CANDACE ROBINSON

Narrator

KIM HEIKKILA

Interviewer

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TRANSCRIPT—CANDACE ROBINSON

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Interviewer:	Kim Heikkila
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Kim Heikkila: This is an interview for the Oxford Community Center Oral History Project. It is Friday, July 18, 2025, and I'm here at the Minnesota History Center with Candace Robinson. My name is Kim Heikkila, and today I'll just be talking to Candace about her and her family's long involvement at Oxford and growing up in the Saint Paul community. So, thank you so much, Candace, for being here today. I'm really happy that you're willing to sit down and talk about your own Oxford story.

Candace Robinson: You're welcome.

KH: So, I'm going to just start by asking you if you could just tell us a little bit about yourself, like where did you grow up?

CR: Sure. So, I'm born and raised in Saint Paul, Minnesota, so grew up. I was actually young when I lived over on Central Avenue, which would be, I think, really kind of the heart of Rondo. And then second grade, I moved to Dayton Avenue, west of Lexington Parkway. And so, I grew up in that area as well. I attended Maxfield Elementary School initially when I lived on Central Avenue. And then later when I moved to Dayton Avenue, I moved over to James J. Hill Elementary. Went on to Ramsey Junior High.

Marshall Junior High at the time was closing that year that I began junior high. And so, we had to kind of make that choice, where are we going to go, right? And so,

Ramsey Junior High was the next school in our district or area. So, we went there, or I went there. And then on to a little bit different situation for high school. I ended up graduating from Harding High School in Saint Paul.

[00:02:00]

CR: I initially started out at a high school in Northfield, Minnesota. It was part of a program that I was a part of. It was a great opportunity. I didn't always see it that way. You know, parents saw things differently for us when we were younger. But it was an opportunity to attend a college preparatory high school and then go on to colleges that you may not be able to attend. And so, a spot opened up. Normally, I think the plan was to go out east somewhere, but a spot opened up in Northfield, Minnesota.

And so, that's where I ended up for the first part of my high school, but left that program a little bit close to home, kind of nostalgic for home. So, I ended up coming back to Saint Paul and then attended Harding High School and graduated from there.

KH: Not Central?

CR: Not Central, no. Central was right around the corner from my home. Every other sibling in my family is a Central graduate. But at the time, my mother had different plans. So, when I left that program at Northfield, she did her homework—that was my mom—and felt like Harding had good academic programs. And so, I was just excited to be back home in the city, so no argument from me. Great. Harding it is. And so, that's where I ended up attending and graduating high school.

KH: Yeah. I imagine Northfield was quite a different experience than Saint Paul.

CR: Yes, it was. It was, it was. I didn't realize it was so close at the time I left. You know, I wasn't driving really too much then, so it just seemed like a long drive. But then I later learned that, oh, it's not too far. I can take the bus back home. Not the city bus, but a chartered bus back home and get back before curfew. So, started doing some of that, and

they're like, "Wait a minute. What's going on here? Do you really want to be here?" [Laughs.] So, yeah.

KH: Okay, so great. So, tell me a little bit about your family. Like, who is in your family?

[00:04:00]

CR: Yeah. So, there are five of us. Three boys and one girl. My brother, Stacy, is the youngest. He's the one who ended up playing for the NFL, New York Giants. I'm the second youngest, youngest girl. And then I have another brother, Ramonn, AKA Pookie, in the community, and he lives now in North Minneapolis with his family. And then my sister Kimberly, she's the next. And she passed away. She passed away in 2016. And Kimberly— [we] all lived here. Saint Paul, Minnesota. Stacy was the only one who actually moved away when he played professional sports, but otherwise, all my siblings were here in the metro area. And then my oldest brother, Leighton Robinson, he's the oldest. It's L-E-I-G-H-T-O-N. It's different. [Laughs.] He's the oldest, and he also resides here in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

All pretty athletic and active at Oxford for the most part. Some more than others. But, yeah, all of us appreciated and spent a lot of time at Oxford.

KH: And what about your parents?

CR: My parents. My mother, she is originally from Waterloo, Iowa. I call Waterloo "Mississippi moved North." Very Southern. You know, the big migration. A lot of my family initially was in Durant, Mississippi. A number of them migrated to Iowa and then on to Minnesota. My mother, very active in the community. I think if you mentioned her name, most people will know.

KH: What's her first name?

CR: Her name is Gladys. Gladys Robinson Thomas. Then my father, John

Thomas—both deceased, my parents—and my father was born in Oklahoma, which is interesting. I wonder if there's any connection of that incorrect information that's out there on Wikipedia about Stacy being from Oklahoma. That's the only connection I could make. It's strange, but yeah, my father was from Oklahoma.

[00:06:00]

CR: My father worked many years at Armour Packing House, and then when he retired there, he went on to work—doing some work at the airport. And my mother, she worked as a social worker here in the cities, and very big part of Model Cities at the time.

KH: Really?

CR: Yeah.

KH: Okay, that's interesting. And you were saying, we were talking before the recorder started about the book that was published by Mr. McWatt.

CR: Yes, Mr. McWatt. And I forget Mr. McWatt's first name, forgive me. It was a book about activism and things happening in Saint Paul and maybe the Minneapolis area. But I just remember Mr. McWatt's wife, Katie McWatt, and my mom were good friends and very active, considered activists in the community, for sure. And so, they did a lot of work. I remember growing up young, just seeing a lot going on and them being very active in the community. And so, when I saw Mr. McWatt one day at the coffee shop, I said, "You know, if my mom's not mentioned in that book, I'm not going to consider it credible." So, later I realized that she was mentioned in the book. [Laughs.]

KH: So, the book got a pass.

CR: The book got a pass, yeah.

KH: And what year were you born?

CR: I was born in 1961.

KH: And so, your mom—this is really an interesting part of the story I think, for

me, your mom was an activist in the community before you were born, while you were growing up. So, you saw that in your mom as you were growing up.

CR: Yes. Yes, very much.

KH: And what kinds of things was she working on through her activism? Like, what were the issues that were motivating her that you recall?

[00:08:00]

CR: Oh, my gosh, lots of things. Things happening with regard to education, things happening with regard to employment in the community, hiring individuals for different projects. I can remember them kind of stopping a construction project because there were no men of color involved or working, and they went down in the hole. They were pretty active. And I can remember being, like, in a park one day just handing out meals, cooked meals they had prepared. I don't know what that was actually a part of. I can't remember. I think I asked later, but I don't know if they had just decided to do something to bring community together. It was a purpose. I don't remember why they were gathering, but they figured one way to do it was to create these wonderful soul food meals and bring the community together. So, yeah.

And then also involved, too, in social types of services. I mean, really, very much so. I can remember when, as a social worker, my mom, she founded an organization called ROADs, Refugees of African Descent. And part of the reason for that organization, if I recall, there were a number of children who were fathered by Black American servicemen in Vietnam, right, during the war. And so, a number of people had agreed to sponsor those children, unknowingly, not knowing that many of them were of African descent. And so, when those children arrived, some of the people who had agreed to work with those children, they had a change of mind, change of heart when they realized that they were of African descent.

[00:10:00]

CR: So, my mom, being the active social worker that she was, was called in and got involved in that and really just started helping, not just the children, but the parents of the children. I remember one woman in particular; her name was Saul [ph]. She became so close to us that when my mother passed, when the family gets together in a room, she was right there and just sobbing because she was such a part of our family. But yeah, she went on to sponsor refugees of Haitian descent, Cubans. But yeah, just got involved with a lot of different individuals through that organization.

KH: That's so interesting.

CR: Yeah, she was quite active.

KH: And do you know where she came by that? Like, did she see that modeled in her parents, or her community, or do you know?

CR: Honestly, just being at home and being like a young person, she was that person in the family that got a lot of the inquiries. People came to her. She was just really knowledgeable. She actually graduated high school as an adult and went on to complete her degree at the University of Minnesota. But she was the oldest of her siblings and she was just the go-to person, I remember, growing up. And so, just really active. Somebody died. Oh, what should I do? You know, all those kinds of things in the household.

KH: And you said she got her social work degree at the University of Minnesota.

CR: Yeah.

KH: Do you know what year?

CR: Oh, I'm going to guess maybe early '70s? I know she was attending late '60s.

