

## **Transcript of interview with Lee City by Chad Thomas, December 17, 2008**

This interview will become part of the Georgetown Public Library's oral history collection. This project focuses on people's memories of Marshall and Carver Schools and issues and events of the 1950s and '60s that led to desegregation. My name is Chad Thomas, it's December 17th, 2008, and we're at the Georgetown Public Library and it is just after 1:00 p.m.

CHAD THOMAS: Please state your full name.

LEE CITY: My full name is Lee Louis City.

CHAD THOMAS: And any nicknames you might have?

LEE CITY: No.

CHAD THOMAS: And, your date of birth.

LEE CITY: September 13, 1940.

CHAD THOMAS: The interview should last roughly about 40 minutes, but we do have a little bit more time if we need it. So, I'm just going to go over some of these basic questions. Did you grow up in Georgetown?

LEE CITY: From about...right after World War II ended, around 1944-45...from then we lived in Jonah...well, actually it was out on a farm close to Jonah. Jonah was the nearest little town to us...probably 2-1/2 miles away. And I pretty much grew up there up until I graduated high school and then left Georgetown around 1959.

CHAD THOMAS: In particular, so you were in Jonah, just outside Georgetown. What type of neighborhood were you in, in Jonah?

LEE CITY: It was a farm. Our closest neighbor was about a quarter mile away, so it wasn't really populated back then.

CHAD THOMAS: So, Jonah...you were sort of shut off from other places, but what was Jonah like at the time?

LEE CITY: Well, Jonah, believe it or not, was much bigger than it is now. It was a thriving...I guess you call it...a farm community. It had three grocery stores and one gas station and it had...well, two schools back then...the black school was on the south side of Jonah, which was on the south side of the San Gabriel River. And it was...when I started it was a one-room school house and then the white school house was on the other side of Jonah, and they had a nice red brick building schoolhouse with lots of rooms. When I started we had one teacher to teach. I think she taught the first six or seven grades and I pretty much went to school in Jonah...probably up until the fourth grade. Then, at that time, our parents didn't think that one teacher...well, I guess by then they had two teachers, so they were splitting the teaching. One of them, I think, taught

the first three or four grades and the other one taught the second three or four grades. I can't remember if they went to the 8th grade or just to the 7th grade.

CHAD THOMAS: You said that your parents...were thinking about...what were your parents doing at that time?

LEE CITY: Well, they were farming, which means both my mother and father. And we lived...back then...it was sort of like sharecropping but it was...I guess it was a little different...because the way it was based on is...my father owned all his equipment and he had to buy the seeds and stuff to plant. And the only time that the sharing came in was after the harvest. Like, I'm trying to think what they call it...I think they call it third and fourths. Like, for cotton, the people that owned the farm would get either a third or a fourth of the production and the feed was the other side of it. And the property was owned back then by Southwestern University. We came...well, actually we had lived in Manor for a little while and Austin for a little while, then during the war my father had gone to San Francisco to work in the shipyards. He had three kids: my older brother, myself, and my younger brother. And my younger brother was born in...well, at that time he was the youngest...he was born in '43. I don't know when we went to San Francisco, but I know he was a baby, so it was probably the end of '43 or '44. Then right after the war came to an end we moved back to Jonah, where I had...three of my uncles lived in Jonah. Two of them were farmers and one lived in Georgetown. He more or less drove a truck to the cotton gins and stuff. That's when we moved to Jonah.

We went to Jonah School, which meant we had to walk that 2-3 miles to school every day because they didn't have buses then...at that point in time. And I think we were in the fourth grade when...because neither of my parents had graduated, you know, did more than grade school, and I don't know whether it was to the sixth grade or to the eighth grade, but they were going to make sure...one thing, they understood the value of education back then probably more than people do today...they say, if nothing else you're going to finish high school, because back then kids were dropping out...well, you know, after the sixth grade or after the eighth grade, you know kids were just dropping out of school...and then.... So they decided that we probably weren't getting enough attention with one teacher, or two teachers...one teacher to teach four grades. So, they had to pay a tuition...I guess that's what you would call it...to the Georgetown school district, which was something like \$50-55...and when you got six kids, you know, back then, that's a lot of money just to spend...that's \$300 a year...just a lot of money!

So we came to...I came to Georgetown, which was Carver High School, which was down on...by the river at the end of Martin Luther King, which was Timber Street then. And then the fifth grade I started coming and my sisters and brothers started coming and I went through the fifth grade and sixth grade but in the seventh grade I had to go back to Jonah because my father...my parents...didn't get the tuition into Georgetown in time. So that was like going back to the Stone Age again. By that time...the house where we lived on the University place...it burned down in 1950, I think. Yes, 1950, because my youngest sister was born in 1949 and right after she was a baby was when the house burned down. So, we moved from that place then to probably as the crow flies about a mile and a half away to another University property, which my uncle had been working. But then he moved to a larger farm for another...I think the person's name was MacDonald, so they sort of swapped that. By that time they had a bus that was running from Georgetown...and picked up kids that both went to Jonah and Georgetown. We were the first stop for the bus, which meant we were also the last ones to get off in the

evening. So, it ran from there to Jonah then...well, it also went to Weir...you know where Weir is? OK. And picked up some students there and then it went down [Highway] 29, almost to Circleville and picked up students, dropped students off at Jonah, then brought the ones that went to Georgetown into Georgetown.

CHAD THOMAS: You said that when your family moved back from San Francisco you had some relatives here...some uncles here...were there any others that were living in Georgetown area?

