

University of Houston
Oral History of Houston Project
Turkey Day Game – Wheatley

Interviewee: Edwin Bay, Algenita Davis, Ralph Jones, Willie Jordan, Ralph Oaks, Peggy Stratton-Sales, Betty Taylor-Thompson, Loretta Thompson-Williams

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Transcriber: Justin Thompson

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Abstract:

On September 14th, 2016, Houston History Magazine interviewed seven Wheatley alumni to discuss the now non-existent Turkey Day Classic football game that used to occur between Phyllis Wheatley Senior High School and Jack Yates Senior High School. The group reminisced upon the extravagance and glamour of the events leading up until and after the game such as the Pep Rallies, Thanksgiving Day Breakfast, Thanksgiving parade, the game itself, halftime honoring Mr. and Mrs. Wheatley, and ultimately Thanksgiving dinner that evening. The despair of losses as well as the excitement of the schools victory in the game was both seen with admiration as the game proved to be a very memorable time for the alumni. Aside from the game, many individuals talk about the coaches, the principals, their appreciation of Wheatley HS, and the Houston independent School District. Due to the climate in the 1960's, these individuals as students dealt with the uncertainty that integration brought and many attempts to sever the black community beforehand.

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BT: I am Dr. Betty Taylor-Thompson, I graduated from Phyllis Wheatley Sr. High School in 1959, and I was a cheerleader. I was a Cheerleader at E.O. Smith Junior High School as well. I guess my relationship to all the games was that I was a cheerleader, which I did not appreciate at that time.

RO: My name is Ralph O. I was a student at Phyllis Wheatley, my relationship to the game was that I attended every game.

TT: What year?

RO: I attended every game from 1951, until I graduated in 1959. The, I never ate Thanksgiving dinner around 11 or 1 o' clock. It was always Thanksgiving dinner in the evening around 6 o' clock. I graduated from Wheatley in 1959.

RJ: My name is Ralph Jones. I graduated from Phyllis Wheatley in 1955. I ran track on the state team and that year we had state in track, football, baseball and then basketball. I was an athlete on the track team and the football team. As little as I was, I was out there, but I was fast.

LT: I'm Loretta Thompson-Williams in the class of 1959. I did no sports, I was just a good student. Just a good student. But I enjoyed my years there. So that was it and I'm on the Wheatley wall of fame along with Will Jordan and _____ committee. Wall of Fame. Which he has made...

WJ: I'm Willie Jordan finished in class of '56. I went to every Wheatley-Yates game that I could go to, didn't play in any but I wanted to. There was a reason I didn't play, they didn't give me uniforms because they didn't have any to fit me. I weighed 98 to 101 pounds. Now in my old age I lookback and I'm thankful they didn't let my play I might not have been here. I then wanted to play football so bad, I kept hanging around the football field. I went to Frank Walker, and asked if I could be water boy, manager, or anything. And he did consequently, I ended up

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going, not recruiting but looking at the other team, assessing what the competition would be. As they played the game I was also affiliated with the 1954 State Championship game between Moore High and Wheatley, but prior to that we played Yates on Thanksgiving. Up to that point we hadn't lost any games. And we lost that game 15-14 to Yates, and I'm still mad about it! But Ivory Jones kicked a field goal and generally in high school it was unheard of back then, somebody kicking a field goal to win the game. And we were so mad we just didn't know what to do. But consequently we moved on to play Wheatley of San Antonio, and Moore High of Waco and we did win State Championship right here 12 - nothing against Moore High. There was a quarterback they had who was an All-Pro type guy. He was quarterback, could play both hands, he threw the ball with both hands so he was ambidextrous. And the headline said "Moore beats Moore." Moore High Waco who had a guy named Arther Moore who scored both touchdowns. That is my story and I'm sticking with it.

PS: My name is Peggy Stratton-Sales, I graduated from Phyllis Wheatley, class of 1959. My relationship with the game was that when I was probably in elementary school my mother started taking me to the game, and dressing me in purple and white. I remember that! But my years at Wheatley were very good and I come from, like I say my mother, I came from a line, a history, my family all went to Wheatley. There was nothing to think of except going to Wheatley when you, when you went to high school. I remember all the Thanksgiving games; I remember the challenge of how Miss Wheatley would come out. What she was going to come out of. Cause one time a football, I remember when Yates brought Miss Yates out in a helicopter. Well they said "Oh no," they had told Wheatley for years "Oh no _____ try to do that". And they said "Oh no, we can't do that." So we think they did it as a favor for Dr. Caldwell when he left Wheatley and went to Yates.

WJ: Well up to that point, up to that moment, we would always compete with how Miss Wheatley would come out, how Miss Yates would come out, and one time they would do this, and another time they would come out in an _____ Cadillac, another one, some antique car, horse and buggy and all that. But I will have to confess when Carolyn Wilkins from Yates came out in a helicopter, we threw in the flag. We threw in the white flag. Because we were done. We had been trying to do it and never could get it done. _____ It was a spectacle.

RO: I can remember when Willie came out there he was standing out there with Miss Wheatley he had his cape on, and I think little boots. He didn't tell you about this now!

