

Methodist University Community Oral History Project

Methodist University

Fayetteville, NC

Donald M. Brown

Interview Conducted by:

Korissa Packer

4/16/16

Mr. Brown's Home

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Interview Subject: **Donald M. Brown**

Interview Conducted by: **Korissa Packer**

Interview of:

Donald Brown

Interviewed by:

Korissa Packer

0:01

PACKER: This is a oral history interview. I'm Korissa Packer and I'll be interviewing Donald Brown.

Today's date is April 17, 2016. Donnie, can you state your name and date of birth, please?

0:18

BROWN: Donald Brown.

0:22

PACKER: Your date of birth?

0:25

BROWN: Eleven-Twenty-First of Nineteen Forty-Four. [November 21, 1944.]

0:30

PACKER: Alright. So, can you tell me about what your family was like when you were growing up, and your parents, and your siblings?

0:38

BROWN: Grewed up with a big family. Lived in Hope Mills, North Carolina. There were nine in my family, five boys, four girls, and my mama, my daddy, my aunt, and all the rest of people. [Laughs.]

0:50

PACKER: What was your childhood like?

0:56

BROWN: I grewed up in a small school in Hope Mills. We did not have [but] one school. It was pretty much a typical country-boy school, you know. Nothing, no [violence?]. Nothing big. There was only, like, probably twenty or thirty people in a graduating class.

1:16:

PACKER: What year did you start school?

1:19:

Brown: I don't remember. [Laughs.] I think it was about 1950. '50 or '51, I'm not sure.

1:28:

PACKER: Did you have any African Americans in your school?

1:31:

BROWN: No, there were no African Americans, no Indians. Only whites. There were three schools, the black school for the blacks, Indian school for the Indians, and the white school for the white people. Everybody went to segregated schools.

1:48:

PACKER: Did you ever go to school with an African American?

1:53:

BROWN: Never went to school with an African American. I had to pull prison time one time, still had the blacks separated from the whites.

2:01:

PACKER: When was that?

2:03:

BROWN: Uh, the late '60s.

2:08

PACKER: The late '60s?

2:10

BROWN: Mid-'60s, after I got out of high school.

2:21:

PACKER: Did you ever—in your neighborhood, was there any African Americans ever lived in your neighborhood?

02:24:

BROWN: There was no African Americans that lived when I was raised in Hope Mills, North Carolina. There was none. They was not allowed to live in Hope Mills.

2:37

PACKER: You were telling me about a sign that there was in Hope Mills.

2:46

BROWN: Yeah, in Hope Mills there used to be a sign on each—Hope Mills was a lot smaller then than it is now—but they had a sign on each end of Hope Mills: “If you were caught in Hope Mills, it’s five o’clock, you were black: you’d be shot on sight.”

2:50

PACKER: That’s what the sign said?

2:51

BROWN: Yeah, I remember. I was a little boy. I remember it, though.

2:55

PACKER: In school, did your teachers ever talk about racism? Did you—?

3:05:

BROWN: No, the issue was never mentioned. That was something that didn't happen—weren't supposed to happen. You know, I mean, as far as society back then, [unintelligible,] the way they felt. That's just the way we were raised. We didn't know any better.

3:18:

PACKER: Were your parents—did they ever mention racism? Were they against it?

3:22:

BROWN: Well, my dad was in the Army, so—I never traveled with him, I always stayed with my grandma and my granddaddy—but in the Army there was not much racism because, you know, you had blacks and whites in the Army together. To start with, they didn't have blacks—why, they were segregated, the Army was segregated. Before my time they were segregated. In the war they were segregated. But I never was around no black people 'til I got older.

3:53:

PACKER: Did you ever travel outside of the South?

3:57:

BROWN: Oh, yeah, that's when I—you know—. Things were different there in some states, but not many. Once you got up North, blacks was always segregated. Schools were segregated, churches were segregated, your restaurants were segregated, your liquor store was segregated. Everything went to their own corner. Movies were segregated: movies, the blacks had to go upstairs and sit upstairs in a

balcony thing and whites would sit downstairs. That's just the way it was. I didn't know any different, 'cause I didn't know any different. That's all I knew.

4:37:

PACKER: What was your take on racism? Did you ever—?

4:41

BROWN: Do what now?

4:42

PACKER: Did you ever wonder why you weren't in school with blacks? Did you—?