[00:12:00]

KH: So, you were around. I mean, early '70s. And do you remember her as a student at the U?

CR: Oh, yeah. I mean, I remember she would drop us off in the morning because we had to get to school, right? So, she would drop us off, and made arrangements with the principal like, this is what's going on. They may have to show up a little early. And I remember getting dropped off, sitting there in the principal's office early, before everybody else arrived for school. But, yeah, I remember her attending the university.

KH: So, you had a really good role model in your mom, growing up with your mom.

CR: Yeah. Very much so.

KH: It's funny—not funny, but that we're talking about her, because when I was doing some prep work for our conversation today, I came across an article. I'm trying to think. I'm sure it was in the *Spokesman Recorder*. And was it one of Gayle [Anderson]'s columns? I can't remember, and I don't have my laptop with me, but it was about your mom, and it had something to do with her speaking about African American athletes at the University of Minnesota, and something about what it was like to be a Black athlete at the University of Minnesota. And I wish I had brought it with me or looked at it more carefully, because even from that brief scan of that article, I thought, oh, okay, this is a woman not to be reckoned with, and who was being really assertive and involved.

CR: Yeah, yeah, very much so. And even when my brother [Stacy] was finishing college and being looked at and considered, I can remember some of the scouts, the coaches coming out from different colleges, and they had to sit down with the family, and they had to get questioned by my mom. And I remember us all thinking, "I don't like that one so much." You know, comes with the cake and the bribery and all that. Yeah, didn't like that.

[00:14:00]

CR: And I remember one that did come that we all said, like, "Yeah, we like that

one." That was North Dakota.

KH: Okay. And so, these scouts are really having to pass your mom's muster as well as Stacy's.

CR: Oh, yeah. She was really involved because she knew that things could happen to athletes. What if he gets hurt? What if he—Just making sure, because her priority was always—and she made sure that he was aware of it—you're going to college for an education. The football part is great, but you're going for an education. And so, just making sure that if something were to happen, he was taken care of. And just like you had mentioned the article. I don't recall the article now, but I'm sure she was just making sure that he didn't fall into some of those other things.

KH: I'll send it to you.

CR: Yeah, that'd be great. That'd be great.

KH: So, you were born in 1961. So, you're growing up your early, early years as a young child. And we are getting towards Oxford. Believe me, we're getting there. But you're growing up at the time when [Interstate] 94 is being built right through the middle of Rondo. What is your recollection of that as a pretty young kid, if anything?

CR: Here's the first recollection of 94 in Rondo, because I don't remember so much, the big split. I just don't recall it. What I do recall, though, is being on the freeway, driving on the freeway with my mom, and wondering, and then looking at people down on the freeway, wondering how the cars got down there. [Laughs.]

KH: Because, I mean, it's quite a valley.

[00:16:00]

CR: Yes. So, I'm like, how do the cars get down there to drive? And I remember being down there, and then one day it clicked. I remember going in the on and off ramp. But otherwise, I was just there. And like, how did I get here? And then how did the other

people get here? That's something that I remember. So, I don't remember how old I was. I might be dating myself, thinking, "You didn't know that at that time?" But, no, I didn't. And eventually figured it out.

KH: Now, do you know, was your mom involved in any kind of community response to the freeway coming through the neighborhood?

CR: Not that I recall. She may have been, but I don't remember the conversation about Rondo. If I have to go back and look, I think I did one time, I went not long ago and looked at when Rondo was finished, and I was like, oh, okay. And by then, for me, we were just using it.

KH: And you said—I'm kind of stuck on your mom because she just sounds like such an interesting person.

CR: She was. She was great.

KH: And you said she was involved in Model Cities as well.

CR: Yes. She was a big part. I remember they did the groundbreaking, the ribbon cutting, Mayor Latimer at the time. Big part of Model Cities.

KH: Well, and part of this is so interesting to me because I think I had mentioned to you when we talked on the phone that part of what I've done for this Oxford project was to go over to the library here and look at archival materials about the building of Oxford. You know, how it came up through the City Parks and Rec Department. And it was very much part of the urban renewal planning and Model Cities, as well, in terms of thinking about, broadly speaking, what role do parks and playgrounds play in city planning, especially when the freeway is coming through or when urban renewal is happening or something like Model Cities. And so, Oxford is kind of bobbing in and out of those records, as well. Just because they're all really thinking about how do we try to best serve this community that has now been riven in two by the freeway. So, it's just

interesting to hear that your mom was part of the Model Cities, from a different angle, certain, I'm sure. And maybe later, but yeah.

[00:18:00]

CR: And just as a young person or even as an adult, I didn't think a lot about that role Oxford played, like, when it was created, developed, and then what kind of role it played for the community. I see it now as an older person. I saw it growing up, but I never kind of made that connection of like, wow, this wasn't here. It was put here for a purpose, to serve the community and the folks around the community and did a great job, from my experience.

KH: And what kid would think of anything like that? Right? You're just a kid doing kid things.

CR: Exactly. Right, right.

KH: So, tell me about your first experience with any kind of sports or athletics.

CR: Oh, man. Wow. We used to play sports in general. I mean, when we were kids, we played kickball in the community, right? That was probably our first team sport. So, that was really popular. And then, I mean, young, we really started playing sports down at Oxford, organized sports there. I can remember Stacy was eight years old when he brought home his first Punt, Pass, and Kick trophy. It was pretty significant. It wasn't one of those little cheap things. It was a heavy trophy. We were like, whoa, wow, what is this? And so, that was kind of cool.

KH: That was from Oxford.

[00:20:00]

CR: That was from Oxford, Yeah. So, we started at young ages. They had teams, the WeePees, for the little kids, what, seven, eight-ish. And then the PeeWees were a little bit older. And then you had the [Jimmy Lee] Roads organization for the guys who were a

little bit older for football. So, there was always something. And it was there for the girls, too. You know, I started running track and playing sports early on. And so, my experience with sports was organized sports early on, outside of what we did at home in the street and at the park and stuff.

KH: Yeah, sure. Early on meaning, like in your first ten years of life, even?

CR: Oh, for sure. For sure, yeah.

KH: And so, I think you had said on the phone, too, that among the many things that you did at Oxford, besides running track and softball was football. Was that football-football? Was it flag football?

CR: Yeah. First it was touch football. It was touch football at one time. Then it was flag football.

KH: I remember wanting to play flag football when I was a kid and my dad said, no.

CR: No? Oh, it was so fun. It was so fun.

KH: It seems fun.

CR: Yeah, we had some pretty cool folks that played sports at a young age. Amongst all the trophies and stuff like my brothers used to bring home playing football, I got this really cool medal. It was just nice and weighted and it had this beautiful image of a person going up like this and catching a football. And so, our medals and trophies and things were displayed at one point in the house. And so, people would look at them and they'd look at that, "Oh, this is a cool medal, Stacy. When did you get this one?" And I'd have to correct them. "Excuse me. That belongs to me. You see the name? Flip it over." [Laughter.]

KH: So, I'm going to ask a question, the answer to which might seem obvious based on what you're saying, but in your family then, was there any different attitude

towards the boys and the girls playing sports?

[00:22:00]

CR: No. No. I would say no, because sports in general was not a priority. It was not. It was just not. For the kids, for us it was. But it was always like, Oh, those dishes aren't done? You don't eat football, you don't sleep football, you better take care of stuff that goes on around here. And so, yeah.

KH: Interesting. But your mom, would you say that she was supportive of all of your athletics? All of you, all the kids.

CR: Yeah, she was supportive. And maybe that's exactly what I mean. She was supportive of all of us, probably to the same degree. I don't remember games that my mom went to of my brothers or mine. So, it's interesting. I have a different perspective, like when I see parents attending every game of their child. And that's a wonderful thing because I know kids love support that way. But then I kind of feel like it becomes like, this is the most important thing. Right? And it's not. And so, just kind of letting them know that that's your thing. Okay, that's your thing, and that's what you do, and I support you, but I'm not going to be there for a hundred percent of every game that you play or every practice that you do. And it's different now. I noticed that it's different now.

[00:24:00]

KH: Yes, it is. But your mom, I mean, she had such a full life of her own. Like, she was working, she was involved in the community and with pretty significant issues, against which maybe sports were like—now, of course, Stacy goes on and makes a career of sports.