WJ: But it's in the book it's in the Yates Book! (Yearbook)

RO: Willie was about, looked like he was about four-foot-four. Everybody else was looking down on him. But he was right there among that but it was a big thing to see him out there to see him with his cape on and the purple and white. It was just a beautiful thing.

(inaudible)

DH: I started to wear purple and white today and I thought they might not let me in this library.

WJ: No, they might not! No, You might not.

PS: But it was the thing to wear purple and white on Thanksgiving Day. Purple and white. You would look over like this and it would be a sea of purple. You would look to the other side and see a sea of red.

WJ: But the thing about the purple and white, the stadium was here in Third Ward, and a lot of the guys were afraid to walk down Holman Street with the purple and white, because there'd be some fights and rock throwing and all that. But I understand after I graduated from Wheatley

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some of our real big robust not afraid of anything, Balthazar, Aaron Jackson, all them after the game, they put on all the purple and white and went straight down the middle of Holman Street daring Yates guys to come out and nothing happened.

BT: And I even, I found a picture of me in my cheerleading outfit for Wheatley, and just to kind of remind me, of what we had.

DH: You'll have to let me take a picture of that before we leave.

?: Well we have one player,

DH: If you can introduce yourself and tell us...

EB: My name is Edwin Bay, and um, commonly known as Bay-Bay, I started way back at EO Smith. I was on the 1959 football team. We thought it was the best team we ever had. We got disqualified because of B.W. Cheeks. They said he skipped a grade. But we only gave up two touchdowns that year.

WJ: The whole year.

DH: Wow.

EB: And I was just looking at the names of some of these guys, Redd and Sauerkraut and Bad Hair, so and so, and thinking back we had Bed Bug, something to do, Frog, which was _____ ,

WJ: Hand Jive!

ED: Hand Jive, Big John, Uncle Bubba, Bootsie. So names just kind of go with your friends...

WJ: Over the years.

EB: But anyway, that is right. I'm here, class of 1959, here to see what goes on.

DH: Thanks for coming.

LW: In 1958 we were only scored on twice, and that was by Booker T. Washington and Yates.

RJ: That was the team. That was the team. The games were played in '58.

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LW: Yeah that is what I said, 1958.

EB:Kashmere voted against us.

LW: We were only scored on twice and that was Booker T Washington, 8, and Yates, 8 but we won 20-8.

WJ: The thing about the game is, Thanksgiving game was homecoming and people from all over the country came back for homecoming. They came from everywhere and going back we couldn't go to the hotels for parties and everything, so people had Thanksgiving parties the night before for the out of town guests at their home or at some little café on the other side, or a restaurant on the other side of town. That was Friday, not Friday, Wednesday night. Now the school for all the students had a pep rally. It was wild. You went there and everybody just stood up and cheered, they introduced the football team, the cheerleaders were out, the Major, we had a band, the Majorettes was out there doing their thing. It was a party.

BT: But it was an organized party. Don't say it was wild, because everything at Wheatley, and I'm sure at Yates, was disciplined. We didn't have disciplinary problems.

WJ: No, we had discipline.

BT: We had total and complete discipline.

?: Good, clean fun.

DH: What was your principal's name? The one that came...

Many: John F. Caldwell,

?: We graduated with William Moore.

Many: ...and William Moore!

WJ: The most pronounced, the most significant one, in terms of history was John Caldwell.

BT: Because he went on to Yates.

WJ: John Caldwell was also played... Well he was a football coach at Wheatley.

DH: So that is fairly similar to William Holland.... He was a coach and then he became principal?

BT: That whole idea of mixing up the principals, and my mother was a principal also, but in an elementary school, was done to crack the black community, to try to keep us apart. That was a very political move, by whites to crack the black community because we were very, very much, and my mother told me about this, we were very much... it was a big cultural thing, and so they figured that Wheatley and Yates and all these people that were coming out of Wheatley and Yates. Before them, you had all these people who did well, who did well. They wanted to crack that rise to the middle class that was happening from blacks at Yates and Wheatley, and at Washington as well. So what they did, because we had such a loyalty to our principals, was to move those principals around so that they thought they would break the black community as they moved toward middle class. And it just didn't happen. It did not happen, but they tried.

DH: It's interesting to hear you say that because I certainly heard that from the Yates perspective, they felt it very definitely put a crack in the community in the Third Ward.

BT: It probably did more than it did at Wheatley.

DH: That's what I was going to ask, do you think it had more or less of an impact at Wheatley?

WJ: We were mad about it. We didn't like it. You're against your competitor and you felt like at the time Dr. Caldwell should have rejected the job. But as we grew older, we understood, what your mother probably told you...

BT: Already knew.

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WJ: That said, they put Dr. Caldwell in a position, “You take it or you’re going to leave Wheatley anyway.”

RO: You’re going to leave HISD.

WJ: There was a new school over here,

WJ: The reason they were not going to give it to Mr. Holland because he had bucked the system. He was a real fair complexion guy. If you didn’t hear him talk you might’ve thought he was Caucasian. I was told the story that they would march on Armistice Day in the parade, and what they would do is put the predominantly black schools behind the horses. Where you know what’s going to happen. The horse is going to leave the manure in the middle of the road, the kids marching in the band...