LEE CITY: Yes. See, my grandfather, because my folks...well, I guess I have to go back...my great-grandfather was born a slave...on my father's side...had been born a slave in Louisiana. And then when the Emancipation thing came along, they had made a deal with the guy that previously owned them that they would work for him for a while to get wagons and mules and stuff. And then in 1865 they migrated to Texas to Blanco County. And they did a homestead down in Blanco County and he had about 10 kids, I think. My grandfather moved to Jonah and then he had about six or eight kids. And so, when we came back, we came back because my father had three...I guess he had three brothers here...and one sister. One of his sisters lived in San Angelo and one of his brothers had passed away. Yeah, he had family here, I guess that's why he came back to Georgetown.

CHAD THOMAS: When you were living in Jonah, was your family...did your family belong to a church out there?

LEE CITY: Yeah, there was...well, actually, my father was Baptist and my mother was Methodist, but there was a Baptist in Jonah which was right across from that Jonah black school, so that's where we went to church a lot. Plus, my mother also came to a Methodist church in Georgetown. I don't know exactly when she started coming over here, but yes, there was a church. Then they moved that building and I don't know where they moved it. I don't know if that's...that might be the same building that's over by the old library? I know they moved that building to somewhere.

CHAD THOMAS: What was the atmosphere around the church? You know...

LEE CITY: Well, it was a typical Baptist church, I guess. Made us go to Sunday School, go to church until we got big enough to make our own decision. But it was...like I say...back then a lot of folks lived out in the country, so, you know farming back then took a lot of manual labor so everybody had large families...there was quite a few folks there.

CHAD THOMAS: So, going back to when you were in elementary school...what do you remember particularly about that?

LEE CITY: Well, not a heck of a lot because it's been so long ago, but you know, there probably were some good times. The teacher there, her name was Viola Grant. She passed away a few years ago. We did handicrafts like making a...in fact I still have a...I don't know what you call them...ceramics, I guess you would call them. Like, we'd make ceramics, you know in classes, and, in fact, I had given the one I made to my mother and we still have it, so...that's something that was made in...probably around...I was probably in the third or fourth grade when we made that...and I made something, my

oldest brother made something, the one below me made something and we have two of the items but one of them got broken so we have no idea where it is.

CHAD THOMAS: What was the item that you made?

LEE CITY: It was like an open Bible with the Lord's Prayer in it...so...and that's still in the curio cabinet at home.

CHAD THOMAS: I know you said that there was one teacher in a one-room school. What type...in addition to the handicrafts...what was the teaching like? What was the schooling like, itself?

LEE CITY: Well, it was typical, you know. Readin', writin', and 'rithmetic and geography and stuff. But when they got the second teacher they did add a second room so they both weren't in the same room. And the one teacher, Ms. Grant, who was there first, she also had living quarters in the school. So, she lived there during the week and then on the weekend she would go to Austin where she lived, but she would stay up during the whole week rather than traveling back and forth to Austin. And, I guess...lot of people...my biggest memory was the first day of school. Back then I was...I had a temper, I guess you would say...and the teacher, Ms. Grant, she...that evening, the first day of school...I never will forget this as long as I live...she said something I didn't like and it made me mad and I went out in the yard...and it was a gravel driveway...and I picked up rocks and threw them out there as they came out of the school...but that's...and I always tell people that's the day I learned to control my temper because when I got home my father wore my little behind out. I probably couldn't sit for a week! I always remember that and I say I learned to control my temper when I was six years old. I come out of that school...I look back on it and say it's funny!

CHAD THOMAS: The schoolhouse itself, what was it like? You said it was one room...

LEE CITY: It was just one big room and it had a second room as you came in the front door, there was a small room to the right as you came in, which was where the teacher, where she lived during the week. They had like a stage up front so if we did little plays and stuff we could get on that stage. It was, I guess, just a typical school. You just didn't have all the resources that you needed.

CHAD THOMAS: How were the conditions? Was it, you know, a pretty nice facility? Was it kind of run down?

LEE CITY: Well, it wasn't run...it was old but it wasn't run down. They kept it up. It wasn't cold in the winter. They had an old coal stove that we put coal in because back then they didn't have gas running all over the place. So, but...it was comfortable and we didn't know any better...except we could look across on the other side of Jonah and we could see that the school they had was a thousand times better than what we had...and they had more teachers and everything. But other than that...

CHAD THOMAS: Do you know how many...roughly...how many students were going to your school?

LEE CITY: Oh, I don't remember. I would imagine...I don't even want to hazard taking a guess...I would guess it would be thirty or forty students...I was just trying to count up

families that went to the school because all of the families at that time probably had at least five or six kids...some of them...I remember this one family had thirteen or fourteen kids. I was trying to think of (thinks and counts under his breath). There was probably ten families at least that went to the school, so at any one time it was thirty...forty...fifty, but I doubt it was fifty. It was probably thirty or forty kids.

CHAD THOMAS: You started when you were six. Were you going to school with kids that were several years older?

LEE CITY: Yes. Like I said it was from first grade all the way up to, I think it was the seventh grade. So, you know, you had people from six to thirteen...fourteen, probably.

CHAD THOMAS: What was that like? Having such a big gap in ages...having all these different-aged kids there?

LEE CITY: It didn't seem...it just seemed natural because at home you had the same age spread between brothers and sisters, so it didn't bother us...at least it didn't bother me. You know, there were big kids and small kids.

CHAD THOMAS: And what was the name of that school, again?

LEE CITY: It was...I don't even remember what the name was...but I think later they named it after the teacher. I think it was called the Viola N. Grant School. But don't hold me to that, but I think later on they named it after her. But other than that it was just the Jonah School.

CHAD THOMAS: What was the last grade you went to...?

LEE CITY: Well, I went up to the fourth grade, then I went through the fifth and sixth grade in Georgetown and then, like I said, he didn't get the tuition in in time, so everyone, which means... my older brother was past the age of seventh grade already...but me and my brothers and sisters had to go back to the Jonah School for that one year.