CR: Exactly.

KH: Interesting. Now, do you remember growing up—so part of how this project emerged was out of that previous project on women in sports and Title IX. And so, I've

been talking to the women, especially in this project, about ideas about women in sports when they were younger. Do you remember, more broadly speaking, when you were young, any kind of cultural attitudes towards athletic girls and women?

CR: I don't. Like I said, certainly not growing up in my household. And that's where my first impression would have come from. Like, if there was something from my mother that was like, You don't need to be playing sports. You need to be here with me in the kitchen, or whatever. I've never got any of that. And it was such a natural thing. You know, Oxford was there. It was the community center. That's where you played sports. And that's where boys and girls played sports. So, I never thought anything different or never got an impression from anyone like it wasn't okay or anything like that.

KH: And so, there were plenty of your female friends at Oxford, as well as male?

CR: Yeah, there were some. And I had different groups of friends, too. So, the folks that I was at Oxford with are the folks that I played sports with. Not all of my friends played sports. Some of them went on to Central, for example, to do cheerleading. And so, growing up in middle school and at Oxford, they didn't all play sports, but many of them did. And they were my friends because of the sports.

[00:26:00]

CR: It's interesting because later on, some of those people that I played sports with at a younger age went on to do different things, maybe things that were not so wonderful, but I still had that relationship with them from sports. And so, I would interact with them and some of my friends, "Is that your friend? Why are you—" I'm like, that's my friend. That was my halfback. Yes. That was my tight end. Yes. That was my friend." So, I do have different friends. You know what I mean? So, that was interesting growing up.

KH: Yeah. And who were some of your friends that you played sports with at

Oxford?

CR: Oh, gosh, that I played sports with at Oxford? The Burches, Rosie and Rita Burch, Lisa Lissimore, Deborah Stampley, Linda [Roberts] down at Oxford. Gosh, Ava Billups], Jeannie Buckner. Yeah, there were a number of us down there.

KH: So, you've mentioned already kind of in passing, some of the sports you were involved in at Oxford, but let's talk about them a little bit more specifically. What sports were you involved in and which one or ones were your favorites?

CR: Oh, sure. Track I was involved in early on, softball, basketball, and football. And actually, for me, I think I enjoyed certain things about all of them. The team camaraderie, the traveling to other places. So, all of that was fun. But probably the ones I enjoyed most maybe were the ones I was probably better at. [Laughs.] So, I really enjoyed basketball, and I enjoyed football, too.

KH: And so, yeah, track is a solo individual sport. The rest of them are team sports. For you, what did you like about the team element versus an individual sport? [00:28:00]

CR: Yeah. So, the team element was we all came together, we all traveled on the bus together to the game, from the game. We hung out down at the playground when we weren't playing sports. We'd talk about, re you going to be able to get those new blue Converse to match our uniforms? Did you see our new uniforms? I mean, it was a lot of just camaraderie around the team from the team aspect, and I liked that. And we counted on each other. We all played a role on the team. Even if you weren't a starter, we were all important. We were all an important part of the team.

KH: And do you think that attitude, that you were all an important part of the team, was that something that was generated from you? Was it from the coaches at Oxford? I mean, ideally, every team feels that, right?

CR: Yeah. From both, I think, the players and the coaches. You never know, because somebody might be out for a reason or something and you'd have to step up. And then, two, everybody played. It wasn't like now where just because you might be the better player, you get all the playing time. No, because we need to develop these other ones, too. Maybe the ones who are really good are the ones who started younger or something, but others have potential as well, so we got to get them in there, too. And so, nobody felt like, I'm just here, especially when we were good, too. I can remember sometimes playing on a team where we would dominate other teams in terms of basketball and stuff. And so, I'm going to make sure that I'm not going to shoot all the time. I'm going to make sure that the little person, little Amber on the team gets the ball. She's going to shoot it up there.

[00:30:00]

CR: And she was so small, they'd get a kick out of it. And she loved the opportunity to get it in there and she made a basket? That was awesome. And so, yeah, we all supported and allowed other folks to kind of develop, too.

KH: So, you as her teammate were consciously thinking, "Hey, let's give her a chance."

CR: Absolutely. Why? We're up thirty points. Why would I keep just shooting the ball or why would you keep increasing the score like that? Let's give these other folks an opportunity.

KH: I have a friend whose kid plays baseball through HGRA [Highland Groveland Recreation Association], I think, and I was just looking at one of the scores of one of their games—and I can't remember if it's his team or the other, doesn't matter—but the score at the end of the game was like 30 to six.

CR: Yeah.

KH: I mean, sometimes maybe it just happens, but like—

CR: Yeah, at some point?

KH: So, I wonder if, and I think you just alluded to the fact that maybe we have sometimes a slightly different attitude these days about what youth sports is and should be.

CR: Exactly. And parents will let you know it, too.

KH: Yes. So, tell me about the two sports that you just said were your favorite, football and basketball. What positions did you play in those?

CR: So, various positions, depending on what level I was with. So, maybe at some point, if it's like from this age to this age, maybe I was a little taller, so maybe I would play the forward. But guard, forward, never tall enough to play the center role for basketball, so usually guard, forward. And then in football I would play quarterback, halfback, and end, usually. But then I evolved to the quarterback position.

[00:32:00]

KH: And so, how many years did you play football?

CR: Oh, my gosh. Maybe we started about—I can't, ten or something, maybe we started back then up until about fourteen or something. I can't remember exactly.

KH: So, when you're playing sports at Oxford, is it mostly during your elementary school years and then your athletic life shifts to school once you get to junior high?

CR: Yeah, I would say elementary, middle school, and then I would say shifted at high school. So, then you're still playing sports at the center, but maybe not the organized teams. And that was for me. They could have still had organized teams, when I think about it. I may not just have been a part of it because I'm on a high school team now, and practices happen in the evening.

KH: Right, right. And part of the reason I asked the question is thinking about

football, was there an opportunity to play any kind of football for girls in the school system?

CR: No, no. Not that I recall.

KH: That was a rec center specific opportunity. And so, that's where something like Title IX or the idea about gender equity in sports in schools comes to play. Like, okay, so these girls grow up playing football, but you hit the school teams, and then there's not an opportunity.

CR: Yeah, there was basketball in the schools. Yeah. But I don't remember other sports in the schools.

KH: And so, did you play on school teams at Ramsey?

[00:34:00]

CR: Yes.

KH: So, you're doing both, like the school year at the school as well as whatever was happening at Oxford.

CR: Exactly. And then delving out into other things in the schools too, like cheerleading, things like that in the middle school. So, that was fun, too.

KH: Okay. And so, in middle school, let's see, you were born in '61, so middle school is what, like the early '70s? Mid '70s?

CR: Yes. So, I graduated high school in '79.

KH: Okay, so it would have been mid '70s that you're in middle school or junior high, whatever it was called at the time. Do you remember there being any kind of attitude about girls in sports in school at that time?

CR: No, I don't. I remember other opportunities as well, like gymnastics, and those were things that we were not exposed to. I remember in middle school there were a couple of young ladies who were pretty darn good in gymnastics. So, you could tell they

maybe had some training outside of what was going on in the schools. But our parents weren't taking us to gymnastics classes, things like that. And so, having that opportunity to experience the balance beam and some of the other stuff, that was kind of cool. That was happening in middle school.

KH: Okay, and so by we being not exposed to gymnastics, do you mean—what is the question here?

CR: I'm thinking if it wasn't at the rec center or something, then our parents weren't paying for us to go to gymnastics school or other, you know what I mean?

KH: A club, a private club.

CR: Exactly. Some maybe, but not my friends.

[00:36:00]

KH: Okay. So, that leads to the question about, do you think there was class and/or race differences in who played what kind of sports?

CR: I would think so. Just kind of like, knowing what I know now, I would think so. And I wondered just how much of it was what people liked doing. A basketball is not very expensive. It's a ball. You can get a hold of one of those and you can make a basket on the street. You can put it on a tree. Right? Or whatever. So, that was there. But I didn't see a lot of hockey. I learned, though, that it was played at Oxford, and they were pretty good. There were trophies in the big case from folks who were part of hockey teams. But they didn't go on. I don't know if it had to do with the cost of equipment and things like that. I'm not really sure, but it's not something that was popular.