RO: And they’re going to step in it.

WJ: And you’d step in it, or you smell it and all of that. Dr. Holland said “Well, this is the last year. We’re not doing it, if you got us behind the horses, my kids not going to go.” So I took off my hat for that concept. I heard about it later.

LW: ...The politics of it.

WJ: The board members and the president of the board were so mad that here was an uppity black, to step out of line, to contest them, “Who are you to tell us what to do?” So they were going to punish him by not giving him the school and to really rub it in their face, go over and get Wheatley the competitor and put him here. So it just disturbed everybody.

BT: Everybody. But they did the same thing to my mother. They did the same thing.

WJ: What was that school, in Fourth Ward?

BT: My mother started out at a school, I’ll make it very quickly because this is not about her she is at a museum anyway, an African American museum. They started out at Brays Bayou,

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which was a school that did not even have indoor plumbing. Then she went to Highland Heights.

It was what we call a wood school, you know? And somebody... a shack school, it was a shack school. Somebody, one of the kids burned the school down. When they burned Highland Heights down in Acreage Homes, they built a brick school. So, she was able to stay there. Because she had been in the community so long, they would not let her stay in Acreage Homes. They moved, they felt... some of them, I don't know exactly who it was. But felt that they could not get attached to Mrs. Brooks. So therefore they moved her to a Mexican school, I'll never forget that. She told them, I'm sure the word now is Latino, but then Mexicans. And she said "I have no business being principal of a Mexican school, I don't speak Spanish, these people do not know me, I do not know them." And she fought that battle to get out of that school for two years. And that school, and they finally moved her, and I'ma think of the superintendent who did it, because he said "She's right." And they moved her to Gregory Lincoln and in doing, moving her to Gregory Lincoln, which was the school she attended as a child, they didn't know that they had just put her in history.

WJ: Right in it!

BT: Put her right in history, they didn't mean to do it! And they put her right into the Fourth Ward history. That just goes to show you that when people mean to do you bad, sometimes good will come out of it. And as a result of that, as far as her child, as far as being her child is concerned, they gave her a place in history that they had no intention of doing. She was the last principal.

?: Have any of ya'll been to the museum?

WJ: One thing, getting back to the Wheatley, and I think that is what we were dealing with...

BT: Sorry.

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WJ: No, no, and I appreciate that. Because that is how we learn history and I knew a little about that. That was great. One thing that we forgot and I thought you were going to hit on....

The morning of the game. We missed a greater portion of it; they started having a breakfast dance! They started a breakfast dance!

RO: It started at 5' o clock.

WJ: At 5 in the morning. They would have eggs and have bacon, and a buffet in the school cafeteria. Okay, We started it. I say we, Wheatley started it. Then Yates followed. Yates had some connections with communication, they got on the radio, and then Wheatley pulled some folk to get on the radio. And you know what happened there, it was a competition. We were taking bad about the other, I mean it just built up. The momentum of we getting ready to have a sure enough fight. I mean figuratively speaking. So it was just back and forth. Then after that guess what would happen? Parade! And you all forgot about that. The Yates Parade would go down Dowling. And everybody would get their outfits on. And then Wheatley would go down Lyons Avenue in their convertible cars. And then all the fraternities start coming and everything. So it was a festive occasion, starting from Wednesday through the night since everybody was coming into town, and that next morning is when it was really something because it kept building up.

RO: The game normally started at 2 o' clock.

Others: Yeah. Yep.

RO: And it normally ended around 5:30, because we couldn't do a 2 or 3 hour game

All: Halftime!

WJ: You had halftime, and halftime was just like the game because you're going to compete.

LW: It was probably the most dressed up football game.

WJ: Attended. You'd dress up in Sunday best.

LW: We were dressed to a T.

WJ: They would save money the whole year to buy up a big outfit,

BT: a red and yellow..

LW: went to no other game

EB: It was the only day games that I remember that we played.

BT: Because everything else was _____.

WJ: You were younger. The old guys, that Armistice Day game, was also in the daytime
'cause I remember as a young kid going to them.

EB:we invented that game...

WJ: By then, no by then, it was only one day game.

BT: They didn't let you all do all that stuff that we had to do in the morning because you had
to rest. You all had to rest.

(inaudible)

EB: I can't remember where Frank took us.

WJ: _____ ya'll to the stadium,

EB: No, he took us to camp somewhere.

WJ: He took yall that night, and then bussed yall back in.

BT: Buss y'all back.

EB: Yeah.

BT: Mr. Walker had it together, I have to give it to him, Mr. Walker had it together.

WJ: I'll tell you what.

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EB: Once the game starts, you really don't hear the crowd.

BT: No you don't.

EB: You're into playing football or basketball or whatever it is. You really don't hear the crowd. So it is not like you're hyped up any more than you normally were its just playing basketball or football or whatever.

BT: The cheerleaders were just totally tired by then.

WJ: The only thing I will say, and you don't have to put it on record. But we didn't fare as well as I would've liked against Yates on Thanksgiving. Now I just have to, I'm more mature now. I hated losing!

