

Buckhead Heritage Society

Oral History Project

Interview with Elon Butts Osby

March 31, 2012

Interviewer: Erica Danylchak

ERICA DANYLCHAK: This is an interview with Elon Butts Osby of Atlanta, Georgia. Ms. Osby is a descendant of William Bagley and has fought to preserve Mount Olive Cemetery on Pharr Road. The interview is being conducted on March 31, 2012, at the Mathieson Exchange Lofts. The interviewer is Erica Danylchak representing the Buckhead Heritage Society of Atlanta, Georgia. That's the formality. I want to thank you so much for joining us today. We are very excited to have you participate officially in our oral history program.

ELON OSBY: Well, it's a great opportunity that I could not pass up when I found out about it, so I'm glad to be here.

DANYLCHAK: Well, I am excited to hear about your family's stories and your memories, from when they were here in Buckhead and also when you were growing up in Atlanta. So, when and where were you born?

OSBY: At Hughes Spalding Hospital in downtown Atlanta, July 31, 1950.

DANYLCHAK: And who were your parents?

OSBY: Pete and Willie Mae Butts.

DANYLCHAK: Do you know when they were born, and where?

OSBY: My father was born down in Perry, Georgia. Perry, Unadilla. I think it's also Butts County down there, we have later learned. And he was born, I believe, in 1902, I think sometime around that. And then my mother was born in Forsyth County, Cummings, Georgia, and she was born in 1910.

DANYLCHAK: And can you tell me a little about your mother's parents.

OSBY: What I know of my mother's mother, my grandmother, Ida Bagley, and my grandfather, William Bagley, they, from what I know, they both were born in or near Cummings, Georgia, again Forsyth County. And lived there until 1912, when they had to leave. And then they came to the Atlanta area.

DANYLCHAK: Why do you say they had to leave?

OSBY: Well, there was an incident in 1912 there in Forsyth County of a white, a young white woman who was getting married, I believe the next day. And there were two black men that raped her and beat her up pretty bad. And they caught those men, and they were hung. But over a

period of a week or so the tension and the rage and everything started to build, and then the citizens, or whatever, they decided that they were going to run all of the blacks out. And at that time I think it was “Negroes,” at that time. And so during the night, as my mother told it, they came through on horses and everything, and they started setting the homes in the black area, the Negro area, on fire. And my mother said from what her parents told her, that they had to gather what they could. They had a wagon and a horse, or whatever, and they had to gather whatever they could and leave. And that was, she was two years old when that happened. And I’m not really sure if they stopped somewhere between Forsyth County and Atlanta, and how long they were there, but they finally came to Buckhead, Pharr Road, and Macedonia Park, and made that their home.

DANYLCHAK: So there was an existing community there at Macedonia Park that drew them to this area?

OSBY: Yes. There were already some families living there. I don’t know how organized that it was, because I heard one lady when we were doing some interviews and some meetings about this back in 2005, she said, “When your grandfather came it became a town, and he was like our mayor.” And so I’m not sure what the structure of Macedonia Park was when he arrived. I think, because he had some sort of education, whether it was self-educated or whatever, they must have thought that he was worthy of something, and they started to call it Bagley Park.

DANYLCHAK: Do you remember any stories that your mother used to tell you, or your grandparents, about what it was like to live in Bagley Park?

OSBY: Unfortunately, I didn’t get to know either one of my grandparents. They were already deceased. My brother had that pleasure of knowing them. But there were a lot of stories about the business that my mother and father started. They built a, they called it a rib shack. I don’t know what the actual name of it, but they called it a rib shack, and they sold barbecue, cooked barbecue and all of that in there. And they also sold things like drinks and, you know, hot dogs and candy, and all that stuff. It was a little store, one of the little stores in the community. I think there was another one. And they lived on top of this. My grandmother’s house was there and then when my mother and father got married they either bought this place, I’m not sure if it was already there, or what, but they did turn this area, or built this store, that was the little store and also the rib shack. And I think on Friday or Saturday nights it sort of became like the juke joint also, because people came there on Saturday night and they played music and danced and all that sort of stuff. I remember a story about my brother falling off of the bar, some sort of a counter that was there. I’m not sure how old he was, but he fell off and fell on his head. And he had headaches, really bad, all of his life when he was growing up. I just always remember him having headaches. And my mother would always say it was from that fall. There was another story that was awful and it was also funny. It didn’t happen in Bagley Park. It actually happened in Johnstown, which was near there. Johnstown, the entrance to Johnstown is now right there where Houston’s is at Lenox, and where the MARTA station is. There was a woman that lived there, and they said she was a witch and just evil. But I remember my mother referring to her as a witch. Back in those days they didn’t have bathrooms. They had an outhouse somewhere. But you kept a pot, it was a white tin pot, in the house, and that was the bathroom, that was what you used. And then you were supposed to take it and dump it somewhere, you know, in the woods or whatever. Well, my brother and some other kids were playing outside, and this was a two-storey house, I remember. And my Aunt Mary even talked about it when she

would come in from Chicago. But anyway, there were a bunch of kids playing between two houses, and this woman dumped the, I think they called it a slop pot, or something, she dumped it out the window on these children, and my brother got the most of it. And I just remember that being part of a joke, but part of it was not. It was just a sickening story. And so, I mean, I think they had, life as it was, it was good, it was good. I think my parents were considered to be well off, you know, because they, my father just always knew how to make money. And my mother was always ahead of her time in the sense of the year, and also in the sense of a woman, and also in the sense of a black woman. But they were always considered to be well off as far as Negroes were in that time. They always had, my father always had a late model car, and they did pretty well. I think they had a good life for what was considered a very good life for Negroes during that time. A really sad thing that happened there in Bagley Park was when my uncle was killed.