I have a feeling that if it was more popular at the center, it would have been more popular among the kids at the center, because at one point I learned it was. And I remember being pretty surprised. There was one family in general, just really good in sports. I think of Oxford, I think sometimes of families. It was this group of young men,

the Christian family. And the oldest brother, I learned, was one of those who was part of this hockey team. So, I'm like, we don't play hockey. It's like, what? What do you mean? Look in there, you know? And so, just learning things like that oh, okay, I guess we do. We just don't do it here, because I don't know if because it's too cold outside or the guys didn't like it. I'm not sure why it didn't continue, but yeah.

KH: Well, and to your point about basketball or track, some sports you don't need a lot. Gymnastics, you need a gym full of equipment.

[00:38:00]

CR: You do, exactly.

KH: It's not equipment that every place is going to have.

CR: Yeah. I can remember even before I moved to Dayton Avenue, so that was second grade or prior, and it continued on, we'd have races in the streets. You know, track was like, big. Who's the fastest? All the time. So, it didn't cost anything. You didn't need equipment for those kinds of things.

KH: And when you were growing up, you or your friends or siblings or anybody, did you have role model athletes that you aspired to, whether they were Olympic athletes or just a great kid who's playing at Central years ahead of you?

CR: Oh, sure. For me—I know that my brothers did. There were people that they're like, oh, so and so's really good, like the Benny Hills and some of the other older guys that played sports. Even my brother, he played tennis, and he was good at tennis. And he played football too, at Central. So, yeah, there were older guys that the young men looked up to. I didn't necessarily have that so much. I think my folks, the people that I looked up to, of course there were male athletes, professional athletes that like, wow, they're good. But I think if anything, I probably looked at the folks that were around me at the center that were really good. Like, how did she get so good? Like the Weller Johnson's

of the community playing basketball. You're like, whoa.

KH: Weller Johnson's name has come up a lot.

CR: Yeah, she was good.

KH: And was she older than you?

CR: Maybe a little bit, a couple years. Year or two, maybe. That's what I'm thinking.

KH: And there's that picture of her, Bill Peterson has shared her on that baseball team with all the boys, and she's kneeling down. Yeah. Her reputation has quite a big one at Oxford.

[00:40:00]

KH: So, two things I wanted to ask you about that you said about—well, there are more than two that you said about Oxford. One, when we were talking on the phone, you made a point to say that yes, of course we all played sports at Oxford, but there were so many other things that we did at Oxford. So, tell me a little bit about those other things.

CR: So, I mean, there were folks who worked at Oxford. I can remember the arts and crafts room at Oxford where you can go and paint and draw and things like that and do pottery. I mean, where would we get experience on a pottery wheel? As much time as we want. So, if you liked it, you could hang out there and do that kind of stuff.

We had coronations at Oxford. I remember having to get a dress made for coronation, all those types of things that were not sports, but dancing down there. There was a room to dance and practice dancing and just a lot of different things.

KH: Which leads me to go back in conversation a little bit when you're talking about dances and arts and crafts. What was Oxford at that time? Because we know it evolved from just a playground to a playground with a warming house to one with a building.

CR: So, I'm thinking of the building prior to our big new community center there. So, not the warming house, but that next building. I remember cooking class down there. [00:42:00]

KH: So, how much of your time as a kid do you think you spent at Oxford?

CR: A lot.

KH: Like, every day were you there?

CR: Every day, pretty much. I mean, usually, in my mind, it was every day, you came home—and I try to think about when did I go to Oxford? So, I think I came home, you settled in, maybe did a little homework during that time, and then you headed to Oxford. I can remember, this is true. I can remember, and I don't know, maybe something specific was going on at the time, but I remember coming home one day and I must have been tired, maybe did some homework, went to sleep, and I missed Oxford. I was in tears. [Laughs.] What the heck? So, I'm thinking, was there something going on that day? Why was I so distressed about missing Oxford? But, yeah, went to Oxford a lot after school.

KH: All your siblings, all five of you were down there at various points?

CR: Different times. So, my sister, not as much. And then, my brother was a little older, so he probably didn't go as much as the three of us did at one time. He spent a lot of time there. But I mean, I'm thinking in our newer house over on Dayton Avenue, the two boys and myself spent probably the most time there.

KH: Well, yeah, because your older siblings—Oxford was a different place when they were young enough to have been involved, and what you were involved in. It was just a different place. It was a warming house. Okay. So you lived close.

CR: Very close.

KH: So, you could just walk down there?

CR: Yeah.

KH: And your mom was fine?

CR: Yeah, she was fine.

KH: She knew where you were.

CR: She knew where we were. And that's a good point that you make, because my mom wasn't fine with everything and everybody. So, for her to give us kind of leeway like that to spend that time at Oxford, she must have felt really comfortable. I'm sure she probably talked to everybody down there. You know, My kids are here,and just making sure we were okay. "Keep an eye on them."

[00:44:00]

CR: And they did, too. And they knew my mom, too. So, it's like if we stood out in any way, especially for anything that we shouldn't have been doing, then we could get the eye from them as well. Like, "You know better" kind of thing. So, yeah, she was okay with it.

KH: And I know there was an Oxford booster club that would do things like raise money to buy uniforms for the football team. Do you know, was your mom involved in any of that?

CR: She wasn't involved in that a lot, if I recall. She may have been, but if I remember more like with the Roads and the football, I don't think she was really involved with that. I could be wrong, but not a lot.

KH: Well, she was involved in many other things, so can't do it all.

CR: Right, right.

KH: So, tell me a little bit about who are the adults at Oxford? Who are the coaches, the teachers, the staff that you remember that were important to your time there?

CR: Steve Winfield was a coach and staff there. And Frank White. And certainly Bill Peterson. Alonzo Lucas [ph] at the time, was a coach. There were others. Those are

the ones that stand out to me. There was also this man, his name was Tiny, but he was a big guy. And he worked at Oxford. He didn't do so much like the coaching sports, at least not for me, but he was definitely the person around the center making sure that things were going on okay. I can remember him knowing all the kids at the center. And so, those times where maybe they would do a social dance or something, we weren't quite old enough, but we thought we could maybe get in, he'd be right at that door. "Uh-uh. No." [00:46:00]

KH: Turn around. Not yet.

CR: Yeah, yeah. Exactly. Not yet. Our time came, but not that time.

KH: And did all these guys coach you at various times? Steve, Frank, Bill, Alonzo, you said was a coach?

CR: Yes, yes. And I'm trying to think of the—oh, and not from a coaching standpoint, but Pat Gaustad [ph]. Pat is the one who ran our arts and crafts room, and so she was a big part of us, too, in just kind of being at the center.

KH: And aside from the skills that all of these adults were teaching, whether it was arts and crafts or athletic skills, what do you think you learned from these adults at Oxford?

CR: Oh, my gosh. The social skills, for sure. And you might not really see it or understand it, but when I say social skills, I mean how to interact. I can remember, I think we were at a basketball game, and I remember doing something that was not appropriate. And I can remember getting popped on the back of the head. Now, I don't want to get anybody in trouble, so I'm not going to name names, but, yeah, just getting popped on the back of the head. And it kind of hurt my feelings, but I know that I shouldn't have done what I did. I knew better. And so, just making sure that we acted in a manner that was appropriate, how we were taught to act in social settings.

[00:48:00]

CR: I can remember going out to dinners, like in banquets and stuff, as a group sports teams, maybe at the culmination of our activities. And those were opportunities to be out at nice restaurants in a social setting. So, we learned a lot. I also remember things like—and I have to think back on it, and there was just kind of like the pride, right, in being a young African American of color. It was the dead of winter, and I can remember. And now that I think about it, I'll have to ask. Gayle might know. Was it Black History Month? Why did we do this? But we did this amazing carving. All I can remember is if you helped, you could get some chips and a pop, right? And so, we're stacking this cold snow and iced snow together to create this fist. And they ended up painting it. I want to say, was it red, black, and green? I can't remember exactly. But I wonder now if that was something that we did as a part of Black History Month.

KH: Because it was the Black Power fist.

CR: Yes, it was. And it was so cool after it was done. You couldn't see it when you're just parked out there packing ice and stuff. But to see that come together, you know? That was kind of cool.

