

DeKalb History Center

Lithonia Community Engagement Oral History

Dr Quentin Fretwell

Speaker 1 ([00:00:01](#)):

Lithonia Community Outreach Project for about a year now, and its purpose is to develop, enhance our existing Lithonia collection, which is lacking in many areas, including time period after 1950s, and what was happening in Lithonia at the time to the present day. So, as a former and possibly current resident of Lithonia, we'd love to, we're glad to be able to get your story. So, Dr. Fretwell, were you born in Lithonia? You're from Lithonia, right? Yes. You want to start with your childhood and we'll start from there.

Speaker 2 ([00:00:44](#)):

Well, and let me also say on the onset too, that I'm a graduate of the class of 1974 Lithonia High School, and we had a class meeting on last night. Some of us, and I guess I'll just say this, some of the black students from Lithonia High School who previously went to Bruce Street,

([00:01:20](#)):

We got tired of going to funerals. And at the last funeral of my cousin, Robin Fretwell, we were standing outside and we said, just getting tired of coming to funerals. We had never actually had ever gotten together the class of 1974, at least us. We hadn't been together. So we finally decided to get together. And so I had a conversation with them last night. We had a class conference call, about six of us. And because our 50th class graduation, graduation class, if I can say it like that, is 2024. So we're talking about that. But I mentioned this and I said that I would have a conversation with y'all today because many of the persons in that with my class who are on the call are persons who were Mr. Mill. I think we're talking about the African experience, not African, the African-American experience, the black in particular, Lithonia, DeKalb County, particularly Lithonia, and the person's who on the call, basically for the most part, all history makers.

Speaker 1 ([00:02:54](#)):

Fantastic. Wow.

Speaker 2 ([00:02:55](#)):

For instance, Anthony James Marble was the first black quarterback on the football team.

Speaker 1 ([00:03:07](#)):

Is that Marble? M-A-R-B-L-E?

Speaker 2 ([00:03:09](#)):

Yes. And he specifically said last night that he would talk together about this because I think he was quite interested in sharing some information. Fantastic. And for several of them, they have a few more kind of really great ties, particularly with African American students. I mean, I was there and I was

involved, but he was on the football team, so he has connections with a lot of guys who played football. I was the band and I was my senior. I was actually drum major of the band. And in fact,

Speaker 1 ([00:04:00](#)):

And what instruments did you play?

Speaker 2 ([00:04:01](#)):

I was clarinet. I was with one major, so I was a music guy.

([00:04:10](#)):

And at that time, as you probably understand, most of DeKalb County was white. And so for me to operate in music, I had to compete. And we're talking about 19 69, 19 70. And so for me to be successful in music, I had to compete. Well, I was one of the first black students in the DeKalb honor band. For instance, I as a 10th grader beat out the white drum major for a first year clarinet in the band. So not, and he's since died so many years ago, so not disparaging that at all. But during that time, whether it was for marching band or for concert, we had to wear our uniform and for concert just wore the uniform without the hat.

Speaker 3 ([00:05:19](#)):

Okay.

Speaker 2 ([00:05:20](#)):

Okay. Well, the drum major always wore a white uniform. Well, the drum major was always the first chair. Well, in this instance, the drum major had the six next to me, so I had to compete. So I was in different arenas with some other guys when I was getting ready to show you was something that came up in our conversation last night. That is Beverly Jackson.

Speaker 1 ([00:06:03](#)):

Beautiful.

Speaker 2 ([00:06:04](#)):

Tell us

Speaker 1 ([00:06:04](#)):

About her.

Speaker 2 ([00:06:05](#)):

She was one of the first black beauty queens at Lithonia High School and I, I'll let her get a chance to really tell her story about that.

Speaker 1 ([00:06:23](#)):

Fantastic.

Speaker 2 ([00:06:26](#)):

And one other piece that I'll go into some more in just a second, but just one other piece I was kind of sharing with you. Let's see if I can locate it quickly.

Speaker 1 ([00:06:50](#)):

Take your time.

Speaker 2 ([00:07:07](#)):

Okay. This is mine be Kelly.

Speaker 1 ([00:07:13](#)):

Yes. The crossing guard.

Speaker 2 ([00:07:15](#)):

Yes. And you can read that.

Speaker 1 ([00:07:32](#)):

What is the, I'm sorry, what does the MIN stand for?

Speaker 2 ([00:07:36](#)):

She's a minister also.

Speaker 1 ([00:07:37](#)):

Minister Kelly. Yes. Minister Kelly was one of the first African-American school patrols for DeKalb County and the first African-American for the city of Lithonia in the sixties. She started a hair salon in her home in 1955 and is still a licensed beautician working at her shop located on Main Street. The shop is present day history and is an example of the progress made because of the civil rights movement. Do we know the name of her store?

Speaker 2 ([00:08:01](#)):

Well, that came out some years ago. She sits now 94, so she's not really doing hair,

Speaker 1 ([00:08:10](#)):

Although

Speaker 2 ([00:08:11](#)):

Because her knees are bad and she just came out of the hospital, but hasn't been too long since she stopped doing

Speaker 1 ([00:08:19](#)):

Hair.

Speaker 2 ([00:08:21](#)):

As long as she can stand up the master of the pressing curl, which y'all don't know anything. Y'all young folk don't know anything about that. Back in the day, the pressing curl was the thing.

Speaker 1 ([00:08:35](#)):

Okay.

Speaker 2 ([00:08:36](#)):

Whether you had, especially if you had medium lift hair or kind of short hair and using those curlers, curling, it was a curling iron and they kind of click. So if you're a great beautician,

Speaker 3 ([00:08:57](#)):

You

Speaker 2 ([00:08:57](#)):

Knew how you do that click of those curl and you put it in this thing kind of like a little stove and you heat 'em up and then you take 'em out and you did these kind of little rolls,

Speaker 1 ([00:09:10](#)):

Cool

Speaker 2 ([00:09:11](#)):

Up your hair. My mom got it all the time because they used to go watch my mom get her hair done. My aunt for some reason thought I was going to be a beautician. But anyway, and so you do it all the way up and then that's how you went home. But then when you got ready to go out somewhere, all you did was kind of brush it out and it made this nice. And so if you were a really good beautician back then, you were a master of the press and curl and that whole thing about being to click those curlers because you just have to Google it. Okay. Click

Speaker 4 ([00:09:48](#)):

And curl. That's definitely something that I remember as soon as you said the stove feature, I remembered it immediately because the stylists, they always have that and they always have a hot comb.