CHAD THOMAS: And what grade would that have been?

LEE CITY: I was in the seventh grade that year. So, I didn't go to the seventh grade in Georgetown. I came back when I was in the eighth grade. And then I graduated and just to give you some idea of how people dropped out...when I was in Georgetown in the fifth grade there was probably twenty-something students in my class. And when I graduated it was less than ten...even though a couple of those...one guy moved to Round Rock and one girl moved to somewhere...but you know, less than half of the students in the fifth grade graduated.

CHAD THOMAS: Why was that...that they were dropping out?

LEE CITY: Well, you gotta remember...back in 1950, kids were more valuable working on the farm than going to school, plus a lot of them just didn't see the value of education. Like, I couldn't have dropped out if I wanted to because my parents had told us, you know, you're going to graduate high school. And that was it. They said if you're going to

quit school you can live somewhere else. So, they were really, really strict on that, but they didn't have to push us to do it.

CHAD THOMAS: Did they have something in mind...that they were thinking, with your education you'd be able to do something with....

LEE CITY: Yes, yes because, well, like they knew farming was hard work, you know, and they wanted us to do better. And they said you need at least a high school education to do anything. Even if you want to farm, you need an education in order to farm.

CHAD THOMAS: So, where did you end up going after eighth grade?

LEE CITY: I went to Carver High School, all the way through until I graduated in 1959.

CHAD THOMAS: What do you remember most about those years...and going to Carver?

LEE CITY: Well, I think in spite of getting everything second-hand, like all the books we got was after the white high school had used them. We never had new books, we never had up-to-date books. They were always handed down. Same thing in sports. We never got any new equipment. Everything was when the white high school got through using it they basically gave it to us. That was...that whole point. I think, even in spite of that, even though we could've got a better education even at Carver High School, we got the basics pretty well. Like, I had, and I'm talking about me, for ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade, we had to take English, so we got four years of English, and we got two years of algebra, one year of trigonometry, one year of geometry, we got biology, we didn't have chemistry because no...we just didn't have anybody to teach it...but we ended up getting the basic stuff that you really needed as a basis to go on from there. Although I would have liked...because at some point I got more...I knew more than the teachers. Well, I don't say more than the teachers, but more than they had the capacity to teach because they had so many students. Because even at Carver High, each home room teacher had two classes rather than one class. One teacher taught English and everybody rotated through that. That one teacher, Miss Jackson was the English teacher, and so she taught English so everybody went...you know, through English. Then naturally, the coach was a teacher. I can't remember what the principal taught...he was a principal there for a long time...but like I say, you still had one teacher with two classes in her room at the same time, so they were trying to teach one class and the other class was just sitting back, waiting for their class period. Then the studious guy was...I generally paid attention when they were teaching the class in front of me, so that by the time I got there, I'd already heard the stuff and knew the stuff and so...it was...I could've been taught a lot more if they'd had the capacity to do that. But it was just...the teacher could only do so much with what they had...but still, in spite of everything they gave us a good basic education.

When I did decide to go to college...because there was no way I could go to college out of high school because, you know, my parents just couldn't afford to do it, so I just ended up going into the military after high school. Just basically because my older brother had went into the military when he graduated and he was two years ahead of me, and then I followed him pretty much and then my next brother followed me and then the next youngest followed him, so we all ended up in the Air Force. We all served at least one hitch. My oldest brother, he got extended when he was in Viet Nam, so he served more

than four years. And then my brother behind me, he retired from the military, so we all...two of them was in Viet Nam and the third one, he flew in and out of Viet Nam with supplies...he was with the transportation division and one was a jet mechanic and the other was a supply specialist. Those two actually stationed in Saigon for a hitch.

CHAD THOMAS: Going back to high school, are there any really positive memories you have from Carver?

LEE CITY: Oh, yes. No matter what...it was a raggedy building...I think they condemned the building before...somebody from the State actually condemned the building long before they stopped using it. Like, in...I'm trying to think what year...we had a gymnasium which was basically condemned, I think two years before I graduated, because we had to end up playing...no, my oldest brother was still in school and he graduated in '57 I think, so I know in '57 we had started playing basketball in the gymnasium at the white high school. I guess it's on University Avenue...it's an elementary school or something now...and so we started playing basketball...because they condemned the gymnasium at Carver, which should have been condemned...it was falling apart anyway. And then the high school, somebody from the State I think condemned it, but like I say, they still used it years after it had been condemned. It was falling apart. Still, you grow up with kids, you don't think too much about the conditions. It's just all your friends and stuff that you grew up with all your life. And you understood that the teachers were doing the best they could.

CHAD THOMAS: Were there any things you got involved with then that you look back and reflect on and think, for me that was a good thing for me...that's a positive memory...something I look back fondly on...when you were in high school?

LEE CITY: That I look back on? I don't know...I enjoyed it because we had this thing about learning instilled in us...you knew you were there for an education, so we studied hard and did the best we could.

CHAD THOMAS: Were there any things you did...participated in...aside from just general education?

LEE CITY: I did all the sports. We had basketball and football. I didn't do track because it was too hard and it was in the summertime. I played tennis in the summertime. We didn't actually have a tennis coach. In fact, I basically taught myself how to play tennis from an encyclopedia. It told you how to do stuff and I would go at it...the only place I had a flat wall was in this old condemned gym building, so I would go in and just play myself off of the wall until somebody else saw and took up the game so then at least we had a two-man tennis team. One year...Carver High was a Class B school...and one year we went to Prairie View and we won State champs in singles...I did...and then me and my partner we came in second in doubles.