KH: And how old were you about when that happened, do you think?

CR: Younger than middle school, maybe. Elementary, late elementary, middle, early middle school. Maybe middle school.

KH: So, in '70s, ish.

CR: Because seventh to ninth grade is middle school. Yeah.

KH: And so, that was one of the other questions I had, too. How aware were you of things that were going on in the bigger world with regard to race, racism, the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power?

[00:50:00]

CR: Yeah, I was very aware. And part of that was my mom, too. I was very aware. And like, even looking back, like Steve Winfield coming to Oxford in his dashikis, those were the kinds of things we saw in the early ‘70s and stuff.

KH: And forgive me if this sounds naïve, but I’m going to ask it just to explicitly have a conversation about it. In what ways, or did you, in your life as a young kid, when you were at Oxford, experience race or racism?

CR: Yes. Yeah. We’d go to games at other places, away places, and maybe be called names or something. Things like that would happen. Or be treated a certain kind of way outside of our Oxford community.

KH: I know I’ve talked to many people that I’ve talked to for this project. Frank, Bill, probably Steve as well, talked about how there were a period of years where other teams from other community or rec centers wouldn’t want to come and play at Oxford, so y’all had to travel.

CR: Oh, see, and I wasn’t even aware that they didn’t want to come. I just remember us traveling.

KH: Okay, yeah. And so, maybe for multiple reasons, too. But then you would travel to some of these other communities and not be well received.

CR: Oh, yeah. For the most part, I mean, we didn’t think anything of it. It was just part of being a person of color. So, if it was something small—oh, well, so what? We beat you. [Laughs.]

KH: Handily. But in that context, somebody like Steve Winfield showing up at Oxford in his dashiki and having a Black Power fist carved in the snow, that’s important and meaningful stuff, I would imagine.

[00:52:00]

CR: Yeah, yeah. And I don’t know when I learned of it, because my mom was

very —she talked to us, and we'd hear a lot of things. There was a lot going on in conversations in our household and stuff. But I can remember learning of Steve because, as you know, he has a brother that played baseball as well. And later I learned he was as good or maybe the better athlete, but he was at the University of Minnesota at a time, I believe, when they took over Morrill Hall. And I think he had to kind of make a decision, and he decided, I'm going to go with my folks. And so, just learning the sacrifices people like that made? Like, that's why he's at Oxford and not out somewhere else? So, those were important lessons to learn.

KH: There was a question on the tip of my tongue, and now it's gone. I can't remember what it was. Maybe it'll come back. So, you mentioned Steve having a brother who played professional sports, as did you, with your younger brother, Stacy. So, is there anything you want to share about Stacy and his football career, or anything about him?

CR: Yeah, I mean, people who know Stacy know him to be just a great kid. He loved to have fun, just real down to earth. I know he made it a point, for example, to make sure that when he was here, he would make himself visible—and I'm going to get teary eyed, but he would make himself visible to other young kids to know that you can do these things too. I'm not some special exception or something like that.

[00:54:00]

CR: So, he would always do that. Come to the community, I remember him taking off his ring to show some people. They were like, "You can do that?" Like, "Yeah, why not?" So, he was good in that regard. And I really appreciated that about him. So, he'd donate things like—I had a consulting job with a program called Destination 2010. And I got involved later, but they worked with children from like second grade up to 2010, when they would graduate from high school to help ensure that they would go on to college. And so, I got involved at maybe their sophomore year or something like that. But they

were looking for a speaker and so they found out that Stacy played football, and they said, "Do you think we could get them?" I'm like, "I think we might be able to get him."

And so, he volunteered to speak. And just whatever monetary reward, he'd pass it on to Oxford or something for uniforms. So, he was good in that regard.

KH: And it's sounds in that way, what you just said about Stacy and his commitment to giving back to the community sounds very much like what Steve and others have said about Dave Winfield doing the same kind of thing, like not having forgotten where they came from.

CR: Exactly. Exactly.

KH: I don't know if that's true for most professional athletes. I don't know. Or do you think that's something unique about them?

[00:56:00]

CR: I hope it's not unique. I mean, I hear of other athletes giving back. I'd like to think that it's kind of like the thing to do. I think the question sometimes becomes like, where do you give back? Like, Dave, he played in these other places a lot, and Stacy as well, like in New York. And so, those things become a big part of you. So, do you give back there or do you give back here? Or do you do both?

KH: Right. So, just to be clear for everybody who's listening to or reading this later, so Stacy Robinson played for the New York Giants and with the New York Giants, won two Super Bowls. Is that right?

CR: Yes.

KH: And those were, do you remember the years?

CR: I want to say, I think it was the '86 Super bowl, and then the '91 Super Bowl, the second and the last of the years that he played.

KH: And what was your family thinking, watching your little brother go off and

become a professional athlete?

CR: It was awesome. It was really nice. But again, we were very humbled. It was like just something that he did. Right? Again, it was never the priority. It was kind of like the benefit. But, yeah, we were happy for him. We were very excited for him. I know I benefited in many ways in terms of—and you think the monetary, but no, like the experiences. I got to go to a Super Bowl. I'd visit New York and go to theater and all those kinds of things. It was really nice. It was really nice.

[00:58:00]

CR: And then I remember there was an article. Of course, he wanted to give back to Mom and so he was ready to build a house. Right? But she was like, "No, this house is good for me. It's good enough for my kids." So, he ended up extending the kitchen and doing some other things that she wanted in the house. And then my brothers attended games and things like that, and we traveled. And he later went on to work for the NFL PA, Players Association, as you probably know. And so, they would do a meeting with the players, player representatives from each team, every year. And you can't get guys like that who travel all the time to come to California for a meeting. So, they'd always go to Hawaii. Right? [Laughs.] And so, I was in on that a couple of years. So, different experiences and opportunities like that were awesome.

KH: And I assume that he had lots of support from the Rondo, Saint Paul, Oxford community.

CR: Oh, yeah, they did. When that petition came out to name the field the Stacy Robinson Field, I was really excited about that. And I think that was somebody who had spent a lot of time at Oxford thinking, he gave back here, why wouldn't we name the field? And so, I was like, I think it's a great idea. I'm all for it. And it happened.

KH: Yeah. It is the Stacy Robinson Field, even now. This was the question. I know

I'm just bouncing back and forth here, but—

CR: I hope I'm answering these questions. I'm going on and on.

KH: You are. No, no, you are good. It's me that's kind of scatterbrained here, but I remembered the question I was going to ask you a couple minutes ago, and that is, when you were involved at Oxford, what were the racial demographics of the other kids or staff who were there? Was it primarily African American? Was it mixed?

[01:00:00]

CR: Primarily African American. And yeah, when I think about non-African Americans, I mean, there could have been other people of color, like Latino background and stuff. Well, Frank, for example, he's something in addition to, you know? But I don't remember a lot of them. Bill was an exception. Bill, Bill's children, and Pat, are the ones that I remember in terms of non-African Americans at the center.

KH: One thing that has just struck me, and you've articulated it as well, and I think we talked about it on the phone, is about how much Oxford was a part of and reflected and helped build community. And you just said it a few minutes ago here today that when you think of Oxford, you think of families. So, it was like whole families were part of Oxford. It wasn't just a kid; it wasn't just this kind of—and everybody knew each other. I'm just so interested.

CR: And you asked me how much time did you spend at Oxford, right? I can remember going to Oxford after school and when the rec center closed, you could just see the droves of people walking down the street to go home. And I can remember the larger group was walking toward Oxford Street and heading that way, and then a few of us were walking toward Lexington and heading that way. So, we didn't always have the largest group, some were kind of in between. But I think about the number of people who spent time there, and then once it closed, we were done, it was like a big exodus from Oxford.

KH: And you still live nearby?

CR: Yes, yes. I actually purchased our family home.

[01:02:00]

KH: So, you're still right there. Do you have a sense of whether or not it's the same as that now or have things changed over the years over there?

CR: I can't say with certainty, but from what I can see, things have changed. Yeah. Not the type of time spent there and the numbers that there were in the past. So, many, maybe other opportunities, options, I should say. Just a lot going on. People moving from the community, things like that.