DANYLCHAK: What was his name?

OSBY: His name was Johnny. Johnny Bagley. They had gone hunting, and had all of this meat, and they had it in a cure-house. And they took turns guarding the meat during the curing session, whatever amount of time that was. And some men came one night to steal the meat, and they killed my uncle. He was young. I think he was in his early twenties, I believe. He and my mother were really close, and I just remember her when she would talk about it. You know, there's times when your family comes to visit and they bring up all of the stories, you hear about everything. But she would always get really sad about that. They always said my grandmother was mean. My mother would say, that was the Indian in her. I don't think she was mean, she just didn't take any business. She just didn't take any junk from anybody. And so, I don't think she was mean, it was just her way. And something that, every time I come down Peachtree, every single time I come Peachtree Road, right in there where the Catholic church is, in that fork, my mother, every time we would come, she would tell the story, that's where my father taught her to drive. She said she was coming around that curve and she was coming too fast and it really scared her, you know. She said she just stopped. "I'm never going to get behind the wheel again." You know, but she did. She did. I think the kind of woman that she was, she never would have been able to depend on somebody else, you know, to be driving her. She quit school when she was thirteen. I don't know where the school was. But she wanted clothes. And she quit school so she could go to work. And she was always a very stylish woman. She made all of her clothes. A really good seamstress. And so that's what she wanted to do. There is no telling what she would have been if she had, you know, completed school.

DANYLCHAK: Did she provide her services for other people in Bagley Park?

OSBY: Hmm-hmm. She did. She did. I remember her saying that people would always tell her that she needed to hang out her shingle. And that meant, you know, to put a sign out with her name, saying that she was a seamstress. But she was an excellent seamstress. She made a lot of my clothes when I was in elementary school. And then I got to where every time she'd go hang out the clothes, I would go and try—because her sewing machine was always up. She was always sewing something. And so then I would try to sew something, a sock or something, you know, slip in and do that, while she'd be gone out to hang the clothes or something like that. And then without any lessons I just started sewing when I was twelve. And at one time wanted to be a designer. I just got really good at designing and sewing. And then that was it.

DANYLCHAK: Going back to your parents, you mentioned to me before we started the interview that they had been married at Piney Grove Church. Do you know when they met and when they got married?

OSBY: They met, full circle, here. They met at, is it New Hope, that's over on—

DANYLCHAK: Arden?

OSBY: Arden [Road]. They met there at what they used to call Homecoming, that they had. I think that was the term they used. I don't remember who introduced them. But my father and my uncle both were trying to talk to my mother. And my father told her that day, "I'm going to marry you in five years." And she knew about him, because he was known to be a womanizer and had girlfriends. And she said, "No, I'm not going to marry you." And sure enough, in five years they were married. Meanwhile my uncle had tried to talk to her, you know, and the Butts boys or the Butts men, they were very handsome guys, known to have a lot of women, and I think that my uncle had a baby on the way. And he didn't know that my mother knew it. And so, you know, she wouldn't have anything to do with him. And I think she liked my father. I think she instantly was smitten with him, but he was no good, you know. So, you know, no good in the sense that he was a womanizer. And smart, always worked and that sort of stuff. But she knew he had a reputation. And he just, you know, wore her down. And five years later they were getting married. There's a story about the wedding. The wedding at the Piney Grove Church, and it rained that day. My mother said there was mud, the street was nothing but mud. And my father had not gotten to the church. And she would not go. Now, the thing that amazed me about this, this story, is that you didn't have telephones. There were no cell phones, there was no communication except people going. And . . . [phone interrupts]

DANYLCHAK: So, we were talking about your parents and the story of the church. And there were no cell phones at the time.

OSBY: Right. And no telephones, you know. And she wouldn't go to the church until he got there. And I've always wondered how the communication was done. Did somebody ride back and forth, or, you know, just how did she know that he wasn't there yet, or when he did get there. And thinking about the locations, she's in Bagley Park on Pharr Road, and the church is off of Canterbury, I think you said, so I just wondered how that happened. But anyway, she would not go until somebody told her that he was there. And then she went. And I remember her saying, she talked about the rain, and she said that when it rains on your wedding day it means that there are going to be tears. And if that's the case, then that was true. But I remember going to Piney Grove church one time. I was trying to get, had this idea of getting a reunion together of Bagley Park residents, and I went to speak to them. And this lady asked me, she said, "Do you still have the pictures of your parents' wedding?" And I said, "No, I've never seen a picture." And she said that was the picture, that was the wedding of the century. And they had all of these gorgeous pictures. And I'm sure my mother tore 'em up sometime when she was upset with my father. I'm sure that's what happened, because I've never seen anything or ever even given it any thought until that lady said it. And I just wish, knowing how my mother was, knowing how she was about clothes and style and events, and all that kind of stuff, I'm sure that it was beautiful. I've seen her wedding dress that she made. But I just wish that there was some way to come across those pictures and be able to see them. I really do.