We always had a pretty good track team. The football team was pretty good most of the time, but you just didn't have...because there was probably only two hundred students in the whole school, so because the first year I played football I was like a 130-pound guard playing guys...some schools had guys that were...180, 200 pounds. But you always...adapt...you know...if you can't out-muscle 'em you have to outsmart 'em. So we played football and we always had a good basketball team because we had a pretty good basketball coach. His whole thing was training, so, we used to...you know, most

places you run and you wind-sprint in the gym. We did it out in the school yard like football. We ran figure-8s up and down, up and down, 100 yards at a time whether...you know generally 70 feet or whatever the basketball...so we generally played teams that were bigger than us, but we were always faster and in better shape, so by the time the fourth quarter came on, we were still going and they was huffing and puffing.

CHAD THOMAS: You played basketball, too?

LEE CITY: Yes.

CHAD THOMAS: What position did you play?

LEE CITY: I played guard. I was too short for anything else. Our tallest player in basketball was about 6'3". By the time I got to high school I'd guess I was 5'8" or 5'9". That's where I stopped. We would play this one team, I don't think they had a person less than 6'3"...but as I say, by the time the end of the game came, we were just zipping by them and they just couldn't keep up with us. And we beat 'em...that was always fun...to beat somebody that was bigger than you and faster than you at the beginning of the game, but by the time the end of the game came along you were...you looked bigger and faster than they did. Those were enjoyable times.

CHAD THOMAS: Getting back to tennis. You said you learned from the encyclopedia...then you said one other person joined...you had just a two-person team?

LEE CITY: Yes. A two-person team. After that...because nobody played tennis before that in the whole school, but after that, this guy...because he was in the same grade as my next brother, and then they teamed up after I graduated, so I don't know how long they kept the tennis team. Once I left I was pretty much gone.

CHAD THOMAS: So, when you went to Prairie View for a state competition?

LEE CITY: Yes, because the State meet...Texas State meet for black schools...was held in Prairie View, so one day pretty much the whole...because that one day I ended up playing six matches in one day... because it was just a one-day event. All the different classes, from all the way up to...I guess (unintelligible) had A schools, they didn't have, you know, like nowadays they have 4A, 5A...they didn't have that many classifications. Everybody competed in their own class, and everything was done in that one day.

CHAD THOMAS: Were there a lot of schools that had tennis teams?

LEE CITY: Well, there was enough for me to play six matches! Back then a lot of people thought it was a sissy game and they'd rather run track than play tennis. But it was just beginning. Like I say, I was the first one to play tennis in the State meet, it was the first tennis team...a two-person team.

CHAD THOMAS: I don't know, if at that point there were a lot of black athletes that were playing tennis? In general?

LEE CITY: Well, there was enough...it was a single elimination type thing, so...so there was at least six other teams...well, I take that back, there was at least four other teams because the six was three doubles and three singles...so there was at least four other



teams. And I don't know how many other schools were in Class B back then. Class B was schools that had a combined...like up to 250 students or something. You know, that's all the way through high school...because I don't think they just counted. Like today the high school is just 9th grade through 12th. But I know the second year we had a new coach come in and he played tennis so he was lot of help. He was one of those guys...like today you see this one guy that plays pro, he could serve with either hand...stuff like that. So I learned a little bit from him. But mostly the encyclopedias got me going. The library we had was really not very much at all. It was like shelves on one wall in the classroom that the principal had, a couple tables, and most of the books were...probably twenty years old or more. And we had one set of encyclopedias that I remember.

CHAD THOMAS: You said one of the things that you enjoyed about Carver High School in general was you had a lot of friends you'd grown up with. Did you have some really close-knit friends that you were...that you spent time with outside of school?

LEE CITY: No, not really, because outside of school you didn't really have a lot of time. It was go to school and then you had to work on the farm...especially during the summer I pretty much worked all summer on the farm...even after school you had chores that had to be done, so it was.... But there's still friends that I have that I had from back then, when I was in high school. Not too many of them left around any more...around Georgetown. They're still a few here. And, like I say, I left after high school, so the people that were after me, I still don't remember a lot of...you know, classmates of my brothers and sisters, but there are still a few of those around town.

CHAD THOMAS: Do you have any not-so-good memories from high school?

LEE CITY: No, nothing that I would consider. Like I say, we worked with what we had, you know. And we knew what the situation was...you can't fight City Hall so why waste your energy. Just work with what you've got and do the best you can. Which was quite a bit.

CHAD THOMAS: I know you said there wasn't a lot of time for doing things outside of school when you were working on the farm and stuff like that. What did you and your friends and family do for fun when you did have a little bit of spare time?

LEE CITY: Well, go to the movies because back then they even had a movie in Georgetown. Where the old Palace Theater is, well that was a movie house back then. They showed movies...on Saturdays you'd go to the movies. Well, there were a few cafes, you know, where you could go and get hamburgers and stuff. There was one of those in town. So that was about it. And then a lot of people would go to Austin and stuff. But I was never one to venture off because I didn't drink and I didn't smoke in high school, so that wasn't the kind of place for me, so I didn't go to Austin. But my older brother...when he graduated there was only four kids...four boys...in his class. And I guess you could call them the Wild Bunch. They stuck together like peas in a pod. They were always together, all four of them.

CHAD THOMAS: Were you just more of an independent person?

LEE CITY: I guess you could call it that. Yes. I pretty much...I don't know how people would describe me...I decided what I wanted to do, when I wanted to do it...nobody could

get me to do something I didn't want to do. Or if I thought it wasn't right to do it. A lot of that was because of my parents. You take the value of your parents. Yes, I was independent, that's for sure. And back then I guess...they tell me this now, but I don't believe...I didn't want anybody to beat me at anything... 'cause I was valedictorian of my senior class, and they say, you just didn't want any of those girls to beat you at anything. Even in home economics, you know. I didn't think I was that competitive, but that's what everybody says.

CHAD THOMAS: It was a competitive streak that went into all facets of your life?