KH: I want to talk to you a little bit more about your basketball and other sporting life through high school, and then what you do afterwards. And then I'll come back to Oxford one more time. So, tell me about high school and what you did in terms of sports during high school.

CR: Okay. So, as I said, I attended Harding High School, and I played basketball at Harding. I played for my first two years at Harding. Then it just got challenging. Harding was far. And like I mentioned, my mom was not into, like, "Yes, this is your thing. We're going to make sure you get there every day," kind of thing. No. And so, it was challenging getting back and forth for practice and games and stuff.

KH: How did you get back and forth?

CR: Bus oftentimes. Sometimes my parents, my dad would pick me up from a game or something, late games. But for the most part, I was taking the bus, and the coach would sometimes drop me off, maybe after a game. But basketball practices and stuff, it was just challenging.

KH: It's a lot of time.

CR: It is. It is. It's a lot of time. And so, I stopped playing my senior year.

KH: And when you were in high school playing basketball, what position were you playing then?

CR: Guard.

KH: Still the same, okay. And did you have any particular highlights or your best memory of high school basketball?

[01:04:00]

CR: Oh, gosh. One good memory was we were getting close to who was going to state tournament, and we were playing Central, which was very good. So, we had to get through Central. And we figured if we could get through Central, our next would be Highland Park. And if we could get through Central, we could definitely get through Highland Park. And so, we played Central, and the game was going good, it was challenging, and they end up beating us. But I kind of mess with Lisa, she played on the team at the time, and I tell her sometimes, "You know, I almost stole that ball from you." Or I would tell them sometimes, "You know if I was at Central, one of you guards wouldn't have had a spot or would have had to move over." [Laughs.] But that was one of the fun times because that was, I think, one of the last times that I played. That was probably my junior year.

KH: And so, you were playing against girls you had grown up playing with.

CR: Yes, absolutely.

KH: Because they were at Central, and you were at a different school.

CR: Yes. Rita and Lisa and Rosie.

KH: And did you have any misgivings, or any desire wishing,, I wish I was at Central, playing with my friends.

CR: Oh, gosh. Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. But as I said, I was happy to be back in the city. So, initially you didn't get any pushback from me. But yeah, sometimes I

think, gosh, it would have been nice to play with my old friends.

KH: But again, you said earlier that your mom had decided when you came back from Northfield that Harding was it because they had a good academic program. And that was the focus.

CR: Yeah, that was her rationale. And I know it was the case because, I mean, Central was good enough for everybody else. Why wouldn't it be good enough for me? [01:06:00]

KH: So, what did you do when you graduated?

CR: When I graduated, I actually went to the University of Minnesota right out of high school.

KH: And what were you going to study or what did you study?

CR: Well, that was interesting. Initially, I had thought about journalism, counseling, and my mom being from the social work background, I gathered, she wanted something a little different for me. Yeah, so that was interesting. Because she just knew, social work could be challenging and all of those things. But yeah, so that's what I was thinking initially.

KH: And so, tell me where you ended up and what your degree is in and how you got there.

CR: Yes. So, I went to the University of Minnesota right out of high school for a couple years. Didn't do so well there. I wasn't the student that my mom was at the University of Minnesota, that's for sure. And so, I ended up leaving and I took a job with an African American lawyer in the community, Jeff Hassan. And I learned a lot. I learned a lot. Jeff was so disciplined and hardworking and involved in his own right. I mean, as an attorney, he was, I think, the president of the Minnesota Minority Lawyers Association at the time. So, it was a good job for me. But then I decided that was a lot of work and I

could get more benefits and more money if I went on. So, I ended up leaving that job and took a position over at Minnesota Mutual. So, I worked there for a number of years. I always knew I would go back to school. But I worked there for some years. And then after I left Minnesota Mutual, I took a job, a position, at Saint Paul College. That was in '93. I started in 1993 at Saint Paul College.

[01:08:00]

CR: And then that's when I really started to focus on, okay, so now it's time to go back, finish my degree, et cetera. And so, I did. And I ended up just taking a few classes in terms of general education, just to kind of wrap those up. I think I took three or four classes at Minneapolis College. Saint Paul College transitioned over the years, so they weren't always a community and technical college, so I wasn't quite sure at the time. It's like, let me do these generals over at Minneapolis and make sure they're good. So, I did that. And there was a benefit, a tuition benefit, being an employee. So, I took advantage of that and then eventually went over and completed my degree at Metro State.

And so, in terms of my degree choice, it was like social work was always there, but then there was this English kind of thing going on, counseling. What am I going to do with English? I don't know that I want to teach, you know? But I always liked writing. I enjoyed writing and things like that. And so, I discovered Human Services, which was, ah, that would give me that opportunity for service like I was so used to and kind of passionate about, but I was already working in an educational setting, so that was kind of cool. And so, I did the Human Services with a focus in adult training and development.

KH: And you're still at Saint Paul College?

CR: Still at Saint Paul College, yeah. I started out supporting the evening school and then went on to senior support in our transfer center that was opened up, working with transfer students, then went on to Admission Specialist. That was really cool because I got

to be out in the community a lot, recruiting, and talking about Saint Paul College and the opportunities. So, that took me to schools and community events and the adult basic education center on a regular basis. I really enjoyed that.

[01:10:00]

CR: And then went on and took another position in advising. And so, I am now an academic advisor. I've been that for a number of years now. And I advise students in our health science programs. So, whenever I'm in the community, at a clinic or anywhere, I'm always finding myself asking, "Where did you study?" And you'll be surprised at the students who studied at Saint Paul College.

KH: Really?

CR: Yes.

KH: I wish my son would take a look at it, myself. I think we were talking about that a little bit on the phone, and I don't need to spend our time here doing that, but it's got great programs. It's close. It's affordable. All the things.

CR: Yes, absolutely. Transfer opportunities, so you don't have to stop there. You can do something short period, short term. We know that people have to get out, feed their families, but you can continue. We get a lot of students interested or who are in that position. I have to do this for now, but it's not my end goal. And so, I loved how they opened up opportunities for students to transfer on.

KH: Yeah. So, kind of looking back at your time at Oxford and your young years playing sports and being involved at Oxford, where does that stand? Like, what do you take? What have you taken through your life that you got from Oxford?

CR: Oh, so much. I mean, I have no problem working with other people. I've never been that person. I know what it's like to work as a team. So, when I'm a part of a team at work, not a big deal, right? Everybody's part of the team. Everybody brings

something. So, that's definitely something that I learned at Oxford. Showing up. [01:12:00]

CR: Academia, we have to do these surveys of your top five strengths, StrengthsFinder types of things. And responsibility is one of my top, right? And part of that comes from what I've learned at home. But also, as a team member, you have to show up. Regardless of what your role is, you play a role, and you have to be there. If you're not there, the team's not cohesive. Something's missing. And so, I always wanted to show up for my team. I didn't miss games. I didn't miss practice and stuff like that. So, showing up is something that I've learned over the years. And that was part of Oxford.

Other things. Just respecting other people and everybody kind of has their story. I remember I mentioned one of the workers, Pat, who we didn't know or understand Pat when were younger. One thing she would tell us whenever we did something bad, "You're going to go to Fargo." I had no idea.

KH: Fargo? [Laughs.]

CR: You have no idea what Fargo [North Dakota State University] was. Although my brother ended up graduating from Fargo. But just accepting and interacting with people for who they are, those kinds of lessons that I've taken on.

KH: I asked you if you had a particularly fond or significant memory about playing basketball in high school. Now, let me ask you the same question about Oxford. Like, do you have particular memories or stories or things that really have stuck with you from Oxford?

CR: Different things for different reasons, I guess. I'll never forget the pop in the back of the head for doing something that I wasn't supposed to be doing. But just all of the fun opportunities, like going out to dinners at the culmination of our sports events and activities. Cooking class. Remembering back, thinking, Oh, I could make this. We made

like a chicken a la king when I was in cooking class. Just different things like that. The coronations, just having the opportunity to walk down the aisle in the gown, you know what I mean? All those kinds of things were just things that were memorable. [01:14:00]

KH: It occurs to me that I have not asked anybody this question, which is an oversight on my part. Did you have to pay anything to participate in these programs at Oxford, do you know?

CR: No.

KH: So, they were all just free?