EB: I've got some Yates friends now and they don't let me forget it either.

WJ: That's the point I was about to make! We're Wheatley folk, and for a while I wouldn't admit it, 'cause I just was embarrassed.

EB: There is something about football.

RO: But see we were the leaders in Basketball,

WJ: We were super leaders in basketball!

RO: We could come out in basketball, if we didn't win the district, if we came in second, the Championship games was played at PV. And we could be second in district and come out number one in the State. Collins Briggs had, he won, you know they said Jackie Carr, Jackie Carr was a legend. You know, Jackie Carr is not a great legend. Collins Briggs is a legend, Jackie Carr won games when they had integrated, that's the reason his legacy is there. But Collins Briggs went up to PV, that's where you, and they had some...

WJ: They won, could've been as much as 9 or 11 state championships in a row,

DH: Wow

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WJ: Between our school and IM Terrell in Fort Worth, that's where the black power was, in basketball. But in terms of the Thanksgiving Day classic, I think that covered... the ladies will tell you about the dress.

BT: Oh yeah!

WJ: It was, what would you call it? A show!?

BT: I never knew what was going on in the stands. I never knew, I never watched from the stands not one game.

RO: You were almost on the field because of the crowd. They overfilled the stadium; you had two sides to the stadium. Even when they... not always there. But they had to put up temporary bleachers on the north side of the stadium. And that was where people stood at least five deep around the field, they couldn't, lot of people couldn't see the game.

WJ: The numbers though, the numbers, for example, during that time, at one time it was about 28,000. But after I graduated in 1956...I'm standing...

EB: I thought it was in the forties wasn't it?

WJ: They had some big games, but during our time is when that stadium was built that's when it started getting higher and higher.

EB: What stadium?

WJ: Jeppessen. Then the stadium, they got, I remember the time we played, it was about 28,000. Well, I understand that team you all, that only had two touchdowns scored against you with BW Cheeks. I understand that thing got up to anywhere from around 38 - 40,000 and if you check your history, that's probably the largest attended game for high school in the United States. I saw it somewhere; I think Thurman Robins is the one who told me that.

RO: It was the largest scheduled high school game in the country.

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EB: I'm sure it's already been mentioned, in the event there was an integration, of husband and wife, Wheatley and Yates the family actually split, the Yates part on the Yates side, the Wheatley part on the Wheatley side. "Honey I'll see you after the game."

WJ: Well that was one way to do it. Another way they did it was flip a coin, to see who was going to be on the half. They'd stay one half over here, and after half time the husband and wife would go over here. But they'd flip the coin to see who was the home team first. No, I had some like that!

RO: I had an aunt that lived in Third Ward and I think for about four years in a row we went to her house for Thanksgiving dinner. And I can recall it was over here on the other side about two blocks from TSU. We would walk, we wouldn't have on purple and white, you know? Not at all. And we would walk over there for Thanksgiving dinner. Because back then very few people had two cars.

LW: Or a car.

All: Or a car!

RO: So if you didn't know how to ride the bus, you were hurting. But that was the biggest game, that game had more, produced more profit for HISD than all the other games combined in the city.

WJ: It's alleged that that game paid for that stadium. And I take offense to this day when the board technically gave the stadium away to U of H for one dollar. Now I resent that to this day.

DH: I've heard it slightly different on the funding. WPA paid for a good bit of the construction of the stadium, but I definitely heard that the money that was raised, and that was HISD's biggest money maker, never went back to the schools. Until...

BT: No, no, no no no. Never.

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DH: Until they, actually what I had heard, was that Holland and... Caldwell? Caldwell, banded together and said "We're not going to play the game if some of that money doesn't start coming back to our schools."

RO: It never came back to the school, no. Unless it was it was some kind of... Because we couldn't get a whole lot of equipment for drums or nothing.

WJ: Band, equipment, uniforms.

RO: We were hurting, sometimes we had the uniform, they had uniforms except for sometimes, Turkey Day, there was...you know this. Some of ya'lls uniforms weren't new every season.

EB: Certainly our books weren't.

WJ: Don't even mention books.

EB: Don't mention books.

BT: But the most wonderful thing, and because I am an educator and I will have to say this. There is no education like we got at Phyllis Wheatley Senior High School.

All: Oh no, I...

BT: There is no education like we got at Phyllis Wheatley Senior High School. Because I get to see now what education and what students have, and they can't do any of the things that we could do with nothing. I already said I already said that... with nothing those teachers, and we owe them so much, we owe them so much because they cared, they made sure we knew what we were supposed to know. And that is including my mother, there made sure we were prepared for college. There is, I do not, except for my honor students at Texas Southern I had, I do not have one student who is prepared as we were when we left Wheatley High School. Not one, not—they can't compete. Reverend Lawson I remember him saying, "What did they—" and the same

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for Yates “What did they feed you all at Phyllis Wheatley Senior High School?” And they

wonder why all of those people, Barbara Jordan and all of them came out of Wheatley? And many out of here? Because we were prepared and we could face, they could put us, drop us in Harvard, Howard, Fisk, or any place in the world and we were ready to compete, because they made sure of that.