LEE CITY: It was just...I always say, if you're going to do something, do it the best you can. That's not competitive. It's not what the other person is doing...it's you do the best YOU can. That's always been my philosophy.

CHAD THOMAS: After school you said you went off and joined the Air Force. How long were you...

LEE CITY: I was in the Air Force four years. I never got to go overseas because the job I was in I could only do it state-side. It was like...that's another story in itself...the military. I'd gone in the military...like I spent four weeks of basic training in San Antonio and then they sent me off to tech school in Mississippi. We went to tech school for about 11 months or so, I guess, from November to September. They sent us to school...first I was going to be (unintelligible) radio maintenance...that's where people talk to pilots via radios. Then they took like twenty-something students out of my class and they sent us to San Bernardino in California. We were supposed to be going to some mountaintop called Point Mugu, which is, I guess, northwest of Los Angeles. This was a brand new facility...they hadn't opened it...they were going to open a brand new facility...that's why they had twenty students go there. Then we get to California and they decide, well, we're not going to open that site. I mean, they spent millions of dollars and then they decided not to open it.

So, we had to just hang around California for about six months and then they sort of dispersed us, you know...three, or four, or five in a group. And I ended up in New Jersey where I cross-trained into a thing that was called electronic data processing. Because back then they had...that was when they were building these...they call them SAGE (Semi-Automatic Ground Environment) sites, which was big computer sites. They had these big IBM computers and then they had all of these radars along the coast that were feeding information to the computers. So I ended up cross-training to a piece of equipment, which was electronic data processing, because the computer didn't understand the radars. The radar just sends blips, it doesn't know miles, distance, anything. So this piece of equipment was basically a translator between the radar and the big computers. That was only in the United States so I never ended up getting an assignment overseas. That was the only thing I regretted in the military. You know, you join the military [thinking] I'm going to get an overseas assignment for at least twelve months...but it didn't happen.

CHAD THOMAS: I guess during that time there was no overseas conflict going on?

LEE CITY: No, because, when I was in the Air Force, and I got out the end of '63, people were volunteering to go to Viet Nam because that was a good duty. That was before...then when Viet Nam kicked up that was a couple of years later, after I got

out...even though we had been there since the '50s. There was no real conflict back then. It was probably going on, a little fighting, but not...we hadn't done the Gulf of Tonkin thing, so...

CHAD THOMAS: So what prompted you to end your career with the Air Force?

LEE CITY: When I went in I was only going to do one turn because I said, if I was going to make a career of it I would have went to officer's school or something. I said, I don't really want to do that, I think, so, I was just planning on doing one turn. So I did my four years...plus, I also had control over which branch of the service I went in if I volunteered...rather than going into the Army for two or three years, whatever that was...and I really didn't care for the Army--although I probably could have got out of the Army because I've got flat feet. I couldn't afford to go to college...there was really no jobs around...so that was a way of getting good job training, plus serving the military time.

CHAD THOMAS: After that what did you end up doing?

LEE CITY: After the Air Force I ended up, believe it or not, going to Alaska, working for the...well, actually, I worked for RCA, but it was on a satellite tracking station for Goddard...the Goddard Space Flight Center, which is out of Washington. We tracked unmanned satellites, most...at that time...the real big satellite business was weather satellites. So, we tracked the first generation and the second generation and the third generation of weather satellites. In that little valley...because they put everything down in a valley so that you wouldn't have...they put it...like, we were about 15 miles north of Fairbanks...and they put it in a valley so that you wouldn't have interference from the big city. Because you get all kinds of interference from those kind of signals. The only time we had problems was in the wintertime when we had the auroras--you know, the northern lights--that would play havoc with the radio signals. A lot of times we couldn't diagnose from the satellites...we'd have to wait until they got...they had another station in North Carolina...they'd download the stuff there. So, I spent five years doing that. That was a lot of fun but that was before Alaska got fouled up with all those people coming up to the Northern Slope. Back when I was in Fairbanks, with an Air Force base and an Army base, there were probably maybe 50,000 people in the whole area. There wasn't overcrowding and there wasn't a bunch of crooks coming up for the money.

But then after five years I decided...that's enough time...so then I just came back to Georgetown, as a matter of fact, and that was in ...I left there at the end of November 1968. And I'd saved money so when I got back here I decided...well, I don't know what I want to do...maybe I'll just go to college. So one day, almost on a lark, I went down to UT and was getting information. They said, well, you know, if you took the SAT...because back then they didn't have hardly any minorities, you know...they say, you know, you could probably get in this year. So, I got my transcript from Georgetown and I took the SAT and so I ended up starting school in January or February of 1969.

I went in the School of Engineering because at this time I was 28 years old...they try to talk you out of stuff...I say, nope, I know what I want to do...this is what I want to do. Because I had been an electronic technician for almost ten years now, you know, and it's a big disappointment when you get into college to find out that what...what I had been working on the last five years in Alaska...was five or ten years ahead of what they had in college...I mean what they were teaching in college. I just said I'm not going to spend my time staying up three or four hours a night every night just...it's my money...I'm not going

to kill myself, I'm too old for that. You know, I was an average student...2.3 or something...but still, I made it through engineering school. I took a full load every year. At that time they also had the GI Bill, which helped, plus it was a lot cheaper then, too. My whole tuition...all my fees and tuition for a semester was maybe \$150. And the books would cost another \$150 because even back then engineering books were expensive as hell. It was a flat fee. It wasn't like today...you pay \$30 or \$40 for a semester hour...that was the whole thing. I think my last semester, in '72, they went to the per/unit, you know, semester/hour cost, and I think it was \$4 per semester/hour. This was in 1972. But man, it's a hell of a lot more expensive than that now, you know.

CHAD THOMAS: You said when you had gone down there there weren't a lot of minority students at UT. What was it like? What was the atmosphere on campus like?