4:53:

BROWN: No, I was just born and went to school, all the way up. That was no—issue was never on TV up until the late—I guess in the late '60s, when they started having all them—I can't remember that far back—late '50s and '60s, when they started having all them racial stuff, you know, in Alabama, places like that. I'd watch to see it on TV, what little TV we had, but it was never a big issue with me, 'cause I never knew nothing about it, until I got out in the world. You know, if you go to school with whites and you never go to school with blacks, you don't think nothing about it. You see them going up the road on the bus, but you don't really know why. It was never explained to you.

5:30

PACKER: Do you remember in Hope Mills, was there any violence regarding African Americans?

5:40:

BROWN: No, they wouldn't never come to Hope Mills, they couldn't come to the lake in Hope Mills, they couldn't come in Hope Mills! And that's just—. They were probably scared of the Klan, and all those back then. They were probably scared, you know. Maybe on Saturday you'd see some in Hope Mills, but they were gone by the time it got dark.

5:57

PACKER: So, when was the first—what was your first job that you ever encountered an African American or worked with an African American?

6:06:

BROWN: Mmm. That's a good question. Probably the Army.

6:11:

PACKER: The Army?

6:13

BROWN: Yeah. I'd say the Army.

6:15

PACKER: In the Army, were they treated the same? Were they—?

6:19

BROWN: Well, we all had the same job, anyway, black or white. Didn't make no difference. I

[indecipherable] whether you were prejudiced or racist or not. Me, I never had no racial issue with nobody, whether you were black or white. I'm not a prejudiced person.

6:42:

PACKER: So, in the military, did y'all live in the same quarters? Did y'all—?

6:47

BROWN: Yeah, we lived in the same barracks yes.

6:50

PACKER: Just lived in the same barracks?

6:50

BROWN: My First Sergeant in the Army was black. [Almost] all my superiors were black when I was in the Army. There was never a racial issue, back then. It all changed, I guess, after the war it all changed. But things were really racial—things were bad back then. I mean the blacks and the whites, with all—I don't know—. When I was in high school and grammar—we never had a issue, 'cause everybody did what they had to do. [We] went to school, and they went to school, and the Indians went to school.

7:26

PACKER: So, there was no violence in Hope Mills.

7:30

BROWN: During that time, we never had no violence! Blacks stuck to theirselves, the Indians stuck to theirselves, and whites stuck to theirselves. And that's pretty much the way it was. That's the way everybody was raised: blacks, whites, Indians, and whatever—that's the way they were raised.

7:45

PACKER: How much education did you complete?

7:47

BROWN: Twelve years.

7:49

PACKER: So, through high school?

7:51

BROWN: Yeah, that's it.

7:52

PACKER: And you never went to school, from elementary through—

7:56

BROWN: I went to communication schools.

7:58

PACKER: You never went to school with an African American.

8:00

BROWN: Never in my life. Never in my life. Nope. Never while I was in prison, [indecipherable] for twelve months, never went to prison with blacks. They were segregated in prison, while I was in prison.

8:15

PACKER: Were they at the same prison as you, but just kept separately, or—?

8:18

BROWN: Same—different cell blocks. Everybody stayed in different buildings. Blacks was in one building, Indians and whites was in the other building.

8:26

PACKER: So the Indians and whites were together at the time?

8:30

BROWN: Yeah. The blacks was always segregated, in prison, at work, all the way through my first—probably my first sixteen, seventeen years of life, I wasn't around no blacks.

8:44

PACKER: Do you remember the first time that you were around an African American?

8:49

BROWN: The Army, I guess.

8:51

PACKER: The Army?

8:52

BROWN: Yes. I can't remember that far. I can't remember. Too old, can't remember.

8:59

PACKER: So, if there's one thing that you want, like, your grandchildren or anyone to remember from this time, what's your most memorable moment during the segregation?

9:15

BROWN: Well, I'm not a prejudiced person, but I feel like—. I don't feel good when whites and blacks [are] marrying each other. I'm not a prejudiced person. I just think they're going to have a miserable life unless they live up North. [Being in the South?] will still be miserable for them, for the girl or for the boy. I'm not against it! I just don't think it's a good idea. Not because I'm prejudiced, just 'cause I just don't think it would. Maybe it's the way I was raised, has a lot to do with it.

9:52

PACKER: You never remember seeing any interracial couples back then, in your childhood?

10:00

BROWN: No. No. No. No, the white people wouldn't put up with it. If their daughters, they'd beat the fire out of them. If they had got caught talking to a black person, which I'm sure went on, people didn't know about it, way on during the slavery days

10:22

PACKER: Alright. Well, this concludes our oral history interview. Thank you, Mr. Brown.

10:28.

BROWN: You're welcome.