CR: Yeah. No, I don't ever remember having to pay anything. No. And I would have heard it if we did. So, equipment. And equipment at the time for a lot of us were good gym shoes to play basketball, right? And that was Converse at the time. You were really stepping up when you got those Converse. And so, I can remember my mom, "What? How much?" and she'd be like, but when we start working, we could buy those things on our own. So, those were the kinds of things that we could do with our money. And I don't know if I mentioned, but my first job was twelve.

KH: Wow.

CR: And it was one day a week, for people who might think that they're exploiting children. It was one day a week, and we got paid every two weeks. And it was on this crew, this work crew. And I remember some of the older people, like I think Rita might have been one of them, got to do two days a week.

KH: And what were you doing? What was the work?

CR: We were just out in the environment. We'd be in parks, doing different projects and work.

KH: Was it a city job?

[01:16:00]

CR: Yes.

KH: Oh okay. And then did you say on the phone, too, that you worked at Oxford for a summer, maybe?

CR: I think I did. Just for a little bit. I know my sister worked at Oxford. I was down there so much, I can't even remember if I ended up working or not. But I remember trying to work there, and I can't quite remember if I got it. If I did, it was a short period. But I know my sister did. And those were summer jobs.

KH: And so, was it just like working at the rec center, at the building, or was it coaching?

CR: Yeah, just working at the building, doing different activities.

KH: Things come and go so quickly. Talking about working and not having to pay. So, as far as you understand, there was no fee to participate in the program down there?

CR: No fees, no.

KH: So, one thing that we talked about on the phone and that I said I've been trying to figure out as I've been talking to people is, was Oxford unique? Now, it's hard to answer that question in part. If you never were at other rec centers. But you were at Harding. Did you get a sense from your classmates at Harding that they had grown up with a similar kind of experience with a rec center in their neighborhoods? Maybe it's something nobody talked about, I don't know. But do you have any sense of that?

CR: You know, we didn't really talk about it too much, but I didn't think that they had. I could have been wrong, because when I think about for us, there was the Linwood [Recreation Center] , which is not far. I was driving the other day. I was like, okay, there's Linwood. There was Palace [Community Center], that we thought was far at the time, but they really weren't.

[01:18:00]

CR: And I don't know, I just can't imagine that they had the same experience, because the amount of time that we spent at Oxford. I think in some of those other places, maybe you went, you played your sports, and you did your practice, and you went home. So, yeah, I think it was unique in terms—and the other activities too, because it wasn't just sports. It was other things. I mean, and sports, too. We talk about softball, basketball, and football and things like that, but we also played ping pong. Matter of fact, I remember playing ping pong and somebody looked and like, "Oh, you want to go to a ping pong tournament?" And that's something that existed, but we didn't always do it. But they were aware of, Oh, we've got some good ping pong players here, so maybe we should go that route as well, let them participate there as well. So, I don't know. I just think the depth of activities that we had at Oxford, I get the impression, was unique.

KH: Were you ever at the King Center? Did you ever travel that far east?

CR: I did for other reasons. But no, King Center couldn't touch Oxford [laughs] in terms of the activities that we were doing as young folks. I mean, other people came along and ended up playing basketball at the King Center if they were kind of closer to that area. So, I'm sure it worked for some folks. But the activity level, no, it was not the same.

KH: What about Hallie [Hallie Q. Brown Community Center]? And I know they share space.

CR: Same thing. So, when we think of Martin Luther King [Recreation Center], we think of Hallie.

KH: And so, I'm sure perhaps there's some geographic loyalties as well, right? Like if you had grown up on the eastern side of the neighborhood.

[01:20:00]

CR: And Hallie came later, if I'm not mistaken, like the gym and stuff at Hallie

came later.

KH: Yes, I think it was a little bit later.

CR: So, yeah, by that time we were pretty loyal to Oxford.

KH: When were on the phone, you also described Oxford, as, I wrote it down somewhere, as a coming-of-age spot.

CR: Yeah. I mean, because through my elementary, through my middle schools, and then up to high school, yeah, for sure.

KH: And it sounds like it was that for many kids. Like, just that image of you that you described of when the rec center shut and you just see all these kids, that's quite an image.

CR: It is. It's so funny, too, to watch. And I just noticed it a few times, like, okay, Oxford's closed and it's like the whole place just empties and you just see this exodus of kids walking in two directions.

KH: That's amazing. That's a really great, and I think, telling visual about what Oxford was.

CR: Yeah. My first boyfriend was at Oxford. I mean those kinds of things. Maybe that was the day I was mad that I missed Oxford. [Laughs.] I don't know.

KH: Let me just check and see if I have gotten to everything I wanted. Oh, oh, yes. Good thing I checked my notes here. I would like to ask you about, so I was looking through old issues of the *Spokesman Recorder* and came across just some little like ads in the paper for the Shoot for the Stars Clinic. What was that and what was your role in it?

CR: So, the Shoot for the Stars basketball clinic was a clinic that I was a part of along with some other great women. Lisa Lissimore, Linda Roberts, Debbie Stampley, Kathie Eiland-Madison from Minneapolis and her sisters were involved. And then, oh, I know, I'm forgetting someone who came after us kind of.

[01:22:00]

CR: But we came up, I don't know whose idea it was, but we initiated this basketball clinic for young girls. And it was free. And so, we basically taught basketball skills over the summer to young girls who were interested in continuing to play or learning how to play basketball. I mean, we took them younger. We had a younger group and then we had an older group that we worked with. And it was so rewarding. Really was. But yeah, I was happy to be a part of it.

KH: And is this the one that then Crystal Flint takes it into the next level?

CR: That's who I'm thinking of, I'm sorry. Crystal's going to kill me. [Laughs.] Yes, Crystal takes it to the next level. Absolutely. Yeah. She came after.

KH: So, the ads that I saw when I was looking were from 1990 and 1993, so that's well after. Did you play anymore, even recreationally after high school?

CR: Not a lot, no. I know some of the other women went on to play in other different types of leagues. I did not.

KH: So, what draws you back, by 1990, to being part of this basketball clinic? Why is it important to you?

CR: Oh my gosh. To be able to give back, because basketball and sports gave me so much and to be able to give back to these young girls? It was a no brainer. And then to spend time with some of my old friends, sports friends, absolutely.

KH: So, you helped build the program and you were a coach in the program as well. Had you coached before that or in other locations?

CR: No, not really. So, it was a great opportunity for me too. Yeah.

KH: And so, what would you say? I mean, I asked you about Oxford. What did Oxford give you or what did you take with you from Oxford? What about sports in general, like basketball or football? Why were those experiences important to your life?

[01:24:00]

CR: All of those same reasons. I remember one of the parents coming up to me, specifically one of the young ladies that I coached because we split up into teams, even in the clinic. And he told me what that two weeks spending time with us had did to her in terms of her confidence and you know, the way that she shows up and presents herself. And I was like, that's cool. That's cool. Because that's what sports and all these activities did for me as well. And that's why I came back. Yeah.

KH: Do you think there's something especially important about giving sports opportunities to girls?

CR: Oh, yeah. Just the opportunity, number one, to be active, to be physically active, an opportunity to do that. But to see other women running things, running the organization in leadership roles, speaking. It's a lot to absorb. They may not get that opportunity anywhere else to be in that all women setting like that. Yeah.

KH: The project that I first interviewed Lisa and Linda for was about women in sports. And one of the things we talked about all the time, and it's what you're saying too, is that you get so much more out of sports than just the athletic skills. You know, it's just a chance to learn all the things that you've been describing, leadership, teamwork, confidence.

CR: Feeling comfortable being out front, being on stage speaking, because you'd have to talk sometimes when you ask questions or you're in practice and you're discussing certain things, you've got to speak up, you know?

[01:26:00]

KH: I know for me too, in a world and in a culture that values certain kinds of female bodies and appearance, it makes me less concerned about that, if I feel like, well, this body, whatever it looks like, can do this stuff. In whatever sports it is. And that's not a

small thing in this world.

CR: Absolutely. Yeah, yeah. And I think about like, just from the physical and the health standpoint, you've got to get involved in something, right? Why not do it at a young age and so it's a part of you as you're growing up, you know?

KH: Do you follow any sports? Like, do you follow college basketball, WNBA [Women's National Basketball Association]?