Speaker 2 ([00:10:01](#)):

Right. And so yeah, so what you had to do is press out and then you use that. You do. So that was the press and then the Curl, Press and Curl

Speaker 1 ([00:10:12](#)):

Cool.

Speaker 2 ([00:10:13](#)):

And so she's 94 now,

Speaker 1 ([00:10:15](#)):

Right? Is she still living in Lithonia?

Speaker 2 ([00:10:19](#)):

Yes.

Speaker 1 ([00:10:19](#)):

Okay.

Speaker 2 ([00:10:20](#)):

Wonder lives on Kanye Street.

Speaker 1 ([00:10:21](#)):

Very good.

Speaker 2 ([00:10:22](#)):

That's another picture of her. And you can also,

Speaker 1 ([00:10:29](#)):

Oh yeah, mayor

Speaker 2 ([00:10:29](#)):

Venable read that, right?

Speaker 1 ([00:10:30](#)):

Yeah,

Speaker 2 ([00:10:30](#)):

Right. But then read the caption there.

Speaker 1 ([00:10:33](#)):

Mayor Alison Venable was the first black mayor of the city of Lithonia. Reverend Cly Bell Kelly first mother to register her daughters at Lithonia High School. Fantastic.

Speaker 2 ([00:10:43](#)):

My cousins were the first black students to integrate with high school.

Speaker 1 ([00:10:47](#)):

Very good. That's fantastic. Yeah, I would love to speak with her if you think she would be amenable to that, and maybe you would be there to support her or be there to, or somebody would, maybe another family member would want to be on site.

Speaker 2 ([00:11:06](#)):

I'm pretty sure my cousins would like to be in place for that.

Speaker 1 ([00:11:11](#)):

Do you remember the name of her salon?

Speaker 2 ([00:11:25](#)):

I think, if I remember correctly, I think it was Cate's.

Speaker 1 ([00:11:30](#)):

Cate's

Speaker 2 ([00:11:31](#)):

Beauty Shop.

Speaker 1 ([00:11:35](#)):

Can I go back to something, Dr. Fretwell that you mentioned before about honor band? Can you talk a little bit more about out how long you were in the band and what the honor band process was and some of your experiences with performing and being drum major. Can you talk a little bit more about band experiences at Lithonia High School?

Speaker 2 ([00:11:59](#)):

Yes ma'am. And I will, and in order to do that, I'll have to take you back. I'm just going to turn this.

Speaker 3 ([00:12:09](#)):

No problem. Please continue.

Speaker 1 ([00:12:19](#)):

Yes. Take us back as far as you'd like to go.

Speaker 2 ([00:12:25](#)):

I'm sorry. Yeah, I'm in a meeting. I have to call you back. In fact, I was trying to show a couple of the pictures. This is my mom and that's Mr. Anderson. And they were, that's when they were the two persons graduating from what was called Bruce Street School. They are sitting on the steps at the old Bruce Street School building.

Speaker 1 ([00:13:02](#)):

What was your mom's name or what is your mom's name?

Speaker 2 ([00:13:04](#)):

Carrie.

Speaker 1 ([00:13:05](#)):

C-A-R-R-C-R-R-I-E.

Speaker 2 ([00:13:09](#)):

May Fretwell.

Speaker 1 ([00:13:11](#)):

M-A-E-M-A-Y-M-A-E. At Bruce Street?

Speaker 2 ([00:13:18](#)):

Yes. The Bruce Street School.

Speaker 1 ([00:13:20](#)):

And this was before Lithonia High School, was even a,

Speaker 2 ([00:13:24](#)):

This is now, you know where the East Precinct is, right?

Speaker 1 ([00:13:29](#)):

Vaguely. Yes.

Speaker 2 ([00:13:31](#)):

It's on Bruce Street. The East Precinct was the Bruce Street Elementary/ High School.

Speaker 3 ([00:13:37](#)):

But

Speaker 2 ([00:13:37](#)):

Across the street is this building is the remnants of this

Speaker 3 ([00:13:41](#)):

Building

Speaker 2 ([00:13:42](#)):

And they are working, I think one of my classmates actually, or persons named Fred Reynolds, has been working with some other people for years to try to get that designated, I think as a historical site, but then to get it rebuilt for his history.

Speaker 1 ([00:14:12](#)):

Yeah, the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Group is working very closely with the community on that.

Speaker 2 ([00:14:18](#)):

And that's across the street where now the senior citizen center is. Okay. But that's the picture of that building. Wonderful. And she's sitting and they were only two graduates that year.

Speaker 1 ([00:14:32](#)):

Do you know what year that was?

Speaker 2 ([00:14:33](#)):

And I've been trying to think about it and I don't know.

Speaker 1 ([00:14:36](#)):

Okay.

Speaker 2 ([00:14:38](#)):

I can find out, but I don't know.

Speaker 1 ([00:14:41](#)):

Sixties, maybe? Roughly.

Speaker 2 ([00:14:44](#)):

No, this had to be fifties. Fifties. I was born in 1956.

Speaker 1 ([00:14:48](#)):

Okay.

Speaker 2 ([00:14:50](#)):

I school in 1962, so no, it wasn't sixties.

Speaker 1 ([00:14:55](#)):

Okay, gotcha.

Speaker 2 ([00:14:57](#)):

I would say probably early fifties.

Speaker 1 ([00:15:00](#)):

Very good.

Speaker 2 ([00:15:07](#)):

Just showing a couple of pictures. That's my senior year. And they would go to schools and ask for students to be

Speaker 3 ([00:15:17](#)):

Pages

Speaker 2 ([00:15:18](#)):

For the state senate. So we got to be paged for a day. And that's actually in state law that you consider to be excused, having an excused absence if you're a page of the Senate. That's Max Cleland

Speaker 1 ([00:15:31](#)):

And Jimmy Carter,



Speaker 2 ([00:15:36](#)):

And I forgot, we took a couple pictures with him.

Speaker 1 ([00:15:45](#)):

Very interesting. Did that trigger anything in your mind about going into government at all? Being a page and how long did you do that for?

