for the president.

MO: All DePauw's bartending? And is that where you've always bartended?

JM: I did a little bit at a restaurant here one time for about maybe a year. But I wouldn't, I don't know.

MO: Is that restaurant still there?

JM: No, it's gone.

MO: Is there any other work experiences or is there any stories or anything that you think?

JM: Well, I still teach golf and I still tend bar for the president. And that's probably it.

MO: All right. As far as organizations, are you involved with any?

JM: NAACP.

MO: NAACP. When did you start with that?

JM: Probably late 70s.

MO: Did you ever hold a position?

JM: Yeah, well, right now I'm the assistant financial secretary. And at one time, I did that before too. This is my second time doing that.

MO: And then in church, are you involved with the church here in Greencastle?

JM: St. Paul's Catholic Church. I don't hold any positions there now. But that's where we go to church.

MO: Is that where you grew up going to church too?

JM: No, my wife's Filipino and she was born Catholic. So I converted to Catholic, to the Catholic religion when we got married.

MO: When did you get married? I guess when you returned from the service?

JM: No, when I was in the service, 1956. Yeah.

MO: And then you're part of the Cribbage Club?

JM: Yeah, well, it's Greencastle Boys Club, but it's just five or six of us that get together and play cribbage and belong to the club. But I mean, it's just a little social thing.

MO: Were you ever involved with any sports clubs at all, or any leagues?

JM: In school, I did in the service. I was on the base softball team a couple of different times, the baseball team, the base basketball team, and the base golf team. But I never had a chance to play in high school because I was always working. Yeah.

MO: Back to the NAACP, or any organizations, is there any stories that maybe something you guys changed here or protested here?

JM: I never have. I know that there's still sort of an unwritten law, I think, that it's still mostly, I mean, it's still an all-inclusive organization because there's no black members in the Elks. Or the VFW, or the Moose, and I think the Eagles. That's the main four clubs. Now, there used to be an American Legion. I never joined any clubs. I'm not really a big club person.

MO: So the segregation was never too bad here in Greencastle, then?

JM: Well, I mean, it was, I guess you could say it was fairly bad. You liked the movies and the restaurants and things like that. But that changed more or less in... I'm not sure when it changed. I was gone. I left it when I was 18. But no, I was on the city council. I was the first black on the city council here. In 19...1980.

MO: Was that an elected position?

JM: Mm-hmm.

MO: Is there anything you'd like to share about that experience?

JM: Well, it was a good experience. I mean, I think if everyone had the opportunity, they should perhaps get on the...take a turn and see how city governments run because a lot of people don't understand the ins and outs of the way local city government works and what you can and can't do. And that was a good experience in that respect.

MO: Let me just sort of cover the topics. Is there anything else you'd like to share or think might be relevant at all?

JM: No, I think everything is...we've got a really good organization with our NAACP and people can be aware. Last summer we had our first annual Rib and Jazz Fest. Depauw donated a building to the NAACP and it's called the Family Youth Community Development Program and the building is located right off campus. And we had a jazz and rib fester last September...well, Labor Day weekend. And we had some terrific musicians that came. So, I think we had like 250 people there. So this is going to be an annual event. In fact, I'm working on the musicians now. And we've got a grant from Synergy, I think, between 4 and 5 thousand bucks to pay for musicians. So, that's pretty nice.

MO: And this is all through the NAACP?

JM: Mm-hmm.

MO: So it's sort of like a musical?

JM: Yeah, it's a jazz fest.

MO: Do you do anything else with the jazz besides just you hold this festival? Is it sort of an ongoing...

JM: No, that's the first thing. We'll just do that once a year. It's just a fundraiser. But what we...it also helps to...we have a program there at the center for underprivileged kids that maybe need a computer to do their homework after school. So kids are

coming there. Then we've got DePauw people that are coming there to tutor the kids and so forth. So that's a pretty impressive little program there.

MO: Okay, so I guess that's it.

MO: If there's anything else you can think of for education or recording, we went to elementary school and high school and junior high, the same thing, all in Greencastle.

JM: Then I went to IUPUI, two and a half years.

MO: When you returned from the military? Mm-hmm. And was that...what did you study there?

JM: Psychology, and that was my major, but I didn't finish it and graduate. I went two and a half years, which I enjoyed. Then I started working full-time.

MO: At the furniture warehouse? Mm-hmm. Had that been around before? Yeah. When did that start here?

JM: It actually started a year before I started working there. The guys that opened that were all Depauw graduates. So they all graduated in 76 and 77. Then they opened that store. And just one of them is still here.

MO: And so you've been working for 27 years now?

JM: Mm-hmm.

MO: Do you enjoy it?

JM: Yeah.

MO: It's good work?

JM: Yeah. Good job.

MO: That's good.

MO: Okay. There's nothing else you'd like to add?

JM: No, I think that covers it pretty well.