LW: And also going back to the game. The teachers would put the pep rallies and things like that, teachers would give us gifts.

BT: They were totally and completely loyal to us.

LW: I remember when we had our pep rallies in the auditorium or whatever, the teachers were very involved in it...

BT: That’s absolutely...

LW: ...wearing purple and white. They had fun too.

BT: They had fun too!

LW: Because some of the teachers went to Wheatley too.

BT: Absolutely. Not so much that, those uniforms, we bought our own uniforms.

RO: Those that could.

BT: And if you couldn’t, you got one anyways.

WJ: Yeah, they figured out...

BT: They figured out a way for you to get you, you were going to get whatever you needed. And I can remember them having seamstresses who were designated to make these particular uniforms. And going and buying this hard to find.... purple, velvet uniforms! Perfect velvet uniforms. You can see that they made sure, even though they made sure our dresses...

Remember, Yates was long, they didn’t even let them wear short dresses. Wheatley, we could

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wear above our knees. Yates could not. You see, we were covered up, there was nothing showing but the legs from the knees. So that means long sleeves, white satin blouses, and you could not find purple socks, so we dyed, we dyed our purple socks. And got some ripped. And we dyed our purple socks. These shoes were bucks, they were bucks. and bucks have white soles, and we had to go all the way around those soles with black, and you had to re-do this every game because out there in the stadium it was sand. And it would tear up everything and I can see my grandmother now, polishing and making those bucks totally white, and then re-dying those soles for every single game. So it was very important the way we looked. Now we did have summer and winter uniforms.

RO: The other thing about the game, the Thanksgiving game, it wasn't a game between two teams. It was a game, it was a game with the neighborhood. You had people who never went to high school, Wheatley high school, probably never graduated. But they were for Wheatley. And they would argue you to death about the game, and if they knew a kid in the neighborhood could not, he was going to Wheatley, and could not afford it, they would help him out. It was a community, it was a neighborhood, and that's is... Wheatley stood high, you don't have neighborhood schools anymore. Not at all. Even at neighborhood schools in the community, right around that corner. How many parents supported their school other than those that had kids in that school? You didn't have that. And that was the Thanksgiving game, it made that. It made people aware of what Wheatley was about, and it made them respect education. You don't have that today; you don't have respect for education, any more.

BT: Oh no. Absolutely not. None. None.

RO: You know, you get kids...

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PS: We respected those teachers, we respected those teachers. They call it corporal punishment now, okay? But they hit us, you know?. They didn't really have to apply very much corporal punishment.

RL: No they did not...

PS: They call it corporal punishment, okay?

BT: ...I don't know about these boys...

?: inaudible_.

BT: You didn't have to worry about me.

(inaudible)

BT: Bootsie not coming in? You aint seen Bootsie?

?: No

BT: You couldn't find Bootsie?

?: Well she didn't want a whole bunch of people...

(inaudible)

BT: All I did was cheerleading all those stuff you all been talking about in the stands I knew nothing. I knew nothing. They had their hands on us from before the game until after that game. And it was my mother sitting in the stands, _____. I didn't know what ya'll were doing on the stands. I knew every one of them. Matt Rogers and some of them I've forgotten but Barbara.

LT: Barbara, Barbara Jackson-Nealy...

All: (inaudible)

RJ: That must be Yates

WJ: What year was that?

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LT: I recall...

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WJ: Can you all remember anything else other than the breakfast, the parade, the game? What happened after the game, were there any other functions?

RO: No people would come into town

PS: They had parties all the in the mornings and all the Friday nights.

PS: They finally went home and ate dinner. Everybody went home and ate dinner.

??:

BT: Cheerleaders were also, Wheatley cheerleaders, I don't know cheerleading became a professional, I don't know..

WJ: But everybody has said at breakfast they started putting it on the radio. With Yates having their breakfast on the radio, they had it, they were competing, and they were talking trash.

WJ: Trash talking and by the time the game came, everybody was all revved up.

PS: Cause like you said, people came home, took their vacations just to come home just for the Thanksgiving game. Came from different cities.

BT: Especially California

RO: There was a time they started an organization out in California called Wheatley West. A lot of people, and that was started in the late 50s.

DH: I would think the fact that the game was on Thanksgiving, and people could come and visit family helped. And when they changed and the game wasn't on Thanksgiving any more that cut down on the crowd because people couldn't come.

LW: Its just not the same.

AL: They eliminated the entire structure.

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BT: And that was their point.

DH: When the two leagues merged, the PVIL and the UIL.