DANYLCHAK: When was it that you went to Piney Grove? And can you tell me what the church looked like, and was there still a community around there?

OSBY: That was in [pause] 1991, I believe. And I just remember this little white country church, not very big. Sitting in this place where we are now, it was probably not much bigger than the length and the width of these two rooms together. But just a little country church. You know, there were some steps on the front, and you'd go in a little waiting area, and then go into the actual church. And the cemetery, if I remember correctly, was in the back, to the left of the church. I think at that time there may have been a few houses there, not very many, you know, because of all the condos and everything that had started to creep in. But I think back up in there they hadn't built all of those new things, and I think there were a few houses up there. And I don't know where those members went. Most of them were older. They probably are deceased now. But the minister was kind of young, if I remember right. You know, maybe in his fifties or something then. I'm not sure where they went. I don't know if they went to, what is it, St. Mark's?

DANYLCHAK: There's a St Mark's.

OSBY: I don't know if they went there or came into the city.

DANYLCHAK: Do you remember Johnstontown? You mentioned a story earlier about your brother and Johnstontown. Do you, did you ever visit Johnstontown?

OSBY: I did, I did, when I was very young. Johnstontown and also Linwood Park, because we had relatives living up there. But Johnstontown was just dirt roads. I remember a lot of big, old, two-storey houses. Seemed like the houses were huge. And I didn't see any of Bagley Park. I never did see that. By the time we started to go out there, you know, it was just nothing but ground, and the trees and whatever, by the time I came along. But Johnstontown I did go and I remember it. We would go, and I don't remember who still lived there. There was somebody that we would go to visit.

DANYLCHAK: It seems like all of these neighborhoods, Bagley Park and Johnstontown and Piney Grove were really interconnected. Everyone knew everyone. Is that kind of how it was?

OSBY: Yes, yes. I believe that. I didn't know Piney Grove, didn't know anybody that lived there, and I don't remember, other than my mother taking us out there and, you know, just to say this is the church where we got married, or something, I don't remember us going to visit anybody over there. So I'm not sure about that. And I don't remember Macedonia Church, is that what it was?

DANYLCHAK: Mount Olive?

OSBY: Mount Olive. I don't remember that. I don't remember seeing a church building ever. So that was already gone. But there was somebody that they knew in Johnstontown. I don't think it was relatives. And then my mother had a niece and a nephew and some others that lived in Linwood Park. We would go up there often.

DANYLCHAK: Going back to Bagley and your grandfather, you said you never met him, but I'm sure you heard stories. He had a store as well, didn't he?

OSBY: I've heard that. I don't know about that. The story that I've heard about him mostly is about him coming up to Peachtree Road, and there was an area, you know where Chops is, not Chops, what's the one on the corner? I think it starts with a P. . . Maybe it doesn't start with a P. Anyway, on that corner there was a big tree there that my mother talked about. And when the soldiers would come through Atlanta, that's where they gathered. Whatever was there at that intersection. And they would feed the horses. And she said that my grandfather would collect the corn and whatever that would be left from the horses and would bring it back to Bagley Park. And I don't know what he did with it, I don't know if it was for them to eat or to share with other people. I don't know what it was. But she said he would collect the corn and bring it back to Bagley Park. And other than that I don't remember stories about a store and that part. I've heard that from other people, but I don't remember hearing it, you know, from my mother, about him.

DANYLCHAK: He was very prominent. You said he just kind of was the unofficial mayor of the community.

OSBY: Hmm-hmm. And that's just what I've been told, by people that lived there, that he just kind of became the mayor. And then when they made everybody sell out, the city, or the county, I'm not sure which one, they told my, it was my mother and at that time three aunts that were still living, that as a consolation to them, not just to my mother and her sisters, but to the community for forcing them, you know, to leave, they would name the park Bagley Park. And so I would think—and they named it Bagley Street also—I would think that because of them doing that they also must have thought that he was prominent in the community.

DANYLCHAK: Can you talk a little bit about what you've heard from your mother and other family members about the end of the community?