Speaker 2 ([00:16:00](#)):

They would just bring us in for a day.

Speaker 1 ([00:16:02](#)):

Oh, for a day. You said

Speaker 2 ([00:16:03](#)):

It was just an honor. I remember being in class and getting called to the principal's office, and back then you didn't get called to the principal's office. It's almost like everybody, somebody came into your class said, the principal wants to see you. Everybody got scared. You just did not go see the principal. You may go to see the assistant principal,

Speaker 3 ([00:16:30](#)):

But

Speaker 2 ([00:16:30](#)):

You did never go to see the principal if you go see the principal. That was, but this was a good thing. So I was called to office and was indicated I was being selected to be one of the pages for the Senate that day from Max

Speaker 1 ([00:16:51](#)):

Cleland. Do you know what the criteria was?

Speaker 2 ([00:16:56](#)):

I guess I would just say being a good, excellent student. I hate to say that.

Speaker 1 ([00:17:04](#)):

Well, how many kids in your, I mean, yeah, obviously you were an excellent model and student and there were a lot of kids in your class, so there had to be a criteria for

Speaker 2 ([00:17:13](#)):

That's the list.

Speaker 1 ([00:17:14](#)):

Oh wow.

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Speaker 2 ([00:17:16](#)):

That's the program. See, lemme show you. Here's the graduation program. My mom kept everything.

Speaker 1 ([00:17:22](#)):

Yes, that's good. As mom's will

Speaker 2 ([00:17:24](#)):

Right now, I showed this to my 11-year-old granddaughter because she just got named to be on the junior beta club.

Speaker 1 ([00:17:33](#)):

Very cool. Nice.

Speaker 2 ([00:17:34](#)):

You see the legend down here, and I didn't realize this until one of my classmates, I was doing a presentation for the bus drivers and he got up and said, well, had other one of my cousins who was in, not in my graduating class, but below me, he's worked in government, he said to me something to the effect of, he said, we always looked up to you because you showed us it could be done. Meaning the black students you showed us, we could do it. Because if there was any racial tension and things of that nature during that time, which I understand there may have been, I don't know it, but I didn't really didn't see it. At least not in the realm, not the areas I worked in. And I'll share that in just a second. However, if you notice the legend here, if you have one, ask, if you have a plus, you're in joint. You were in joint enrollment. One asterisk meant that you were the National Beta Club. Two asterisk meant you were the National Honor Society, and three indicated you were in beta club and National Honor Society. If you were to take a moment to look through this,

([00:19:02](#)):

What you would find out is I was the only black student in my graduating class to have both

Speaker 1 ([00:19:10](#)):

Fantastic.

Speaker 2 ([00:19:11](#)):

In fact, there was only, I think maybe 12 students total in my graduation class, in the total graduation class who was in both

Speaker 1 ([00:19:23](#)):

High achiever.

Speaker 2 ([00:19:25](#)):

And I don't know,

Speaker 1 ([00:19:27](#)):

Education was important,

Speaker 2 ([00:19:30](#)):

But I don't know where that came from because I can't say that my eighth grade year was that great. It was a change. I think I remember failing. I was failing English and I'm sorry, this is a school calling.

Speaker 1 ([00:19:51](#)):

Feel free

Speaker 2 ([00:19:56](#)):

Afternoon. This is Dr. Fretwell. I'm fine. How are you? I'm okay. Okay. I got you. I'm in a meeting right now, but I'll be checking again, so I'll let you know if there's something that's not looking right, but I trust you. Okay. And feel free to give me a call back, back later on or tomorrow. Okay. You are good. We're good. Thank you for calling me. Appreciate it. Bye. I'm sorry about that. Terribly sorry about that.

Speaker 1 ([00:20:44](#)):

A man with two phones is a busy man.

Speaker 2 ([00:20:48](#)):

Well, and I'll have to tell you about that. I'm actually a retired educator with the CAP schools. I started, this is now 40 years for me in the field education. Wow. I started in 1981, then I left and I came back as a substitute teacher. And my first year of teaching I was a band director, was not a great experience. And now that I'm lot older and more understanding, I wasn't ready to teach anyone's children. I knew music. And that kind of goes back to what I was saying. Let me take you back to, as far as music concerned, brought me back to Bruce Street where I started. But just to put a button on this, I wasn't prepared to run a band program. I knew music, but I wasn't. And there was a lot of reason why I wasn't prepared. One, it's because I finished my education. I finished my bachelor's degree in music at Georgia State University. Well, at the time, Georgia State University did not have marching band. They have football team.

Speaker 1 ([00:22:14](#)):

Yeah. Now they have football.

Speaker 2 ([00:22:15](#)):

We're talking about 1981. I

Speaker 1 ([00:22:17](#)):

Also graduated from Georgia State.

Speaker 2 ([00:22:19](#)):

Right. So you understand what I'm saying before? Yes. Right. Absolutely. And so it had been some many years that I was removed from band, that type of, and it changed from the time I graduated from high school. You had to have opportunities to be in that environment. And now I think about it, I'm just thinking about it now, had the have opportunities to be in that environment to be interning in band programs at schools and things of that nature.

Speaker 1 ([00:22:55](#)):

Like student teaching.

Speaker 2 ([00:22:56](#)):

Right. To know. I did my student teaching with a very, very successful band program, but I was not immersed enough to understand all the changes that occurred. So to get into the program, I was, I not ready for it. I actually got the job before I even really officially graduated. I just met all the requirements because I was graduating that same year, but my maturity level wasn't ready for that either.

Speaker 1 ([00:23:34](#)):

So that was in a DeKalb County High School?

Speaker 2 ([00:23:37](#)):

And so I left. And then through various experiences, one day woke up and when I'm on unemployment for six months, I try to be things like a rev. I tried to be, I got a job as the manager trainee for Revco Drug stores and got fired. And this just, I'm forming a book actually, but this will show you something here. Now I go out, get to Bruce Street, Revco Drugstore. If you were an employee, you could not buy anything with cash off the floor. Everything you got, you had to put it on an employee ticket. And it was a triple ticket NCR paper. And so what you did was you filled out your ticket, take your discount, which you got 15% off, take your discount, and you were to take the bottom pink copy because of that store, every bag that went out had to be folded and stapled with, with the receipt on top, you were to fold your bag up, stapled receipt on top.

