

JACK DAVIDSON

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INTERVIEWER: Maury Miller

Transcribed by Donna Duzan, July 2017

M: I am here for an oral history with Jack Davidson. Jack, when and where were you born?

J: I was born July 19, 1946 in Terre Haute, Indiana.

M: And who were your parents?

J: Don and Jean Davidson

M: And did you have any brothers or sisters?

J: I had one older brother, Don Jr, he lives in Columbus, Georgia.

M: And tell us where you grew up.

J: We lived down on the Zion Road. My grandfather had a farm. There was a hired hand house and we lived in it. And my grandfather lived in a big white farmhouse and I remember it was dated 1898 in the eaves of the house. That house is now torn down and Richard Lindley who is now deceased lived there and I think his son, Jim lives there now. There was a big hand hewn barn across the road and the road divided the house and the barn. We lived just down the road just a hundred yards. Then when I was eight, my father got a job in Marshall and we moved to town and I was thrilled because I could literally walk a block down the street and buy milk or ice cream or whatever I wanted. It was Harlow's Grocery Store and it is beside where the Dog N' Suds was. This was quite a thrill because there was quite a variety of grocery stores in 1957 in Marshall and around Marshall. We were a block and a half from the South School.

M: What do you remember about the neighbors and neighborhood?

J: We lived a Fifth and Vine and they called that area the more socially-economically depressed area of town also known as "Hollywood" so you could say I lived at Hollywood and Vine. When you have lived in the country all your life and then when you move to town and can walk up the street to get a coke, that was quite a deal because it was really a long walk back then, I was eight. We rode our bikes, when the city sprayed for mosquitos we rode bikes right behind that spray truck. We played kick the can at the South School all summer long, we would hide in the ditches. Steve and Bud Prevo lived just across Route 1 and they had a nice concrete driveway and we would play kick the can there. Then when we got older we would work bailing hay. There wasn't a pool yet, the Clark County Fair was the biggest event of the year. I distinctly remember going to the football games in the fall and if it was a cool damp evening, you could smell Velsicol. For years I just thought that that was the way the air was supposed to smell.

M: Let's talk about school, what schools did you go to?

J: Marshall, I graduated from high school in 1964. I went to the South School until Jr High, then to Marshall High School and after that I went to Eastern Illinois University and graduated from there in 1968. I loved the Marshall school system. We were in the last school to attend elementary school in the "old" South School.

M: What other memories do you have of high school? What did you participate in?

J: I played football for two years, played basketball the first two years and wrestled the last two years. Never played baseball, never liked baseball. As a child, my dad built quarter midgets, so when I was 10, 11, 12 I raced quarter midgets. My dad wanted me to be well rounded so he made me play little league baseball so as soon as baseball was over I got to go race quarter midgets. I would have to race with only my socks on because I couldn't feel the pedals of the race car with cleats on. So I despised baseball because I had to do that before I could race.

M: What about your social life? Did you date?

J: Oh yeah, I had a red '57 Chevy in high school and I did date. It was just your typical high school drama. Our class was kinda different. We were pretty united and many of us dated as friends. I feel like even today, we have a very strong commitment with former classmates.

M: Let's talk about growing up in the family, what types of things did you do as a family?

J: My mom and dad both worked. We would go on Sundays down to the farm to eat lunch with the family. My mom didn't have any brothers and sisters and she was from Arizona so, it was just my dad's family. We always had supper, always a Sunday meal. I always had a good family life. My poor mom, she had two sons and a husband so she was in the minority. I always admired my dad because he would let us boys grow in the way we wanted to. I loved art and he loved to draw but he would never draw around me because he wanted me to draw. He always let us go in our own direction. My brother went to Marshall schools also and he missed one day of school in twelve years. When he was in sixth grade my dad made him stay home and help butcher one day. That's the only day he missed in twelve years !!

M: What did you study in college?

J: Art, I was the only guy I knew that started and ended with the same major. And graduated on time. I just missed the draft and in '68. Got classified 1A and was allowed to finish college. When I graduated I went to Chicago to teach. Got classified 1A again and the principal at the school was a friend of my family and got me a teaching deferment.

M: So you taught in Chicago?

J: On the south side, at Shelby I taught two years, got tired of the city, and moved back to Marshall. I felt very fortunate to live in Chicago to find out what "city" life was like. I just like a small town much

better. The quality of people is so different between a large city and a small town. It was a good experience to teach up there, the student body was 2200 and it was quite the change from Marshall. And then I taught two years at Sullivan, too.

M: And after you came home, what did you do?

J: I worked at the City garage, was a postman, worked in a service station for 13 years, and then I went to the Ford Garage and started selling cars and progressed in 2000 to the manager of this store.

M: When and where were you married?

J: I've been married three times, once in Chicago and two times in Marshall. My present wife and I have been married 24 years in October.

M: And she is a Marshall girl?

J: Yes, a Smitley. Everybody knows a Smitley.

M: Let's talk about some general things in your lifetime. What major people or events had an impact on your life?

J: Some things that I remember are that I was always allowed to do and develop whatever I wanted to do as far as art goes. My parents were always very supportive of my art projects. I loved old cars, when I wanted to work on cars, my dad very much accommodated me. For four months I worked with the restoration committee at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Museum, that was one of the highlights of being over there. I did my graduate work at Loyola and I really enjoyed that, that was on the north side of Chicago. As far as motivation and direction, I always felt that my parents being supportive of whatever I wanted to do was appreciated by me.

M: Do any historical events in your lifetime stand out in your mind?

J: I recorded with a tape recorder when we landed on the moon. When I started teaching in Chicago, in Fall of 1968 I went to the Democratic Convention one day and found out what was going on down there and didn't go back because I really wasn't interested in being in the Cook County jail. 911, you just remember things like that. But those are a couple things that I do remember.

M: As you think about devices and conveniences that we now have, what do you think affected you most?

J: It is amazing how much cell phones have crept into society. The computer as well. You know the computer started out big and just keeps getting smaller and smaller. But to me the cellphone is so fascinating because of the capabilities it has. I go back and look at the automotive field and if you take a cell phone in a car they almost progressed at the same rapid rate. So a car's technology is totally amazing with what they can do now that was not possible when I was younger.

M: Jack, I have one more question, if you were talking to someone who was not from Marshall, how

would you describe Marshall and why you live here?

J: Marshall is a very clean small Christian community. It's not too big and it's not too small, it's a little close-minded. It's a little too Christian at times, what I mean is, you get some conflicts going here that are really not ? to society. But it is a really really nice town. One of the many things you can say about our community is that you can live here 25 years and still not be from Marshall, some of my friends still don't feel like they are from Marshall, the family roots run so deep here, but it's a great place to be from and it's a great place to live.

M: Jack, thank you very much for doing this interview for the Friends of the Library oral history project.