AD: They eliminated the black schools playing each other, and that was, that year was the last Thanksgiving. It was '66. And the reason that it was eliminated that year was because the Houston Independent School District, the lawsuit that was filed in '55, they had prosecuted that lawsuit all the way through until '88. 1988 or something. And they were allowed to continue that process because they were only integrating one grade per year, and that was my year. Because that is what started with the lawsuit, the three plaintiffs that started, that entered, would have been the first grade in '55. That was at that Ross Elementary school. I don't know which one... Benevia? She was the Senior High Plaintiff? But she was, yes she was! She would have been the plaintiff for the junior high level but they had three plaintiffs, and George Nelson was the barber who took them to the schools to try to enter, and when they were denied entrance, that's when they could then go back and then get together to file the lawsuit to force Houston Independent School District to integrate. Because the rest of the world had already done that, but Texas being the recalcitrant entity that it has always been, refused to integrate, so then they started this one year. So from '55 every year. There I think two students in my class who left to go to a white school in the 12th grade. One of those was Andrew Moran, and I don't think, I don't know if John Scribers did it. No it was Johnny Scribers. So they left in that 12th grade, and they could have done it, at any year we could have done it. But to do so would subject you as a child to the vicious, Confederate personalities of the school system. So that's why it ended, and Thanksgiving Day ended at that last integration year, and that was like the penalty. That was '66 the last Thanksgiving parade.

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BT: And did you? I don't know if you knew. When I came back and was working at Kashmere, they went through and picked teachers that they were going to send to Bellaire. I remember Bellaire. They were going to send me, Carolyn Lynn, Carolyn Macafee Lindsey, and I cannot think of the other, anyway she looked white. To Bellaire. No black students, just three.... I said "What!?" and they told me I had to go, I said "No, I don't. Watch me." I said "You mean to tell me you're going to send me to a school that has no black students?" Because they said my test scores, we had the three highest test scores in the school. I left and went to Washington, D.C. Because my mother was still a principal. I said "You know what Mama? You're not going to have a job, if I don't get out of here." I said "Because they cannot do this to me." I would've been in jail! I was about to go to jail! Cause I said, oh, oh! No! They did everything they could to try and talk me into going to Bellaire. Not one black. Oh I get angry when I think about it today.

DH: Edwin?

LW: What year I don't know. What year did the Wheatley-Yates game almost become insignificant in a sense?

AD: Once they took it away from Thanksgiving.

RO: Now what happened was that the playoffs for the district playoffs,

DH: '67.

RO: That changed the scheduling for the games. So when they started the playoffs before Thanksgiving, you had to finish the season before Thanksgiving. So they couldn't have Wheatley and Yates play on Thanksgiving when district play is already ended.

AL: That would've been '67, because the last Turkey Day Game was '66. So then about '67 that's when the whole schedule integrated, integration of people occurred.

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DH: I went to Westbury, and we integrated in 1967, that's when I was starting high school.

We had one black student and one black teacher, that was integration.

All: Mhm.

?: I wouldn't have _____.

LW: Dorothy Booker was supposed to be here, she was one of the first black teachers with the integration and she ended up being the head of the math department.

AL: Yeah, she said they selected the teachers and they put them in all kinds of different schools. And I remember my mother had been at Crawford Elementary School for like, I would say, 30 years, and then they said, "Well, now you have to go to Hohl." Hohl. H-O-H-L. Anyway, so they moved her they just pulled all of those teachers out, took about half of them.

RO: The Best of them too!

?: The Best!

BT: And I could not believe that!

PS: They took my neighbor, I don't know if they pulled him out.

BT: I said "You're going by yourself because Betty is going to Washington D.C."

EB: What about the black principals? The reason I'm asking because I was wondering...

What about the principals?

BT: They left a lot of them alone. They left a lot of the principals alone.

BL: They didn't want to put them into those leadership roles. A black male principal over a bunch of white teachers, white female teachers. They didn't want to do that.

LW: When all that came that's what caused part of the demise of the big...

WJ: Big black schools.

LW: We had fun with the Turkey Day game, but now when they started doing all of that...

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BT: It took the fun away, but I left the city.

RO: I always thought, you know after they, they separated Fifth Ward so bad.

AL: Crucified it, is what it is. I-10 and 59.

DH: Are you talking about the freeway?

AL: I-10 and 59 they crucified Fifth Ward.

WJ: I-10 and 59, see that killed Wheatley.

?: They took _____ away from Wheatley.

RO: That was the demise of Wheatley, first when they put 59 through.

AL: And then when they came with 61.

RO: then they...

AL: 61 they put I-10.

RO: No students out there.

WJ: But the zoning was the same difference, think about Pleasantville.

BT: Absolutely!

WJ: Even now you think about Pleasantville, and Furr.

AL: And Clinton Park.

?: And Clinton Park.

?: _____ went to Kashmere.

BT: They drew the line, one of my girlfriends...

WJ: Gerrymandering, you ever heard of that?

BT: They drew those lines to kill Wheatley.

RO: You know even today, Wheatley and Kashmere were together at one time. We all grew up with most of those kids. And with the problems they're having at Wheatley and the problems

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they're having at Kashmere, you know it would be easy to combine those and make another mega school or a larger school. Because now with the population of Fifth Ward...

AL: As it decreases. As it decreases and continues to decrease.

RO: Right. And right now they're doing bussing from Kashmere gardens over to wherever they buss the kids.

AL: And all of the schools, you know Yates is right here, this is a campus built for 3,000 students, and the zone, the number of students zoned to Yates is 1700 like 1700 students. Of the 1700, 900 attend another school.

WJ: And that's on the high side.