([00:25:05](#)):

Now, then they would take it out of your check. So you never did cash. And that was for a person making sure you didn't buy a blender and one of your colleagues charge you a dollar for it. Okay. So among other things. But anyway, what the manager would allow us to do that, if you got a bunch of stuff this two week period, if you didn't want to get, have it taken out of that pay period, you just put the whole ticket on his desk and then he would then put it on the next payroll kinds of favorite body. So I remember getting some toiletries, like right guard, extra, do deodorant and some other things. Some things. So lotion, stuff like that. And the manager that week had gone on vacation. So I was manager on duty. So I remember this fateful Friday night, I got some toiletries and I wrote a ball down, put the ticket on his desk.

([00:26:11](#)):

And so I got my bag and we locked up. Friday night, I walk out the door, here comes security. Security says, where's your paint ticket? I said, it's in there. Let's go get it. We go back in, open up again, walk back in. He takes the items out and he's looking at the ticket and he's taking items out in my haste. And this was completely, totally an accident. Well, just a mistake. I wouldn't dare do something like this. But I wrote down, I think something like 180 5 for the right guard. It was like 1. 95 or something like that. I just writing too fast. Took him 15% off. He saw that and immediately called the regional supervisor. Long story short, Monday morning when manager comes in, I see him on the phone going, and the way we fired people was we didn't let them order. Well, let Quinn do the ordering for you, not right now.

([00:27:27](#)):

And then in the day, takes me in the back, hands me a separation notice, and I cried and he cried. I hadn't done. I really was, I was doing what we were allowed to do. I learned from that, regardless of

anything, you always follow procedure. Now in the state of Georgia, if you get fired, you know, don't get unemployment. I filed for unemployment. They did an investigation. They said, something's wrong here. So I was able to get \$150 a week unemployment, and I was at an apartment. I had moved there because I ate my band job and I was in my apartment. My mom thought I was going to live with her until I got married, but they gave me that \$150 a week. I had to save for the rent. But one day I woke up and something said, why sit you here till you die? You love to teach. And they say, you're kind of good at teaching. So, I got up from there, went over to the cab school district, went to HR, met with Lonnie Edwards, a guy who'd been knowing me for years. I said, I want to substitute now. What came to mind was, I'm getting \$150 a week.

(00:28:55):

You make about 90 to a hundred dollars a day to substitute due to math. \$150 a week. I'm getting \$90 a day. We're looking at 500. He said, I'm not going to see out for any observations because you already been teaching. Put you on the list. Go here. I went to some schools and then I walked into Columbia High School one day and never left.

Speaker 1 (00:29:29):

So how long were you there,

Speaker 2 (00:29:32):

You saying that? I walked in and that's when teachers would get their own substitutes. And I ended up having a little calendar. I kept with me and teacher would come to me, can you substitute from this day? And I said, okay. And did that. So I was booked up just weeks coming to Columbia High School. The teachers would actually come to me and say, they would not give me their substitute folder for the substitute teacher. They would say things like, I want to cover this I on tomorrow. When you come in, can you cover this information for me? Oh yeah, sure. So I'm actually teaching instead of the substitute folder. Now, that was in some cases like social studies, things of that nature. But anyway, I remember that's something I remember that was that they say, can you cover this? Okay. So that was when we were in quarters. I went that first quarter. I substituted second quarter. I get a call from the principal, would you like to be our in-school suspension supervisor? Okay, sign me up. I get to be in school suspension now. I have now what? I have a full-time job

(00:31:12):

With benefits. Now it's not paying very much because it's a paraprofessional position, but I'm in,

(00:31:21):

I then become a paraprofessional in English. Wasn't doing quite well in that. There was just a lot of take all these papers and file things of that nature. I didn't necessarily like that. So they moved me to special education and ended with special ed. These two ladies, one of them I know very well, Theresa Mans. She ended up being not a colleague of mine, but also church. But we were church members together. They gave me my own little class to teach. I was their paraprofessional. They gave me my own. So I had a little math class that I taught in the other room and they said basically summarizing, you seem to be good at this. Why don't you go back to school and get your master's in special ed? Never thought of it.

(00:32:17):

I went to back to Georgia State, got in, took two classes in special education. By that time I've been placed back into in-school suspension. And I told the new principal who used to be the assistant principal, I said to him, I'll be happy to go back in school suspension if you let me run it. Let me do it

Now. I noticed that they have the reason why I got it. They've been watching me. But anyway, I'm walking in the hallway going back to my room for school suspension. And one of the ladies, one, the administrative assistants in the office walked by and she said, personnel just called. They called it personnel back then. Not human resources. But anyway, I said, personnel just called and want to know you to call 'em. I said, I didn't call them. I don't know. Okay. So I called over personnel. They said, we understand you're interested in special ed job teaching. I said, okay. Said, well, if you're interested, we have two positions we'd like you to go interview for. Now. Keep in mind, I had just gotten married and had a baby on the way.

Speaker 1 ([00:33:45](#)):

Oh, wow. Wow. Big changes.

Speaker 2 ([00:33:47](#)):

So I go over to school that they were, the school district was operating in the DeKalb RYDC over on Clifton. I went over there and interviewed with the counselor because the principal's out and he said, well just meet with my counselor. And I went over there and met with him and he said, point blank, if you'd like to have it, the job's, yours. I said, sign me up. Here I am now. Now I'm a teacher again. I got a baby on the way and I'm married and now I'm teaching again. So here I am teaching at this school (inaudible), that's in RYDC. That was an interesting experience.

([00:34:52](#)):

But I try to make an impact, try to make a difference. I would do things like the guys who were locked up because what would happen is we had kids called day students and they would come in and it was kind of an alternative setting for some kids. They wouldn't be sent to alternative school if you sent to this one because sometimes try to separate. And so we had kids who came in, so we had to search 'em. And then they came in. They took classes with the kids who were locked up guys. So anyway, so I would do things like some of the guys, instead of going back to their room or a cell, say, okay, well you can clean up my room. And I would talk to 'em with thinking, you need to, and the wonderful thing as an educator, this is the thing that really gets you, the wonderful thing is to encounter some of these people when they've grown up.