OSBY: Yes. I think they hated being forced out, not getting the value for that property. And when you think about the transition from what it was with the Negroes living there to what it became, and the value. You know, the transition of the value and everything. They definitely felt slighted, you know. Any time you are forced to leave something that you love, even if it's not the best of conditions, it's still not a good situation. And I think they would have just stayed there, you know, because it was home. Now my uncle, he tells a different story. And my mother said that the reason that they had to leave was because they cut this street right there next to Bagley Park and built these houses for the white people, and that the white people didn't want the Negroes living behind them because the flies were coming over. That's my mother's story. My uncle tells a different story. And this was not her brother, this was her sister's husband. He said that there was too much noise there Friday and Saturday nights. People were partying. He said sometimes they were shooting. Now I've heard that this shooting and stuff like that was from Ku Klux Klan. That they would come in and ride through the neighborhood and shoot, you know, do a lot of stuff like that. And that probably was the initial stages of getting them to leave.

DANYLCHAK: That would have been in the 1930s, you think?

OSBY: Probably '40s.

DANYLCHAK: '40s. And do you know when the residents, when they first were forced out, when it started? Like mid-'40s?

OSBY: No, I think it was, well, you know, maybe so, maybe so. Because the last, the last family to sell was in '52, I believe. One of the deeds that I've seen. And my parents, they bought the place in Atlanta, northwest Atlanta, in 1948. So whatever settlement that they got, that's when it happened. Now I'm not so sure that, I don't think they were living there as late as '48. They were working for a family that lived on Peachtree, right there near that church that I was talking about. And they, my parents lived in their garage apartment. And I'm not sure about those years. But I think that, I'm not sure about that. And now a picture is coming into my mind that they took there and my brother was very young, so that had to have been earlier than that. My parents, they were married in 1931, so it could have happened any time, you know, between that. So they probably were still living in Bagley Park. But I think that, I think that you're probably right, now that I'm kind of putting it together in my mind. It started in the mid-'40s, and the last one being in '52. But Uncle Ross said that there was a lot of noise, because black people just had good times. You know, Friday night and Saturday night and it was good times to them, but somebody from the outside, you know, may not have seen that as a party. You know, you're just drinking and having a good time. And he talked about the sanitary conditions, you know, that were, it was all they knew, but I'm sure somebody that's living on the street in this new house, you've got indoor bathrooms and all of that. There were probably smells and things that were coming from over there. So, you know, it was probably time. It was probably time for that to come to an end, and probably that was the only thing that was going to force them to move to something better, if you will. You know, if this is all you know, and this is what you've been doing all your life, it's not really uncomfortable until you go somewhere and have something else.

DANYLCHAK: Where did most of the families go? You said your parents went to northwest Atlanta.

OSBY: Northwest Atlanta, near I-20 and Martin Luther King Drive, I-20 West. Back then, it was considered the country. It was considered the country. There were no roads. That was a long, long ways from Bagley Park or from Buckhead. And there was a gentleman by the name of, I'm not going to be able to think of Mr. Thompson's first name. But Mr. Thompson was educated. He was a pioneer and he had gone out in northwest Atlanta and they were, there was some land for sale out there. And he had bought some land. He had, he told me, he said, "I went back to Bagley Park," and I don't know if he lived there. He never did say he lived there. But he was trying to get them to move out. And he said, you know, he told them about it, these pieces of land were going really cheap. He said they just could not see it. They said that's just too far to go, you know. And so I think most of my parents' friends, they went to downtown to like Fourth Ward, they went into public housing. Fourth Ward is down around Auburn Avenue and Edgewood, some of them lived. I know one family, they were in my parents' wedding, and they lived over off of Fair Street. So that was an area where blacks already were at that time. And so Ma Margaret that you've heard me talk about, they moved from Bagley Park to an area, I'm not sure what it's called, but Washington High School, Washington High School is off of MLK. And Ma Margaret and them moved over on a street that's a couple of blocks over from Washington High School.

DANYLCHAK: Was that over near Collier Heights?

OSBY: No, not that far. This is, if you came out of downtown Atlanta on MLK, and let's just say you're headed toward, in the direction of Six Flags. Of course, you've got to get on the expressway, but headed west. Past the Dome and near the AU center. That's where it is. And

Mount Moriah Church is over there, near there. And so that's where they moved to. So I think it was, most of 'em went in that area between downtown Atlanta and around the AU Center, that way. And my parents went further west and bought a lot of property out there. They had all of this cash money and they bought a whole lot of property out there, later sold it off, except where the home place is.

DANYLCHAK: Did most people who lived in Bagley get a cash settlement?

OSBY: Yes. They got something. Not what it was valued, but they got something. I don't know exactly how much my parents got. They would have had, I guess my grandmother's place probably was divided up between the children that were left. And then my parents had their own place. There was a deed with their names on it. And I'm not sure how much money they ended up with. But I do know that the property that they bought they paid \$12,000 cash for it. It was like, almost a whole block, probably a whole lot of money then, for black people to have. And so the place that they bought, the house part of it was a little, literally, a two-room shack with a hall. There was a living room, and—a "front room" is what we used to call it, not a living room. So there was a front room and there was a bedroom and a hall, and then a porch on the back. And there was a pot-bellied stove in the living room that they cooked on. And then my dad, who could do just about anything, he turned the porch into a kitchen. Built that. And then when my mother became pregnant with me he built another bedroom for my brother. And then, we had an outhouse. They bought that in '48. And then I was born in '50. We didn't get an indoor bathroom until I was almost four. And my dad built the bathroom. So he turned that house, that shack into a house.