AL: 900 attend another school because they choose to go to a M & M, through magnet or whatever. They will tear down this magnificent 3,000 student facility. And they'll build this miniature 1,300 student facility right here, that's what they're doing.

DH: Is that what they're doing?

AL: That's what they are doing now.

DH: So for Wheatley, didn't they build a new Wheatley now?

AL: Wheatley has been, courtesy of this gentleman right here, that's the architect.

WJ: I designed the school, and to follow up what she's saying, and make it real short, I wasn't about moving, to propose tearing down, a, what, 1500 auditorium, that was done by Carl _____ who was a protégé of Frank Lloyd Wright. And there was some other nice aspects of architecture, good traditional historical architecture. Took part of it down, kept some of the old, added the new and blended the two together, and just flipped flopped 180 degrees but we tried to use some of the old. It saved, number 1, economically for us, and there was a lot of

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opposition against that. They wanted to bulldoze it down, and then justify giving you a little sheetrock.

AL: The way they doing the original Wheatley.

WJ: Like they do apartments type.

DH: The original Wheatley, I thought it had already been torn down... its gone right?

AL: Is torn down.

WJ: That was the original Wheatley.

AL: They tore down the 1929 building _____ 1927 creation and it was 250,000 sq. ft.

They tore it down, even though it had all the modifications, even though three years before they put 2 million dollars' worth of brand new library there, because it is better to give a contractor, it is better to give a contractor 38 million dollars than give a contractor 18 million.

WJ: Bad Decision.

AL: Has nothing to do with the students. Then they put up some little funny looking something, two story flat out something and say now it's better and its open.

RO: We had the same problem growing up, you know HISD has embarked on a...

BT: Well HISD is gone.

RO: ...small compact school for the high schoolers, you go anyplace out in the suburbs and you have 2,500, you've got 3,000 students and these kids are getting good education. Why can't we have that at mega schools in Houston? What is this high school going to be down here on Southmore?

AL: The energy school, the Energy Institute.

RO: And how many students will it house?

AL: For 1800.

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RO: And what kind of school spirit will those 1,800 kids have?

WJ: None! Because there coming in from everywhere!

RO: They don't have any sports, they don't have any,

BT: HISD is gone. G-O-N-E. Gone.

RO: They don't have any clubs.

RO: You know sports give school spirits.

EB: To give some truth to what you're saying, I live in Manvel and you should see Dawson.

Alvin, those schools I mean, they're just... gorgeous you know?

RO: What I am trying to allude to, is the fact that, you look at the colleges the major colleges.,

A&M spent how much money up there for a big stadium? Why did they do that?

DH: And for Kevin Sumlin, and now they're not winning games!

RO: And you guys spent 460 million dollars for this piece of junk right here.

DH: You can't record me talking about the stadium, I'm sorry! I would have liked to see us keep something of the old stadium and the history. This one looks like an erector set. And you probably know what that is.

EB: Can we entertain some question for you from you?

DH: I'd like to have each one of you if you wouldn't mind, share your very favorite memory of the Thanksgiving Day Classic.

WJ: Favorite memory. I told you mine, when Ivory Jones kicked that field goal and we lost that game and that we won state any way. That was bittersweet, I'll put it that way. That was the one I remember the most because I knew it was the one we were supposed to win, we didn't, we had it in control and we lost by one point. So that's my bittersweet memory. One of the better memories, as they said I weighed about 99 pounds and I accompanied one of the Ms. Wheatleys,

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Joan Bookman, that's in that Yates, I mean Wheatley-Yates Classic thing, and I was a little tiny guy off to the side with a little cape. Joseph Brown was the guy on the other side, we were both from Hardy Street. So we stuck our chests out as we got gray hairs.

EB: Mine is simple, just running out on that field. Because you had seen it since you were 12 or 13 and all of a sudden you're there.

LW: One of my favorite was Clarence Steele was a good friend of mine.

EB: Frog.

LW: Clarence was as tall as I was. We were good friends. One of those Thanksgiving games he said I'm going to score a touchdown for you, and then I going to do this (unique hand gesture). And he scored a touchdown, and that's one of my favorite memories because he did the signal. Oh, he had his own, I wasn't his girlfriend, but we were just good friends. That's one of my favorite ones, one of those Thanksgiving days. It just, I think in the in the 1958 football season, only Booker T. Washington and Yates scored on us. And that Booker T. Washington school... Well I guess _____, Wheatley beat Yates 20 to 8. The other schools didn't score on us at all, that was one of my fondest memories. Actually that whole year, because we had an excellent football team. And like I said Clarence was like my height but he was thick.

?: _____, yeah, '99.

BT: Well I have, and I'm listening because my perspective for the game is totally different from you all. I never sat in the stands, never, never, never. So for me, those years that I was at Wheatley, every single time that football team hit the field, and we cheerleaders came out with them running, every one of those are precious memories to me. Because every time it was the most exciting part of the game for me. And we looked forward to it. We'd line up, wait for the

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football players to come, and they used to have that paper thing you'd burst through, that was it every time for me. It was the highlight.

LW: Our outfits, it was big for us also.

BT: Well. No, I already knew what I was going to have on! Yes!