([00:36:08](#)):

And I remember for instance, being in church one day, and we in the church, this guy came up, he said, Mr. Fretwell, because I was Mr. Fretwell then, not doctor. It didn't matter to me. Anyway. He said, Mr. Fretwell, he said, I was locked up and I was in your class and you really helped me. You let me clean up your room so I wouldn't have to go back to that cell and all this kind of stuff and you talked to me and all that kind of stuff. And he said, I really, really, really appreciate that. I just want you to know that I really appreciate you. And he said, I want you to meet my wife and here's my baby. I want them to meet you. Subsequent to that, I've encountered several students, not ones that's just locked up, most kind of just several students. I've got at least two to three of my former students. And I say that because I taught special ed, but then a few years later became department chair. So, here's what happened. You're missing a piece. I worked at B Dobbins office for one year. They decided to close the school and the state ran the school. It was a state school,

([00:37:34](#)):

So they closed B Dobbins. I'm sitting there, we're having a meeting and, excuse me, I'm sorry. I'm sitting there and we're having a meeting with the associate superintendent of instruction, assistant superintendent of instruction. It's only about three or four of us who are teachers with DeKalb. And so

we are getting, being asked where we'd like to go, since they're closing the school where you want to not going to fire us, and we let us go. They don't put us someplace else. You always need teachers. So they're asking Ms. Fox and other people, where do you want to go? So then he gets to me. But interestingly enough, the assistant superintendent of instruction was my former assistant principal, Lithonia High school,

Speaker 1 ([00:38:22](#)):

Small world.

Speaker 2 ([00:38:26](#)):

He would say things like when he would encounter me since I had become a teacher and all that kind of stuff. And I would come to the meeting and he, along with the principal, the principal became, Clark Britt was the principal at Lithonia High School at the time. He became the social superintendent of operations or facilities like that. And so they would come up and say things like, Quentin, did I beat your butt when you were in school? No, I don't think I beat your butt when I was school. It's like, okay, really? So we're sitting there in the meeting, and so then Mr. Rourke says, looks at me and says, I don't need to talk to you because the principal at Columbia High School where you just left, has already asked for you to come back over there to teach special ed. So we already know where you're going, so I'm not going to talk to you. So that thought, that fall, where am I back at Columbia High School, within a few years. I go from being a special ed teacher to being department chair. By the time I finish that year, being department chair, the principal at that time, Mr. Britt named me assistant principal. Now get this. I am now supervising some teachers that I substituted for because Columbia High School at that time, people just didn't leave. Okay. So it's an interesting thing. I'm actually a supervisor. Teachers that I substituted for, and now we're in 1993. Please tell me if I'm getting too much in the weeds.

Speaker 1 ([00:40:38](#)):

You are not. It's very interesting.

Speaker 2 ([00:40:47](#)):

The new school year, I was actually possibly going to be going from Columbia to Dunwoody High School, 1993, 94, I believe is what it

Speaker 3 ([00:41:03](#)):

Was.

Speaker 2 ([00:41:08](#)):

That's the year Ryan Seacrest was there.

Speaker 3 ([00:41:12](#)):

Okay.

Speaker 2 ([00:41:13](#)):

I was actually at Columbia during the time when Chris Tucker was there.

Speaker 1 ([00:41:17](#)):

Oh, wow. Awesome. Flat Rock connection. Right,

Speaker 2 ([00:41:20](#)):

Right.

Speaker 1 ([00:41:22](#)):

How does that work as an assistant principal? You're asked to transfer or is it a choice?

Speaker 2 ([00:41:33](#)):

You work at the that the will of the superintendent naturally. So if you're getting transferred,

Speaker 1 ([00:41:41](#)):

You have,

Speaker 2 ([00:41:41](#)):

I mean, particularly during that time, that was kind of what happened. You were placed in places where you think you worked best. And the assistant principal at Dunwoody had been promoted, I think, to well either promoted or I think there was promotions going on. But here's what happened. This was like 1993, I believe. Please understand, some of the dates kind of get fuzzy here. I'm old. However, the assistant principal at Columbia High School, the other assistant principal, had a massive heart attack and died on the road on his birthday. He had the wherewithal to stop the car on the side of the road. So then because of that, I ended up staying at Columbia. So I didn't go to Dunwoody. I did eventually go to Dunwoody in 1997. Excuse me. I did end up going to Dunwoody in 1997. I was there until October, 2000 is when I was offered a position in the county office. I went to HR, any position that I had previously applied for and didn't get it, that I'm in the position that I applied for maybe like a year, a couple years before that. So here I'm HR, but see, I have been doing discipline, safety, attendance and all those kinds of things for many years as assistant principal. And so department of student relations was always a dream of mine. That's the office that, that's the department that deals with student hearing, student discipline, code of conduct, all those kind of things include safety and all those kind of things.

([00:44:26](#)):

And I would share things I was doing as assistant principal with them. And so in 2002, I asked the question whether or not if I move from HR to or applied to go to get promoted to student relations, would that look bad on me? I was told, no, you have to do it. And so in 2002, I got promoted to department steward relations. So that's kind of my educational journey.

Speaker 1 ([00:45:00](#)):

And you're currently in that position?

Speaker 2 ([00:45:02](#)):

Well, I became administrative department student relations 2002 and 2008. I had the wonderful opportunity to be promoted to director of that department and retired in November, 2012. However, 2013, I got called to a meeting. And during the time I was director, that was during the time when all the stuff changed relative to when really some of the research information started coming out about bullying in schools. And so the state law said that school districts had to either revise or create a policy



on bullying. So I began to work on the policy and we said, is this a wonderful opportunity not to just change the policy? Because bullying had become this real big issue in schools. There was research that was done by Daniel (name inaudible) in 1993. It'd be a wonderful opportunity to wrap this up to a whole campaign. Let's help kids. Let's stop. Because bullying, they found out now has these significant short-term and long-term effects. They have now studied kids for 10, 20 years, and some of the kids who have substance abuse problems, relationship issues, PTSD and all those kinds of things cause of being bullied. So there's short-term effects and long-term effects. It can't be just doing boys be boys, girls be girls, get over it, write a passage, all those kinds of things. You can't look at it that way. It's serious.