DANYLCHAK: How long did your family live there?

OSBY: Well, I still live there. I still live there. My father died in '72. My mother died in '82, and I moved back then. And so I live there, waiting until my husband comes to move me away. [chuckles] So that's the home-place. And now it's just, it's like a quarter of that block. They sold the rest of it off at different times.

DANYLCHAK: So when you were growing up, where did you go to school?

OSBY: I went to Anderson Park Elementary School. And then Turner High School. Both are very close to where I live. And before I went to Anderson Park, went to elementary school, I went to my mother's daycare. My mother had the first black licensed daycare. I mean, there were people who were keeping children in their home, and in fact my mother kept children at our house from the neighborhood. And then she got this idea to start a daycare and she wanted it to be licensed and regulated and all of that. And she, my father was working at Lockheed at the time, but he didn't want her to have a business, so he wouldn't help her. And so she borrowed money. And there was a church near us that had a separate building that was their education building, and the pastor agreed to let her rent that building.

DANYLCHAK: Which church was that?

OSBY: Union Baptist Church. They used to be on, MLK, there were sections of Martin Luther King Drive before it was named that, re-named that. It was, it started out downtown. It was Hunter Street. And then when it got out toward our way, Moseley Park, that part of it was called Moseley Drive. And so Union Baptist Church was on Moseley Drive. The pastor agreed to let

her have the nursery there and she fixed it up. Once my father saw that he couldn't stop her, then he started helping her. And she had this daycare. And it was, I don't remember, it was the first black licensed daycare I know in Georgia. I don't know that it went outside of Georgia but I know it was in Georgia. And it was, for the quality of care that they were given it was the premier daycare for families that could afford it. And we're talking about five dollars a week. That's what it was, and she always had a waiting list, that went well into, you know, numbers. And when they started, when other people started opening daycares and they were charging twenty dollars a week, and she eventually, I think, when she sold it in, she started in 1954, I think. She sold it in '69. I think at that time then she was only charging something like \$28 dollars a week. And the other daycares, they were charging in the thirties. And she just thought that was awful, you know. She felt like if parents have to work, if the mother has to work, then you can't, you know, punish them because they've got to work by charging these enormous prices. She just refused to go way up. And she was the one that started it. But she wouldn't increase her fees to where somebody couldn't afford it. And so I went there until I started kindergarten at Anderson Park and then went to Turner High School.

DANYLCHAK: Do you have any favorite memories from your days in school, when you went to Anderson Park?

OSBY: Oh, definitely Anderson Park. I remember Miss Bing. She was my kindergarten teacher, and she was just the sweetest, just the sweetest person on this earth. I'll tell you something else that I remember. That's the good thing that I remember. And I remember my best friend, still now. We became friends in second grade--Patricia Holbrooks. But there's something sad that I also remember. During that time there was prejudice, you know, there was the Jim Crow and all of that going on in the '50s. But also within the Negro community there was also lines, color lines. And if you were light-skinned, still, that was the closest thing to white. And if you were dark-skinned, you know, it went the other way. And I remember the way, and I was dark when I was young, when I was very young. I lightened up with each one of my babies, for some strange reason, a degree or so. But I was kind of dark when I was in elementary school. And several children in our classroom that were light-skinned, one girl very easily could have passed as white. She had red hair. Her parents were, her grandparents and great-grandparents were Irish. And so she had red hair. I remember one day we were doing a test. And one of the light-skinned kids told the teacher that I was looking on her paper. And with no request for proof or my side of it or anything like that, she just believed this other little girl. And I got a whipping for it on my hand. I remember it like it was yesterday. And I was—first of all, I wasn't cheating. But it was just the point of being a little bit too young to understand the color lines, but you knew something. If somebody asked you, you wouldn't be able to explain it. But you knew. You knew that you were this complexion, and you knew that they were that complexion. And they got everything, you know. They got everything. And so because this little girl said I was cheating I got a spanking. That was it. And so that was sad. Whenever those situations happened, those people were, you know, the class queen and the teachers' pets, and those kind of things. And then things sort of started to change. And I'm not so sure that it was necessarily that things changed, or if it was a different teacher. But I remember Miss Smith, our fifth grade teacher, who saw everybody the same, you know. I had an awful teacher in the fourth grade. I don't remember her last name now [. . .] She was just—if she was in school today, somebody could probably sue her. She was the type that she, she wanted to make you feel bad, you know, and she wasn't about lifting people up. Any opportunity that she had to make you feel bad. I remember one time I was