LEE CITY: Even though there was a lot of students there, you make friends. Even today there are people who remember me because it's a lot easier to remember one black face in a class as opposed to twenty white faces in a class, but it wasn't...and it doesn't seem as big as it is. Most people think...well, you got 50,000 students, that's a big place, but even in a school that big, when you get into your major, you know, then the size really shrinks. That's the people you spend most of your time with, the people that's in the same major. Then it doesn't seem so big. It never seemed big to me. People say I don't want to go there because it's too big.

CHAD THOMAS: Your whole education before then had been in small schools and in all black schools, so what was it like, making the transition to some place that wasn't a much bigger school, even though you were in your major, and also just kind of different...

LEE CITY: You've got to remember that I'd spent four years in the Air Force, so therefore, I was used to being around other than black folks. And I was in the Air Force, which was a lot different at that time than any other military services.

CHAD THOMAS: How's that?

LEE CITY: Well, for an example, when I got transferred from California back to New Jersey, we were...our radar site...we had maybe 150 people in the radar site and our commander was an old fighter pilot who couldn't fly any more. But we also had the men from an Army base because we served both the Army and the Air Force with our radar because the Army back then had their Nike system, which was their air defense on the coast of the United States. So, the Army had built our living quarters and the Army was used to living in these open bays where you had a bed, a bed, a bed. We had an Air Force colonel come down and he looked at our quarters and he basically said, no, the Air Force doesn't do things this way. So, within a year or so all of those open bays were converted to two- or three-man rooms.

We just didn't do things the way the Army did. Plus, you were more integrated than the Army was, even though the Army was integrated at that time, it was just different. The only thing similar in the Army at that time was the Signal Corps, because they were more like the Air Force. Well, they thought they were special, too, because they did the Nike, the radar stuff, just like we did. But they were different than the regular Army, too, because they had jobs to do every day whereas the regular Army, the only job they did was marching, or going around picking up cigarette butts or stuff, you know.

And then at our radar site, which was about 30 miles away, we had our own cooks who prepared our food the way we wanted it. So, we had to eat breakfast on the Army base...they had food...in fact I think that's when I gave up eating breakfast. (At our radar site) they'd fix whatever...everything was special for us.

Then, we had softball teams. That's when we really got on the Army. In sports there's no such thing as rank! We'd get those Army lieutenants out there who would want us to do certain things. I remember this couple of Army lieutenants were twins...you'd be on one side of the street, they'd be all the way across the street...we wouldn't salute them on the other side of the street. They complained to high commander and he said what happened? They would say we were here and they were there and they didn't salute us. Our commander basically told them that if you want them to salute you, you come across the street to where they are and I guarantee they will salute you. It was just things like that, the Army, the military, the brass, they just had it all over the grunts. The Air Force just wasn't like that. Like our second lieutenants, even our lieutenants, when the commander wasn't around, we talked to them just like any other enlisted man. It was fine with them because most of them were in ROTC, so they weren't like people out of West Point would be.

There are probably...when I was in the Air Force...probably the best friend I ever had I met...and he was white...he was out of Spokane, Washington. He was a farm boy just like I was. We had met when we first went to Mississippi and we ended up serving the rest of our three years and whatever months together. He passed away a couple years ago but his family lives back in Pennsylvania. I used to go back and visit him all the time. He ended up going to work for IBM when we got out of the service and I went to work for RCA. Then I came back and went to the University, I guess three and a half years, from January '69 to May of '72. And then I left Texas and I went to work for JPL in Pasadena. That's because...it's really strange, because when I was at the University I worked part-time for the Dean of Engineering and then also, in that capacity, I did a lot of work for the guy that ran the placement office. So when I graduated he just told me that...because I'd seen him every day probably for three years...he just told me to give him the name of six people I would like to work for. So I gave him the six companies I would like to work for and he sent out stuff to them and they all invited me for interviews. So, I had it a lot better than other students, just that one contact. I interviewed six people and I think four of them offered me jobs. The reason I took the one in California was because...at that time IBM also offered me a job, but they didn't have any openings in Austin and they had a plant in Austin. They offered me a job in Lexington, Kentucky. And JPL offered me a job in California. I just wanted to do research and development; I didn't want to work on any product line. They both offered about the same amount of money. So it basically came down to location and if I had a choice between Lexington, Kentucky, and Pasadena, California, Lexington never had a chance. So I ended up going out there and worked for JPL for five years.

Then I interviewed IBM out there...marketing division...in '78 I guess, end of '77...and I went to work for them from '78--as a systems engineer--until 1993, when they had...well, actually they had one big reorganization before then and then in 1993 they had another big reorganization. Since I was at a certain age and had worked for them for so many years, I had the option of...because they were changing job titles and everything...I had the option of taking early retirement with a payout, or transferring from Pasadena to San Jose. I decided to just go ahead and take the payout and do early retirement.

So that's what I did and for the next three or four years I just sort of laid around. I figured I had worked enough because I had worked all my life. On the farm at four or five years old I was out there choppin' cotton with my mother because I didn't want to stay home with my brothers and sisters. So my father sawed a handle off of a hoe and I was out choppin' weeds in a field with my mother and older brother. Probably chopped down more cotton than I did weeds! I just didn't want to stay home and take care of my little brothers and sisters. In 1997 I moved back to Georgetown. I told everybody I was looking for a job, but I wasn't really looking for a job. I say I'm 50-something years old and I've worked since I was four or five. That's enough lifetime work, so I moved back to Georgetown in '97.