(00:47:06):

So we decided to ramp it up to a campaign. Started that in 2010 has more served us well. In fact, I did my PhD dissertation on bullying. So if you ever find yourself one night, you can't sleep. Just

Speaker 3 (00:47:30):

Google

Speaker 2 (00:47:32):

Addressing bullying, schools perception, thoughts and beliefs of middle school principals. That's my work. I've had about 9,000 downloads of my dissertation since I've created in 2015. I do presentations. See, the wonderful thing about, see, this is why I'm sharing this. I know this doesn't, but it applies to my journey, which now I'm writing a book because look where I started and look where my career has taken me. So I'm writing a book called Embracing Your Path or Your Journey to Your Destiny. Because what I have found out now is being a band director was not, and this goes back to now Bruce Street. So let's pivot back to Bruce Street. I started band in 19, excuse me, I started band in fourth grade. You were allowed to start taking music in the fourth grade. Now it's later on in schools, but it used to be fourth grade. I remember one of my classmates, Sammy Powell, he got a snare drum. I said, I want to be in the band too. Now, my band director because, and let me tell you what the layout was of Bruce Street. It was Bruce Street Elementary High School.

(00:49:11):

If you know anything about East DeKalb precinct, which is what it is now, the school is kind of in a U shape like that. This side of the U was the elementary side. This side of the U was the high school side cafeteria. And the administrative offices were here, here, and here. We had the same principal, the same counselors, and also the same band director. So the band director of the high school band was also the band director, elementary band. His name was Gordon Boykin. Now he wanted me to get a bass clarinet, and my grandmother went to find, couldn't find one. So she got me a regular clarinet.

(00:50:22):

Well, by the time I was in the fifth and sixth grade, I was first chair clarinet in the high school band. Wow. So, me along with people like Gary Brightwell, we marched in (inaudible). We marched with the high school band in the fifth and sixth grade. Now, I seen a picture subsequent to that, and the band wasn't as big as we thought it was back then. Okay. So maybe they really needed us. But we played in the high school band. So we out there marching football games, sixth grade jam band, Fred Paxton was the drum major. So I ever since the fifth grade, I wanted to be a band director in DeKalb County schools. Since I wanted to be a band director in DeKalb County schools. In fact, as a sixth grade, I didn't play the elementary band. I got a chance to stand on y'all young people don't know if they bought milk crates, but back in the day, they had bottled milk and you had wood and metal milk crates. So Mr. Boykin would put me up on top of a milk crate and I would direct the elementary band. So that's all I want to do was

be a band director. But subsequently, I found out that being a band director was not my destiny. To me, it was my gateway.

[\(00:52:26\)](#):

And I've learned now that no matter that if you embrace your journey or your path to your destiny, then you learn to look at stuff. Even things that are not so good or things that are tragic as what am I being taught? What am I learning? What am I being chastised about? What is encouraging me to prepare me for my destiny? So therefore, then you learn to really look at things with a different set of eyes, and you learn to look at even the tragic things that occur in your life. As long as I'm still living, this is showing me something to get to my destiny. Because the whole thing about your destiny is it's for you.

[\(00:53:36\)](#):

And what I have shared with some people is that sometimes you're a destiny. You can't see right now, some people are trying to get promoted to positions that they see now, like, you're my supervisor, I want to do your job. What about the fact that there's a job that's being created for you down here and you're being prepared for that job, but it hasn't been created yet. But when it comes, you only person can do it. So you learn to embrace your journey, your past, your destiny. So then you look at even tragic things with different set of eyes. So all the things I went through, the unemployment, all those kind of things, living in an apartment, saving up for rent, gas turned off. I can't cook anything. I mean, cost stuff. I don't even have enough money. I don't even have 10 cents to dry my clothes. You ever try to dry a shirt on the outside, on the stoop? Things don't dry well. So now you're taking that morning, you're trying to take the iron, you're try to dry it. Trying to iron it dry didn't work. But I look back at those things now and say, look at how that was preparing me. So Bruce Street was a place of preparation. It was, as I understand it, and made one of my classmates kind of, well, or you'll get some more history that will clarify this if I'm not quite correct. My understanding was there were three black schools in DeKalb County at the time. There was Bruce Street, Hamilton and Lynwood

Speaker 3 [\(00:55:35\)](#):

Park.

Speaker 2 [\(00:55:40\)](#):

So, we basically got hand-me-downs, and this is what I recollect. We got books that had no covers on to get a book that had a front cover or to get a book that had both covers on. It was the best thing in the world because in the front of the book, naturally, remember that little grid they put on the front of the book where you could write your name in it? Best thing in the world, I remember, and this has nothing, this is no slight of the band director. We got a bassoon one day. Every once a while you get something new. We got to assume. And if I remember correctly, it was almost like we're thinking that it, something was wrong with it because it was backwards. But if you know anything about bassoon, most of the holes for the notes were on the backside of it. But I remember, if you've ever been to the East Precinct and Lucius Sanders Rec Center, that was the gym. And I remember that being built. I remember sitting in class when they announced that John Kennedy had died. So as you saw, my cousins, I used saw my cousins. They were the first to integrate Lithonia High School. Now we're talking about 1967, maybe 6, 6, 6, 7, something like that.

[\(00:58:11\)](#):

But they closed the high schools, the black high schools in 1968, interest enough, Brown versus Board of Education was 1954. They closed. So during that time, naturally, elementary was one through grades one through seven. High school was eight through 12th, they closed. So we were in the last seventh

grade class there at Bruce Street. So, they closed Bruce Street Elementary School, the elementary side in 19 69, 68, 69 school year. So, 69, 70 school year, we went to Lithonia High School. I grew up on Klondike Road in Lithonia. Now, to give you some perspective of that, if you were to get off on I 20 onto Evans Mill Road, and you turn left or right, depending on which way you're going to, if you're coming east on I - 20, you turn left going downtown be, excuse me, crossover Covington Highway. Basically the next, excuse me, excuse me, I'm sorry. You'll eventually get to Klondike Road. And my grandmother's house was the first house made on Klondike Road and actually caused the split of bifurcation for Klondike and Arabia Street. My aunt, the one who does the hair, she lived on Arabia Street and her shop was behind. Old shop, was behind the house.