chewing some gum, and I'm certainly not saying that it was okay, because it wasn't. But she caught me chewing some gum, and if she had just whipped me in class—and the teachers could whip you then, spank you, whatever the terminology is. That would have been so much better than what she did. She made me put the gum on my forehead, and then she paraded me around to all of the classes. And it was one of the most embarrassing times that I remember in my life. And then we moved. Our school was, it was a new school. We were the first ones to go into it. Traditional, sprawling school, you know, in the '50s. And then they built a new wing on to it. And when you got ready to go down that ramp, when you got to that grade, you could go down that ramp and you were on that end of the hall, you really thought you were something. You know? And we had, I was there for fifth, sixth, and seventh grade. And our seventh grade teacher [. . .] he treated you like you were little adults. He respected you, he would call you by your last name. Miss Butts. Mr. Johnson. And he probably is the best teacher I've ever had. [. . .] he was also crazy, we later learned. But we didn't know it when we were in class with him. He was such a great teacher. He's deceased now, as most of my teachers are. And so one teacher, Miss Wainwright, who, you know when you're in elementary school you think your teachers are ancient. You just think they're old. But they weren't. Now teachers are younger, I think. But back then they weren't. And I'm sure we thought Miss Wainwright was already 50. Rainwater. That was her name, Rainwater. I'm sure we thought she was already 50 when we were in her class. And she taught me in fifth grade. She taught my children, both of my children. I got an email from one of my elementary school classmates a month ago, and she's now a teacher, and she said, "You would not believe who's subbing out here." And it was Miss Rainwater. And so I sent a message out to all the folks in, I do all of the emailing for our high school group, high school class, so I picked everybody that was in elementary school with us and I forwarded the email. And people were just emailing back, they said, "no, no, tell me that this woman is not still teaching." And so we have figured out, even though we thought she was fifty, she had to have been thirty-something, in 1950, 1960, something like that. Bottom line, she's in her 80s now. That's just all there is to it. We're so glad that she's in good shape, you know, that she could be teaching, but it's just amazing that this woman is still alive. And so anyway, I told Ada, if she comes back again, please call me, I'm going to stop what I'm doing, get my girls and we're coming out there to see her. [laughter] And that's just so funny, that this woman could still be teaching, you know. But Anderson Park at the time, unless somebody was going to a private school like Oglethorpe—and I'd like to share something with you about Oglethorpe—Anderson Park was, you know, a premier elementary school at that time. The children of the rich and the prominent folks, they went to Oglethorpe Elementary School.

DANYLCHAK: Where was that?

OSBY: Oglethorpe was over in the AU Center. I don't think it's there anymore. It wasn't a private school. Well, it may have been a private school then. It became a public school. My brother William, that's where he went to school. And my mother would drive from Bagley Park over to Oglethorpe to take him to school. And he was in class with Maynard Jackson. That's probably the most famous person that you would know out of that group. But a lot of other kids who became judges and all sorts of things, they went to Oglethorpe. And even after I started going to school and it had become a public school, that's where a lot of people who thought they were whatever, that's where they had their children enrolled. So there was Oglethorpe and then the Catholic schools, that's where the prominent people sent their children. And my parents, they were always well off, monetarily, but, and my mother was very well known. They both were

very well known, but I don't think they were considered as prominent, you know, because back then I think a lot of it was skin color, and my mother was light-skinned. My father was dark-skinned. But a lot of it was how you got accepted, because of your skin color, and then your educational status, and what you did. And even though my parents were very well known and they were certainly financially well off, I don't think they were considered as prominent people. I remember one time I went to, down, this was when my mother first died, and I had to go down to Fulton County to get some paperwork done. I was getting the property transferred in my name. And there was a white man that had been there for years. And he didn't mean any harm. And he said to me, "I don't mean any harm by this," he said, "but your father was always well thought of down here. And they used to refer to him as 'that rich nigger.'" And he certainly wasn't trying to be ugly or anything, he just was telling me some history there. My father always believed in owning property, owning land. And even, I guess it must have been in the '60s, he bought a lot of property over off of, it was Bankhead Highway. It's now Donald L. Hollowell. He bought a lot of rental property over there and also some vacant land. He just believed in owning land. He thought that that gave you value and you'd always have something.

DANYLCHAK: Did you attend church growing up? If so, which one and what are your favorite memories of church?

OSBY: Yes. My mother—my father wasn't a church-going man, as you probably would assume by now. [laughter] But my mother joined Wheat Street Baptist Church when my brother was, I don't even think he was a year old yet. And so she would come to Wheat Street.

DANYLCHAK: From Bagley?

OSBY: Yes. Because he was a baby when she joined. So that's where she always remained a member. And I, of course, was raised there. And Reverend William Holmes Borders is known, you know, all over the world for his style of ministering or preaching I should say. But he also was a pioneer. And all of the things that churches are doing now, you know they have all these programs and everything, he did that in the '50s. He was the pioneer. He did a lot of things that people probably thought was crazy, they had never heard of. Wheat Street was the first church to have a credit union for its members. They had a daycare. He started buying property. They had a, not public housing, but it was affordable housing. I mean just acres and acres and acres down off of Auburn Avenue and Fort Street, all over in there. If you ever ride through there, it's all cleared now, but there were, it was called Wheat Street Gardens. They were beautiful back then. And he also built a high-rise for seniors across the street from the church. So he just was way beyond his time.