AL: Like Betty. I marched in every game because I was captain of the squadron marching unit. So when the football team hit the field, in fact, we started practice on first Monday in August. Football team didn't start till second or third Monday.

EB: Frank would run y'all off the field.

AL: I know!

LW: Since you were the football player during our time, what kind of pep talk and stuff did Walker would give you guys?

EB: It was just he was never satisfied, plain old never satisfied. You could be leading a somebody 40 to nothing at halftime. "You ought to be 70 points on these hams." He would just always complain. But that's what coaches do. It wasn't really a pep talk it was more of a "You could do better." And that's about it.

RO: I guess my first, or my most memorable Thanksgiving was the 1951. My first Thanksgiving game. Can you imagine a little 10 year old kid, no I was nine, no I was ten, with his father going to football game? We didn't have television back then, so you were going to these small games, but to see 25,000-30,000 people at a football game.

?: dressed up!

RO: It never happened again but I was so excited and people stood up most of the time, I could not see my daddy had to put me on his shoulders, for me to, he and I to watch the game. But that was my favorite, I'll never forget that. Never forget that.

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DH: That's great.

EB: Ralph you remember it was a Robinson, Doughnut, 52 or 53 they were running back for Wheatley I remember back then. Am I getting the year right?

RO: Weren't they with Ding Dong and all of them?

WJ: Ding Dong was in our class.

RO: I vaguely remember them.

(inaudible)

EB: Rueben Robinson. Doughnut, Melvin Jefferson may have been his name? He may have been _____.

RO: These are all heroes.

Many: We were a

AL: The last game that Wheatley won, that was Thanksgiving Day was 3-0 in 1960. And Ronald Frasier, I remember, was on that team.

?: He was a quarterback.

AL: And when I saw Ronald Frasier about 15-20 years ago in Florida he's an architect, he came up to me and said "My name is Ronald Fraser", I said "My name is Algenita Davis, you were on the the team that scored 3-nothing". I can remember that, I can't tell you where I was yesterday! But I can tell you what happened Thanksgiving 1960! Because my parents always took us, my father was very enthusiastic. He was coaching as much as Frank Walker. Okay? And it was that kind of thing it was a family affair. Your entire day was built around that Thanksgiving Day game, because you left the house in the morning, going over there. You came back home and then you ate. And then watching the performances, and having participated on the field and ultimately seeing my brother becoming the drum major of the Phyllis Wheatley

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Wildcat band, and I left college and flew home to see him perform. That's how big of a deal it was to me to have that performance stuff in my family.

DH: So were you on the drill team or you were in the...?

AL: Drill team

DH: Drill team, okay.

AL: I was on the drill team. But the band performed, and my brother was three years behind me, he was in seventh, eighth, ninth when I was in tenth, eleventh, twelfth. Well they needed a bass clarinet player in Wheatley's band, so Mr. McGruder told my brother to Ms. Mosely, and Ms. Mosely you can have my bass clarinet player. My brother played and marched in every game his entire junior high school years in the senior high school band.

BT: Oh, I imagined he did, I can see Jackie doing that!

DH: Do you have a memory to share?

RJ: My memories, Frank Walker lived about two blocks from me.

BT: You lived on Worm St.?

RJ: lived on Benson.

?: That's right.

RJ: Collins Briggs about four blocks from me so I knew all of them. I see them on a daily basis. Frank Walker as a matter of fact his dad would make boats,

AL: That's right!

RJ: So I'd get out there watching him make boats all the time. So I decided that I was a star track guy and I wanted to play football, Frank Walker gave me hell because I was so little but I was fast. I played on the football team, and I... Frank Walker was my friend. I never will forget. And when I graduated from Wheatley, first thing he did, all the athletes couldn't talk to him. He

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said look, wherever you want to go let me know and I'll write you a letter, it doesn't matter what your grade is, anything at all. I'm going to back you 100%. But I went to Southern University.

WJ: That's where he went, so don't think... talking about you can go "Anywhere you wanna go, except if it is Southern I'll write my letter."

AL: And the house still stands

?: Yes. Yes it does.

(inaudible)

RJ: I can remember on Benson, all the ladies would get together. You could smell the food cooking, that whole week. And they would go from house to house, "Sugar, do you have some soda or do you have some sugar?" And you could smell the food in the whole area. People would be coming in from California, the main city they be coming from. Coming back for the Turkey Day Classic here in Houston. I didn't mean to cut you off but I had to throw that in there

PS: My relatives were in Chicago that was the time we looked forward to. They were coming to Houston for the Thanksgiving game. And the thing was getting ready.... I remember, what's that street? We didn't have no freeway. we'd come down Lockwood, wasn't that Lockwood? In the back where that old Foley's thing used to be. I remember us coming down there and just rushing to get to the game. I also remember one year we lost, I don't know which one but we lost a game, and we were coming back. It took forever to get home, and everybody was just so bored.

WJ: When you lost it was horrible.

LW: It was not a good feeling

WJ: Almost couldn't eat you know, sometimes.

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RO: One time the Wheatley and Yates game rivaled the Texas, Texas A&M game. In the early days. He's a Texas graduate so he knows...

[End of Interview]