(01:00:37):

My other aunt lived down on Magnolia, just down the street. My mom stayed rent the house on that same street on Magnolia, if I remember correctly. No, on Stone Street that had my other aunt stayed on what's called Dean Court. That's off Bruce Street, in fact, which is was with Lithonia Housing Authority. My aunt had 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 kids. Her husband, James Norris died as a serviceman. She lived in that place until she died. And her kids still live there to this day, some of them, two of my cousins of bad family have died. But life in Lithonia was, from my remember, is joyful. I am sure there were issues and problems, but there seemed to be still for the black community, it seemed to be very, very cohesive. And what I mean by that is pretty much everybody knew everybody. In fact, we joke about the fact that we say, it's not my Tony, it's my onion, but major. There are three large churches in Lithonia. Three quote unquote three main churches. And that was Antioch, Union, and St. Paul, AME Union were Baptist churches. St. Paul was AME church. But we did everything. We did things like watch night for New Year's we all had together. Christmas program we had together something called Candlelight Musical, but there are other smaller churches around quiet anniversaries, all that kind of stuff. I'm a church musician too, by the

Speaker 3 (01:03:46):

Way.

Speaker 2 (01:03:49):

So I was Mr. Music, actually. I grew up in Antioch and then I became Minister of Music much later. But the same people who were ushers and choir members and persons in church were like the cafeteria workers. The clerk and pianist of the choir at my church when I was little was my third grade teacher. So there was a pride there. I know kids complain about the food in the cafeterias now, but back then it was, you didn't bring a lunch ate in the cafeteria because they fed you. I mean, they cooked and they fed you Thanksgiving dinner was fall.

Speaker 1 (01:05:03):

Do you have memories about going from Bruce Street Elementary to the high school and what that transition was like?

Speaker 2 (01:05:14):

Yes. I remember when the first two white elementary students came to Bruce Street before it closed. I mean, sometime, I'm not sure at the time. I think they were younger, second grade, something like that. But as I said, being in music, I had to compete. In fact, my first year, well, actually going to eighth grade, actually going to eighth grade, well, lemme back up. I told you about Gordon Bogan, the band director,

right? Well, when they closed the high school, when, lemme back up somewhere around, I think it was seventh grade, he went to, I think Gordon High School or something like that. I think he moved when they closed the high school. So we had a white band director our seventh grade year. So going over to Lithonia High School, one of the things I actually remember is I played football, but I was also good enough to be in the marching band as a eighth grader.

[\(01:07:10\)](#):

So I would go to, and I'm trying to remember the order of this, but I think I went to football practice and then finished football practice and go to band practice or vice versa. So as I said with that, it was certainly was a change. But I do remember this. As I said before, I don't know when the shift occurred, but I'm not sure if I was really trying to be a good student initially. We were trying to be funny with teachers and all that kind of stuff. Like I said, I ended up having a, if I remember correctly, I think I had an F in math or something of that nature. It was something, one class I was failing and all of a sudden I said, I can't do this. And I ended up making a B in the class, I think, or something like that. I ended up doing quite well. I'm not sure if I got an A, I may have got a B or something like that. But somehow that next year, I guess because you start high school, ninth grade that next year, I just became a good student. I don't remember consciously that I did it. And I've always said this to people, regardless of all this thing about what people do or how people think, I give me the same opportunity and I can do just as well, better than you can. But I remember just, I don't know how I just start doing. Well, and I have the trophies at home. I got the most outstanding musician award in band every year. Start ninth grade.

Speaker 3 [\(01:10:12\)](#):

Wow.

Speaker 2 [\(01:10:17\)](#):

Start ninth grade every year. Start ninth grade. I got the most outstanding music award. And senior I got the John Phillips Susan Award, which is the big award. John Phillips. Susan is the father of marching band music. That was the senior award. But for some reason, and I guess that's the reason why I was telling my classmates last night, I didn't have some of the connections because some of my classmates, they talked to their other classmates all time. They call 'em and talk to 'em, all that kind of stuff. I don't necessarily do that.

Speaker 3 [\(01:11:08\)](#):

And

Speaker 2 [\(01:11:08\)](#):

I guess it's just because of different areas I was involved

Speaker 1 [\(01:11:11\)](#):

In

Speaker 2 [\(01:11:13\)](#):

Right from the clock, I got a two hour parking.

Speaker 1 [\(01:11:16\)](#):

Oh, okay.

Speaker 2 ([01:11:18](#)):

Wow. So I ended up graduating top 5% of my class. So I got things like the journal cup, and I remember senior awards night, I would go and get an award and they would say, don't go too far.

Speaker 1 ([01:11:43](#)):

You were going to be called again.

Speaker 2 ([01:11:45](#)):

I remember being in biology class and my biology teacher thought I was going to be a doctor. I would not even study and set the curve on a test. So I got the biology award, like science. I just had a knack for that. I guess it's just because did a lot of reading and stuff like that. I don't know. But it just clicked. If I knew then what I know now, I probably would have tried to be the first black valedictorian of the class. I didn't take any AP classes and it would've been easier. See now to be valedictorian class and this young lady right here, she just fresh out of high school anyway, so she knows to be valedictorian class. Now you got to take all AP classes from Jump Street and because you're not going be valedictorian unless you got a 4.3 0.4 0.5 GPA, something like that. Back then, if you had a 4.0, you could be valedictorian. I don't even know if we had advanced placer classes. And that's the thing, some of the things I didn't even know about. For instance, I didn't know if we had SAT prep classes.

([01:13:35](#)):

I didn't take SAT prep. All we knew was when you became 11th grader, you go to Towers High School and you take the SAT, you sign up to take the SAT. You know what my score was on SAT, and this was with when it was a thousand points in 1600. Now I believe my score was eight 80.

Speaker 3 ([01:14:03](#)):

Wow.

Speaker 2 ([01:14:09](#)):

No prep, no anything. Just took it. It's not too good A score,

Speaker 1 ([01:14:19](#)):

An eight 80 out of 1000

Speaker 2 ([01:14:21](#)):

Is not a good score.

Speaker 1 ([01:14:24](#)):

That are you saying an eight 80 out of 1000 is not a good score?