I want to jump back to something if you don't mind. I learned a lot about my mother after she died, going through her papers and the things that she saved and the notes that she wrote, stuff like that. But she was a photographer. She took millions and millions of pictures. And she wanted to be a fashion photographer. And, of course, that was unheard of for a woman. It was definitely unheard of for a black woman, to be that. But that's what she wanted to be. And she just had boxes and boxes of all of these pictures that she took in the '30s and '40s. And she started to slack off some. You know, most people, they take a million pictures of the first baby, and the second child they take five, and that's it. And then she had started the nursery, and so, you know, she just didn't get into it. But I have her camera at home. I have it on display in my

den. But I wanted to mention that about her. Again, something weird, she just thought ahead of her time, you know. She just was always ahead of her time.

But jump back, you'll have to remind me what I was talking about.

DANYLCHAK: Wheat Street.

OSBY: Oh, Wheat Street Baptist Church. You've heard of Hosea Williams. And Reverend Borders gave Hosea an office in the church in the education building, because nobody else would. And this was after King, Reverend King, died. And Hosea Williams was so radical. He was just so radical. And I remember at Reverend Borders' funeral, he wasn't scheduled to be on the program. But he had come and had sent word to Reverend Borders' daughter that he wanted to speak. And she allowed him to speak. And, of course, we laughed the whole entire time. But he talked about that Reverend Borders gave him this office, and nobody else would. They had put him out. SCLC had put him out. And he was on Auburn Avenue, putting stuff in his trunk, and Reverend Borders, walking down the street as he did almost every day, asked him what was going on. And he told him that he had been put out of the SCLC building. And so Reverend Borders told him he could come up to Wheat Street and have his office. He'd give him the office. And he was there for quite a while. But he believed in people. He'd make you believe in yourself. And wanted to always give somebody a chance, you know, if he saw something in them. And a lot of people don't know that Wheat Street, Reverend Borders played a really big part in the, and you're going to have to help me out, Reverend Martin, not the race riots, but the, I'm having a real big senior moment here! But the movement, the movement. For Atlanta, it started at Wheat Street Baptist Church. One of the very first meetings, or the first meeting, for organization was held at Wheat Street. It was because Reverend Borders, he was just, not a radical, you know, but just, we have to do something. And so one of the first meetings was there.

DANYLCHAK: Did your parents go to those meetings? Did your mom go?

OSBY: No. No. My mother, she was proper. And she would have thought that that was not to be done. She just probably felt that we had been, we had achieved a lot already, the white people have allowed us to do whatever, and we just need to be happy with this. The only time I remember my mother being up in arms about something was the day that I came home and told her that the name had been changed from Bagley Park to Frankie Allen Park. She was hurt, she was upset, because they were supposed to never change the name. So she was really upset about that, mad about that. And then there was some news people or somebody that was doing a story on it had come to interview her about Forsyth County. And she was pretty fired up about that. And she never did get to know, she was already deceased when, there were a group of attorneys and white activists who had come to know the story about Forsyth County and they were trying to organize a restoration movement for Forsyth County. And so they had done all this research about who lived there, where they lived, how much land they owned, all that sort of stuff. And according to their records, which came from Forsyth County property records, my grandfather left eighty-four acres. Now, you know, for an African American or Negro, let's say, to own an acre of land in 1912, that was something. But they had found on record, eighty-four acres. And this was one of the stories my mother told. These, he had the only school for the Negro children there, in Forsyth County. So that was also on his property. And so, she got kind of fired up about that. Just reliving it and everything, you know.

DANYLCHAK: Do you remember what you thought when you learned that the name of Bagley Park was being changed? Did you understand the significance at the time?

OSBY: Not so much. I didn't understand the loss, the loss of it. And what it meant. I probably thought, well, you know, my mother will do something, and it will get fixed. That's probably the extent of it. And she called people and talked to people, and I don't really know what she was able to find out or anything more. But certainly not to do anything about it. I believe that was in, when I found out about it was either 1980 or 1981. And so, for her eighty-first birthday, her last birthday, I was able to get the sign from the Parks Department of the City of Atlanta, and we gave it to her. And I still have it. I hope it hasn't rotted out down in my basement. I still have it. But that, she really appreciated getting that, but it didn't restore anything for her.

DANYLCHAK: That actually leads us into what I wanted to talk about next. There was an effort in 2005 that you mentioned before to preserve Mt. Olive Cemetery and to memorialize the neighborhood in some way. Can you talk a little bit about that project and how you became associated with it?

OSBY: I apologize, Erica, that I'm not going to be able to remember everything that I would like to. But there was an organization. They had offices over in southeast Atlanta somewhere near the Zoo. And they spearheaded that. And I'm not sure how they came about wanting to do that for the cemetery. But anyway, I didn't even know it was going on. At the time I was working in Council. I had previously worked for Mayor [Shirley] Franklin in their administration, in their offices, and also Bill Campbell. And I had left Mayor Franklin's office and went to work for Derrick Boazman. And Mayor Franklin sent me an email asking me did I know about it. And I didn't. Somebody always has to bring it to me. And so I called about it and then I was working for Derrick Boazman, and he wanted to get involved in it. And so the people came and we had some meetings and then it progressed to where they were looking for descendants. And I got some people together for them and they did some interviews. And they also had a history session over there on Pharr Road, just down from the cemetery. I remember we left the session and all walked over there. One of the archaeological engineers or whatever they were, you know, they were pointing out. They had all of these red flags where they had done, what is it that you do to the ground? Sonar?