My mother passed away last year. In '03 she was diagnosed with, well, it's not Alzheimer's, it's what do you call it? the precursor? I can't even think of the name of it. But anyway, we knew something was wrong because she would forget stuff and then there was a point when she was paranoid, and so we had to end up...the State basically...she gave me the power of attorney in 2003. There were certain things you could do with power of attorney over a person but mental health is one you cannot do. Only the State can do that. So, she had walked out of the house one night. My brother was supposed to be watching her and he went to sleep. She couldn't see very well, so she was just out in the front yard. I guess the police was driving by and they saw her, so I was asleep and they woke me up. We put her in the hospital that night and we decided she was at a point where she might hurt herself because she thought people were trying to hurt her. So, the State stepped in because then they could commit her. So we put her in St. David's for three or four weeks and then they got her on some medication which really helped her. Then we brought her home at Thanksgiving that year. She went along pretty good most of the time and then last year, around the middle of the year, she had a sick spell and she just deteriorated from there. She passed away...in fact today is the day she passed away last year. So this is the first anniversary of her passing. That's why I have to go put some flowers on her grave after I leave here. That's pretty much my life in a nutshell.

Like I say, I have no complaints. If you know what you're dealing with, you just have to build that into what you're figuring you're going to do. It's just like a 135-pound guard, trying to knock somebody that outweighs you thirty pounds. You just don't block him head-on. You make him go to one side or the other and then you can block him. You have no strength from sideways as opposed to running straight at you. You adapt.

CHAD THOMAS: I'd like to back up a little bit and talk about desegregation. You had graduated from Carver before desegregation...

LEE CITY: Yeah, I graduated in '59.

CHAD THOMAS: So, were you at all involved in desegregation?

LEE CITY: No, no, it was...like I say, I graduated in '59 and I guess that didn't start happening until the early '60s.

CHAD THOMAS: What did you think about desegregation after it was done?

LEE CITY: Well, I thought it was something that probably should have happened a long time ago. It happened in other places quicker than it did here. And it happened in other places... because here, because my two sisters were still in high school when...in fact I think my oldest sister...I think she might have been in the first class that graduated from the Georgetown white high school after she left Carver... My mother would always tell me that there were certain people, you know, that wanted to desegregate over a twelve-year period. You know, they wanted to start with the first grade...say in '64, and then twelve years later they would have complete integration. But luckily there were people in Georgetown--white folks--that said no, that doesn't make sense. Not only does it cost more money but we'll have a dual system for twelve years. That doesn't make sense. So--Dr. Benold-- he was the one she always talked about--and a few others, would say we're going to do it all at once. Luckily that's what they did. Like I said, my sisters could probably tell you more about that because they were involved right there at the beginning of it, when it all happened.

CHAD THOMAS: Were you of the mentality that at any point in your education here, going to Carver particularly, that it's really time for integration? Were you at any point thinking having these split schools is just not a positive thing?

LEE CITY: Well, yeah, plus also the big driver was...with me...why can't we get up-to-date equipment, up-to-date books, up-to-date sporting equipment rather than getting all these hand-me-downs that somebody just used for a couple of years? That, to me, was the biggest problem. I could do with the separation, if I had the same access to quality education. That was what my parents wanted. After the thing in Kansas City, after the Brown decision, I guess that was '54...well, we figured it's time. It just took a little longer to get here. It took ten years to get here. Other places in the state had already went through the desegregation but Georgetown was fightin' it.

You probably know, Georgetown used to be a lot more conservative than it is now. Williamson County was probably like Orange County in California and Orange County in Florida. It was really conservative. But then when the professionals, young professionals started working in Austin, and they didn't want to live in Austin, they start migrating north. As more and more people came into the city and then into Williamson County, the old city fathers--or city fart-ers as we used to call them--lost [control]. They wanted to control the city, they wanted to control everything. Which is why Round Rock outgrew Georgetown because there were companies, like over here at the Rivery...there were companies trying to build over there even after I came back in '97, but Georgetown was making them go through so many hoops, they just said we can't put up with this.

My mother used to...I think it was my mother that was telling me...if you were a company that wanted to move to Williamson County, if you moved to Round Rock all the Round Rock leaders would say, where's your building going to be? When are you going to have it finished? And they'd tell them and they'd say, well, when you get your building finished, we'll have access to it...roads...we'll have sewage...we'll have electricity. And in Georgetown they would say, we're going to charge you this to put roads in, this to put electricity in, this to put sewage in, so the guys just go to Round Rock. And now Round Rock has what, four or five high schools? And Georgetown just built its second one, but high school students probably won't move in there for another three years probably. So, that's how it went. Round Rock said come on...Georgetown said come on and bring your money.

CHAD THOMAS: I know we've been talking about segregation as far as schools. One thing I wanted to back up and ask you about was...so, you were in the Air Force and it was integrated when you were there. Was that really the first time you'd really been interacting with white people?

LEE CITY: Yes...yes...yes...although there were farmers out in the country where we lived, and we interacted. We just didn't go to school together. But we saw each other all the time and we interacted. They were, I guess, pretty "liberal" is the word to use. It didn't make no difference to them. They would make a deal with my daddy on a handshake just like they would anybody else. It's just that when you got to Georgetown then it was a whole different story. You didn't have trouble going in the stores and stuff, and you had trouble if you wanted to go in the front door of the cafes, but there wasn't that many cafes here. And I didn't like to eat out anyway, so it didn't bother me. I say, I didn't want to eat your food anyway. But the L&M Cafe was here on Austin Avenue. It was right next to...that was when Piggly Wiggly was the grocery store...they would serve black folks but you had to go in the back. I never even ate in the place, so that didn't bother me. Yeah, it was like that. There was nobody that you interacted with in Georgetown...no other than the people in the stores. You had no trouble going into the stores because, you know, green is green no matter where it comes from.

CHAD THOMAS: What about the theater. You said you'd go to see movies.

LEE CITY: Well, it was divided. White folks sit downstairs, black folk sit up in the balcony. But I always thought the balcony was better seats anyway. That didn't bother me.