CR: I always tell people, I mean, I do watch them. I watch the professional basketball games and stuff like that when they get to certain points. But I can get so involved that I kind of steer clear sometimes, even with the Vikings football and stuff like that, which I like. But I could go one way or the other. So, if I start watching, I could really get into it and go down that hole or I can just kind of steer clear and kind of be a fan from afar and when it gets close and they really do good, then I get a little more involved. But I can get quite emotional when it comes to sports and games. So, I try to enjoy a little bit from a little afar, a little bit afar.

KH: Have a more well-rounded life so I don't get stuck down the rabbit hole.

CR: Yes, yes. That could easily be me.

KH: I can understand that.

CR: I didn't even talk about—I just wanted to mention this. I think about why we were able to spend so much time at Oxford and stuff. I remember like the free lunch programs and stuff down there in the summer, so we didn't have to go home and eat. We'd eat right there. So, all of that was part of why we could be down there so much.

[01:28:00]

KH: And again, probably as a kid. As a kid I wouldn't have been thinking about something like this but did you—let's take a quick pause.

[Audio Break]

KH: Okay. So, we're back. So, the question I was going to ask you, and I maybe know the answer, but I'll ask it anyway, when you were a kid at Oxford, did you have any consciousness or any awareness that this was at least a facility and a program run by the city of Saint Paul?

CR: I learned that at some point, but when I was younger, no.

KH: So, your loyalty, I mean, it wasn't like, hey, this is a great program that Saint Paul is offering, this was like, I love Oxford. I'm here to be here at Oxford.

CR: Absolutely.

KH: And are you connected to Oxford in any way now?

CR: Not so much now. Yeah. I mean, I visit the community center. I'm a member of the community center for the walking track and things like that. Over the years, like maybe a few years ago, I would use the community center to do these after kind of end of year school year pool parties for kids, nieces and nephews and things like that. So, I still use the center, but not so much. And that's the community center. But what I consider the Oxford building, no, I'm not so involved.

KH: It's a nice pool down there.

CR: That's where I learned to swim.

KH: Is it?

CR: Oh, yeah.

KH: And when did you learn to swim? Like, how old were you?

CR: Oh, gosh, whenever that pool came, maybe a year or so later. Because we were definitely there. And that was a big deal. That was a big deal. We didn't have a lot of swimming pools around, right? So, they worked hard, I think, to get that pool there.

KH: Am I right, is there a pool also at Central High School? Do you know? Well, why would you know? You didn't even go to Central.

[01:30:00]

CR: I can't even remember.

KH: Because I know there was a lot of conversation around building a pool at Oxford, at Central, separate. I think at some point there was maybe a plan to have like a skyway maybe over Lexington, but I don't know.

CR: That's a good point. I don't recall.

KH: Me neither. So, there you go. So, Candace, is there anything else you would like to say about Oxford or sports or any of what we've talked about or anything we haven't talked about?

CR: Not really. I mean, in terms of sports, they can do a lot for young people. So, even if—and there's something for everybody, right? Sports is a big category, but just the idea especially. And there are individual sports too, as well. But I do like the idea of involving young people in sports or some type of activity where you're part of a team. Especially today, when these young folks are on their phone, solo, they can walk into a room with somebody their age and not say a word. That didn't happen when we were younger. We felt comfortable, oh, there's somebody my age. Their interaction is just not there. And I think it's so helpful for individuals to take away that experience, just the interaction of being a part of a team and what you learn from that is important. So, take advantage of sports that way, for sure.

[01:32:00]

CR: And Oxford, I know I can't say enough about Oxford. I'd say that's where I lived. I spent so much time there, that's where I lived. But if I could say anything, I would say try to make these centers and rec centers, places where you have variety of activity, where you have opportunities for young people to come and explore. Don't assume that everybody wants to play basketball because that's what's hot. Open up to other activities,

pottery, art. And then people will find their place, they'll find what they enjoy. I think so often we focus on specific things now instead of giving young people the opportunity to explore a little bit.

KH: Yeah. Like everything is so specialized so early, including sports. Like, oh my gosh, you can't play multiple sports when you're a kid because you need to keep up with everybody and go on traveling teams at age eight or nine.

CR: Exactly. Yes. And then the whole family has to go. That's a lot.

KH: Even with school too. Like expecting that an eighteen-year-old kid who graduates from high school knows what they want to do for the rest of their lives.

CR: Absolutely.

KH: And part of that, I'm sure, is driven by the economics of higher education. But when I was at the University, I took two years to figure out what I wanted to do because I could afford to do it.

CR: Absolutely. Yeah. And that's why I enjoy what I do so much as a community college advisor. From my experience, I know that everybody doesn't get it. Not just understanding what you want to do but just understanding navigating academia. You know, sometimes it takes a little time. And so, having that opportunity to do something in a short period, then you can come back. Or you can wait a little bit. And it's not a bad thing.

KH: Yes. There are many paths through life, for sure.

CR: For sure.

KH: Well, I am so grateful for you and your willingness to sit down and share your Oxford memories and stories.

[01:34:00]

CR: Well, you are welcome. You've actually made me start thinking again

about—there's something that I've been wanting to do down at that field. I don't know what, but maybe at some point, just kind of getting the community together and bring them to the field for some activities and fun. I'll have to think a little bit more about it, but it's something that I wanted to do when the field was initiated. I wanted to come back a few years later and do something. I haven't done that, clearly. And so, I still think about what we could do to bring the community to Oxford and then have some activities, different stations, maybe some exploration. Who knows.

KH: And what year was it dedicated to Stacy? Do you know offhand?

CR: I want to say 2012ish. It was shortly after he passed, if I'm not mistaken. Maybe a little bit after.

KH: And did he pass away in 2012?

CR: 2012, yeah, I think it was. But the dedication might have come a little bit after that.

KH: I mean, obviously that place, that field, that playground, rec center, community center, whatever you want to say, has just made a huge difference in so many people's lives. And you said on the phone, too, something else that I really liked. You said Oxford was a community center before the official community centers opened.

CR: Yeah, in my opinion. Because that little brown building, that was a community center. And we needed a bigger building, okay. They have bigger gyms there and they added a pool. But as far as the community piece, that's always been. That's always been. Yeah. I'm thinking about a lot of things now, about the things that you learn. You also learn the politics of things and sports, too, as part of this being down at Oxford and all that, like, who gets to play, you know what I mean? There's a lot. But you become familiar, attuned to those types of things, even as a young person, right?

[01:36:00]

KH: Give me an example, or can you think of an example?

CR: I don't know. I'm thinking of, for example, when my brother got to the level of the Roads. That was not necessarily Bill anymore and those coaches. So, there were other coaches who were familiar with other kids and their families, right? And so, then you bring these kids together. Okay. Now it's time for these kids to play together. And this one's maybe clearly exceptional. Oh, but this is the one that we've always worked with before, you know what I mean? And so, yeah, just seeing all of that transpire.

KH: And I'm not as familiar with football, as I am with, say, baseball. So, first of all, how do you spell Roads in this case?

CR: R-O-A D-S.

KH: So, just like roads, like the roads we drive on. And it was kind of the next level of playing football outside of rec sports.

CR: Yes. And Roads comes from; it's a group of men that were like porters from the railroad. They formed an organization. So, yeah, that's where the Roads comes from. But yeah. I think they maybe sponsored the team when they got a little bit older. So, they were called the Roads.

KH: But yeah, you learn all kinds of life lessons. The positive ones and the hard ones.

CR: Yes, absolutely. Yeah, the hard lessons, too. How you navigate those and know that they exist.

[01:38:00]

KH: And I'm sure continue in different forms, like your mom. I will send that article to you when I get home. Because the implication was that Black athletes at the U weren't being treated fairly, or the way white athletes were.

CR: Sure. Yeah, I can remember. Yeah. I can remember my mom talking to

athletes, former U, actually, for advice, like when Stacy was moving forward.

KH: And I'm sure, yeah, all the lessons that we see at a recreational, municipal level are exaggerated when you get to not just high school, but college ball, and then professional sports. I can imagine that. Well, thank you. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

CR: You're welcome. I hope I've been helpful.

KH: Very much. Very much so.

[END OF INTERVIEW]