DANYLCHAK: I'm not sure which method they used.

OSBY: They did something where they were able, they did the probing, but they also took these X-rays of the ground, and they were able to determine where there seemed to be something solid, a casket or vault, probably not vaults, but caskets. So they walked us over there and showed us all that. And that was the last thing that I remember being invited to. It just sort of fizzled out after that. There was a time when Mayor Franklin expressed an interest that maybe it could be acquired as green space. And so it didn't go any further than that. There were some newspaper articles in the local Buckhead newspapers. But it didn't go any further than that.

DANYLCHAK: And so the next time Mt. Olive popped up in the newspapers was when Brandon Marshall acquired the property.

OSBY: Yes.

DANYLCHAK: Can you tell me about how you found out about that?

OSBY: Susan Conger. Susan Conger was doing her thesis. And so she wanted to interview me about Bagley Park. And I shared some papers that I had with her. And so she and I, you know, connected that way, and would keep in touch from time to time via email. And so then one day she called me, and she was like she was out of breath. She had been walking her dogs and came by Bagley Park and saw the sign for the hearing. And so that's how I found out about it. And I went to the hearing down at City Hall. And, thank God, that's when I met you all. And met Wright [Mitchell]. And so it progressed from there, the fight, you know, to try to keep this from happening.

DANYLCHAK: And can you tell me what you felt after Fulton County [Superior Court] made its decision to stop Brandon Marshall from moving the graves out there?

OSBY: It was relief. It was relief. Because there had been so many emotions about this, going through the process. And I think the first thing that I felt was, they are running us out again, you know, because they had run my grandparents out of Forsyth County, and then they had run my parents and everyone out of Bagley Park. And now here it is again, you know. And my grandfather and grandmother and uncle and aunt are buried there. And so it just couldn't let it happen without a fight. And I had an excellent attorney, excellent attorney. But it just seemed like for a while there it seemed like he just was not going to give up. He just kept on fighting, kept on fighting. And after a while you start to think, you know, is he going to win? Because he just kept going. But when it finally happened, and you finally, not just with the decision of the judge, but waiting. Is he going to try to do something else? When it seemed like, okay, he's going to let it go, it was just a weight off of me. It was just relief. And I had talked to several people, Sam Massell being one, several people who had assured me, it's not going to happen, you know, even if he was to win the case in court, he just will never have a clear title and be able to do anything. I don't know what he thought he could do in the first place. It's just not a plot of land big enough to do anything. And then even if you were to put something on there, there's no parking, nothing. So, I just think it was just a crazy idea in the very beginning. But regardless of that, it's his, he owned it, and you just had to hope and pray that the Urban Design Commission, that the Council, people of Fulton County, that everybody was going to see, you know, we can't let this happen. We cannot destroy what's left of this settlement.

DANYLCHAK: What would you like to see happen with Mount Olive cemetery? What's your vision for that space?

OSBY: My ultimate goal, the first thing on the wish list, would be that the City would acquire it, or that somebody would acquire it, as green space. And in those initial plans back in 2005, there was talk of a monument, some sort of a statue. They wanted to do a plaque with some of the history on it. I'd love to see that. And at each place, even though we can't identify who is buried there, I wish that at each place that they're able to determine here's a grave, that there could be some generic headstone that would say "Here lies a resident of Bagley Park" or something. And maybe that's not the best thing. Because some of those people did not live there. That was the thing that helped establish it as a public cemetery, because everybody that's buried there did not live in Bagley Park. But, something saying, that somebody's here, even though we don't have names of them. That's what I'd like to see. And I'd like to see a sidewalk on the street instead of people having to take that path. And I don't really know how that could be done. But I wish that they could bring the street out some so they could make an actual sidewalk and people would

stay on the street instead of coming up in there. So my new prayer, and you shared with me today some possibilities, my new prayer is that somebody will take it on as green space.

DANYLCHAK: That's what we hope as well. Is there anything else you want to share with me today? I know we could get into so much more, but is there anything in particular you wanted to share that we've missed?

OSBY: Not anything that I can think of. Now, of course, when I get in my car and get headed home something will come to me. I don't know if it's possible I could send that to you and there's some way to add it verbally. I think this has been a great interview. I like the way it was done, and I think we've covered everything. Covered much more than what I thought.

DANYLCHAK: We've covered a lot of ground and I really appreciate you taking time today. This has been such a pleasure for me.

OSBY: It's been a pleasure for me. I'm so glad I had a chance to do it. But actually, we talked about more than what I thought it was going to be.

DANYLCHAK: Good. I think that's a good thing.

OSBY: Definitely.