CHAD THOMAS: Were there any things that did bother you, like problems you run into at times, or inconveniences...

LEE CITY: No. I never had anyone that called me the N-word, my whole life, even in Georgetown. It's probably good because I probably would be in jail. (Laughs) It just wasn't...at least to me, maybe it was the way I looked at something... because at the drop of a hat if somebody had called me the N-word I probably would have beat 'em up right there.

CHAD THOMAS: You were saying that one way to describe you is that you were kind of an independent guy, a little more casual...what I'm going to do, what I'm going to accomplish is what I set out to do. But as far as other people that you knew, did they run into situations that you knew about in Georgetown that having this...having segregation...created problems?

LEE CITY: Nobody ever...they just didn't talk about it if they did, though. It was probably going on, you know. Since I didn't live in Georgetown itself I didn't have that much interaction. My basically being in Georgetown was I'd come to school on the bus...[then] get on the bus and go home. On the weekend maybe come in and shop and then go home. But you know, I didn't have a lot of interaction with the white folks in Georgetown.

CHAD THOMAS: What about the buses, were they segregated?

LEE CITY: Yeah.



CHAD THOMAS: So, I guess there was just a front and back division?

LEE CITY: It was two buses running the same route.

CHAD THOMAS: So, they had a white bus and a black bus?

LEE CITY: Yeah, yes, pretty much two buses running the same route. Everything was spending money...two buses. When you look back at it you say how could they be so stu.... Well, they had to run two buses, otherwise it wouldn't make sense to have two different schools. It was just like that.

Even in the country...the only time I remember one person...that was this guy that owned this little store...you know where Mankin's Crossing is? If you go out of Georgetown out about 5-6 miles, there's a high bridge that goes over the San Gabriel River...anyway Mankin's Crossing is the low bridge, down on the crossing of the river. Right above the low bridge, came up the hill...there was a little grocery store/service station. There was this guy. I'm trying to remember his name. I think his name was Marshall. Anyway, me and my cousin, who is the same age as me, was there buying something. And he rubbed his hand on my cousin's head and said...it was something stupid...something like, you rub your hand on a...it was the only time I heard someone say nigger...nigger's head and you'd get something like three bales of cotton a year. So, we went home and we told my daddy and he...at that time he was probably about 6 feet and weighed 230 pounds...and he went back, encountered this guy, and scared the livin' shit out of him. Told him if he'd ever do that again he was going to come back and kill him. That guy was nice to us...treated us like his own kids...from that point on. And like I said, my father had two brothers, they were all out there and they were all about the same size so...you know he never raised his voice, but when this guy saw he was mad, he really scared this guy. That was the last trouble that I'd ever seen from that guy.

But most of the folks out in the country, they didn't care too much. In fact we baled their hay every year because my father and uncle they had a hay baler, so even before they did their own baling they'd go around and bale everybody else's hay. And everything's done on a handshake. So much per bale and we'll get it done next week or the week after. It was all a handshake and OK. When he come back he'd tell how many bales he had and the guy'd write him out a check and that was it.

And the other thing about Jonah...back then it had three grocery stores--now there's none--but the three grocery stores, they were typical farm community. In farming during the wintertime you don't make any money. So basically you go into the grocery store, you buy your food and they write everything down, you sign it and the guy put it away. Then when the crop comes in, summer comes in, money starts coming in, you go back, give the guy the money, he'd give the ticket back. That's the way farmers lived back then. The grocery store pretty much carried you through the wintertime and they didn't charge interest. You just picked up the food you needed to survive and that was it.

CHAD THOMAS: I know you said your sisters probably would have more stuff about desegregation in Georgetown because you weren't living here at the time, but how was your life affected by desegregation at the time that it was occurring? I guess you were in the Air Force at the time....

LEE CITY: Well, afterward, because I didn't do very much traveling until after the Air Force. And up until the Fair Housing Act was passed it was hard to drive down the road...highway...and find a motel that you could live in. Like I said, I didn't do very much traveling anyway. Even when you were traveling and you didn't want to spend money on a motel, it was relatively safe even in the late-'60s, if you get sleepy you just pull into a roadside rest place and just go to sleep. You didn't want to spend money for a motel anyway. It didn't have that much effect on me, not consciously anyway. By the time I really started traveling there was no problem to get housing anywhere in the United States. Before then I'd heard stories about people wasn't able to stop and get a motel or anything. They just basically had to stop at a service station or whatever and go to sleep in the car.

CHAD THOMAS: I guess, would you say that the Air Force, because it was already desegregated, did that sort of serve as a transition point for you? It was maybe a separate type of lifestyle, but for a lot of people who were maybe more...

LEE CITY: I never even thought about it. It never even occurred [to me]. From the day I went to the service everybody was the same. Nobody was different. You got treated the same. If you screwed up you got hollered at and if you did good you got praised. And in training, it was always the timid ones that the guy knew he could holler at and get a reaction out of. Like I say, that was back in the day that if he'd hollered at me to much I probably would have been in the brig. You just come off the farm, 185 pounds of farm boy, nothing but muscle, so...as long as you did your job nobody hollered at you. As long as you didn't act like you were scared of them, you know, the training instructors wouldn't holler at you. After a point you see where they were hollering at a certain person because that whole point was to try to make him stronger, to try to make him stand up to you. If you're in the military you gotta stand for something. Even the Air Force wasn't as bad as the Army or the Marines because the Air Force's philosophy was to treat you like a human and they'll get the most out of you. That was four of the best years of my life. I met a lot of people and made a lot of friends. But we're all getting old and when you get out you sort of disperse, so it's hard to keep track once you get out.

CHAD THOMAS: Well, let's wrap up.

LEE CITY: OK.