Speaker 2 ([01:14:28](#)):

Well, I think it was a thousand back then. I just didn't think eight 80 was a really good thing. I guess I thought it should be a little bit higher or I should have score higher. But I have a PhD, so I did not want to take the graduate record exam to get into a PhD program after my experience with SAT. So, I took the

Miller's analogy, Miller's analogy test that A is to B and C is to B, because that's the two ways you can get to a doctoral program in Georgia State.

Speaker 1 ([01:15:13](#)):

Okay.

Speaker 2 ([01:15:18](#)):

But I got the Barron's book on taking Miller's analogy. And interesting enough, this is what Barron says. Barron says, normally you would look at A is to B and C is to B, right? But what Barron says is you may want to look at A is to C and then B is to D, or you may want to look at A is to D, and then B is to C. So depending on which one is missing, you can't just focus yourself on, okay, what's the analogy with A to B? Let's say C's missing. So you say, okay, what's A to B then C's missing. So then you got to look at this and then say, okay, what would be comparable C to D? And Barron said there, you can't do that. You got to look at sometimes C may be missing, but you got to look at what A is the D

Speaker 1 ([01:16:25](#)):

Think outside the box.

Speaker 2 ([01:16:26](#)):

Correct. So I ran down. In fact, I left late and I ran down because I was taking the Miller's analogy at University of Georgia in Athens. I'm in Stone Mountain, and I, for some reason, something came up and I'm running late because I'm director of student relations. So I was doing something trying to get something done. I jumped in the car and I get to University of Georgia, Athens. I don't know how I got to the right place. It's huge. That's huge. Yeah. I don't know how I got to the right place. I get there and run in and I'll get there just enough time to sit down and they hand me the test.

Speaker 3 ([01:17:08](#)):

Wow.

Speaker 2 ([01:17:12](#)):

And I score in the top 90% of doctoral students.

Speaker 1 ([01:17:23](#)):

So, school education is just in your in blood. It's in your nature from an early age.

Speaker 2 ([01:17:31](#)):

And I guess that's the thing. But I guess what I'm going back to is that this was my destiny because now I'm doing things that I would never thought I would be doing. I mean, my family didn't grow up going to college, barely out of high school. You see, that's not where I grew up in. But it took teachers and people education, particularly this whole music thing, to show me it was a better route. I didn't sit out to even do PhD. I don't think I'm PhD smart. In fact, it took me nine years to do PhD. I was director of student relations. So I would take my one class every semester. I had colleagues were taking three, four classes a semester. I can't do that. My brain doesn't work that way. So I teach my class and just take my class. If I had to do a waiver or do waiver, and I had five changes in chairs for my doctor, my doctorate,

[\(01:18:38\)](#):

Because they were either moved to another school or they would retire or whatever the case may be. Anyway, it took me nine years. So I ended up, my dissertation chair ended up being the associate superintendent of the college education at Georgia State. Tall lady, like six four. And when I met with her, she helped me more in five minutes than anybody else did. And when I finished, I'm standing there and I'm defending my dissertation and my mentor, Dr. Gary McGivney, who actually hired me in Department of Student Relations and took a chance on me and taught me the job. And to this day still teaches me. And I had the wonderful opportunity to be the opening ceremony keynote speaker for the annual Homeland Security, Georgia Homeland Security School Safety Conference. Been presented that conference for years. And one day they called me and said, you've been presenting the bullying training for us and school culture and climate, things like that for years. We would like for you to be the opening keynote speaker. We would like you to set the tone for the entire conference. That was very, very humbling to be asked to be the opening VO keynote speaker. I mean, it was like something I always, and I've seen him do it, and it's like, I always wanted to be a keynote speaker. You get a chance to stand for an hour and talk about what you want to talk about.

[\(01:20:40\)](#):

And they called me and I said, wow. So he actually came down to listen to me, but to get a chance to do the things I'm doing now, why I start out, what I think so badly is because this was my destiny. So I finished defended my dissertation and that my co-chair, Dr. Bear says, go down, go to my office. We got talk. So go down my office. I'm trying to say, don't try to but us up. She looking stern. So I go down and sit down. I'm just nervous. She comes back down, gets me, I go back in the room and I'm standing there and Dr. Minnie gets up. And like I said, she's about 6 3, 6 tall lady. She comes over to me and goes, Dr. F Fred will.

Speaker 3 [\(01:22:08\)](#):

Wow. Wow.

Speaker 1 [\(01:22:18\)](#):

Congratulations. Congratulations.

Speaker 2 [\(01:22:21\)](#):

After nine years,

Speaker 1 [\(01:22:22\)](#):

That's a lot.

Speaker 2 [\(01:22:27\)](#):

And like I said, I didn't grow up like this and I just, because I was dealing with something I think would work, that just couldn't wrap my head around it. Something that happened that I was trying to deal with, and it's like, God, what am I going to do with this situation? So it was in the back of my mind. I always thought about what I would do. When I finally finished, when I finally did it, I remember just stooping down, going, wow and mcg on. He asked me about being on my committee. So that was just mind boggling to me to have done that. I didn't start out, didn't know if I was going. I wasn't really interested in doing a PhD, but then it just kind of flowed. Sorry, excuse me. It kind of flowed like everything else. It just flowed. So my whole career and the other thing, my life just kind of flowed. And

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so that's why I'm saying, I don't know when it turned to where I started being a good student, I didn't set out to be. It just flowed

Speaker 1 ([01:23:51](#)):

And continues to flow, it seems.

Speaker 2 ([01:23:54](#)):

Well, I have students, like I said, when I became assistant principal, I have students now who are principals. I encountered students all the time who are doing various things. I encountered one guy, he was one of my students while I was assistant principal. He came in to fix my garage door.

Speaker 1 ([01:24:19](#)):

Small world.

Speaker 2 ([01:24:20](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([01:24:21](#)):

Wow.

Speaker 2 ([01:24:23](#)):

It's just amazing. But I see now how all this worked. Lithonia, I am, and this is the first time I'm saying this, I couldn't have been in a better place. But Lithonia, Georgia,

Speaker 1 ([01:25:04](#)):

That's a great way to end, I think. Thank you, Dr. Fretwell.

Transcribed by REV AI

Edited by J Blomqvist, archivist, DeKalb History Center, November 2024

Dr Fretwell was interviewed by J Blomqvist, archivist, and Monica El-Amin, African American History Coordinator, DeKalb History Center, December 2023