

## **Interview with Dr. Lorene Holmes**

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Interviewed by Tracy Caradine

**TC:** This is Tracy Caradine, Director of Library Services at Jarvis Christian College. Today's date is Tuesday, June 19, 2001. I will be interviewing Dr. Lorene Holmes today.

Dr. Holmes, would you start out by giving us a little background information about yourself?

**LH:** Thank you, Ms. Caradine. I was born in a little community called Freeman Chapel, which is near Mineola, Texas. When I was two years old, my parents moved to Hawkins, Texas. While we lived in Hawkins, Texas, however, I attended Big Sandy Elementary School. My parents were the late Jessie May Barns and William Henry Barns.

In 1950, I believe, we moved further up in Hawkins where we were in the Hawkins Independent School District. So I attended Hawkins Colored High School from seventh grade until I graduated in 1955. Those were wonderful years.

In 1955, I enrolled at Jarvis Christian College, where I received my Bachelor of Science degree in business. I met my late husband here, Charles Holmes, and then during the summers '64, '65, and '66, I attended North Texas State University [Denton], which is now the University of North Texas, where I received my master in business education degree.

Then I enrolled again at the University of North Texas and received my doctorate of education degree in 1970. Now you must remember that was during the civil rights era, and they weren't exactly accepting us into their fold. So when I attended the University of North Texas, I was admitted conditionally.

Racism was very overt. I have very vivid memories of my first experience to hostility when I enrolled in one of the classes and the professor looked at me and said, "If you didn't graduate from a white college, you probably are not going to make it in this class." That is when I decided that I was going to make it in the class, and I did I was the second person to receive a master of business education from that university. They were nationally recognized and accredited by the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business, and that is where I wanted to get my degree.

I have had an interesting experience. The only place I worked was at Jarvis. I started out as a cashier, stenographer—oh, I can't remember all the positions I've held, but they have all been rich and rewarding—assistant professor of business, associate professor of business, and I chaired the dynamic division of business for 25 years. Then I worked with Dr. Jenkins as executive assistant to the president. I worked as executive assistant to the vice president. I directed a special program, alumni reclamation management program, and now I am working with students again as director of career management services.

My late husband died in 1996. He was a Jarvis grad. My daughter was also a Jarvis grad. The two of us were the only mother-daughter Miss. Jarvis. In fact, we still hold that distinction of the U and C of colleges. So that is enough about me, I think. **[Laughter]**

**TC:** Well, Dr. Holmes, I see that you have been in this area basically all of your life, leaving only to attend school. So you have seen this community go through a number of changes. As you were

a child growing up in the area, were you conscious of the fact that your community was basically all black, or was your community all black?

**LH:** Yes, my community was definitely all black. It was segregated—you know, the whites lived on one side of town, and basically we lived on “the other side of the track.” In fact, the school was located on the other side of the tracks.

**TC:** Was this an all black school?

**LH:** It was, it was. We didn’t integrate until the sixties.

**TC:** So all of the years that you spent in the public school system were in segregated schools?

**LH:** That is correct. Even at Big Sandy Elementary School, all of my teachers were black, also.

**TC:** How did you get to Big Sandy? I understand that Big Sandy is a few miles from Hawkins, and by you attending the colored elementary school in Big Sandy, what type of transportation did you have.

**LH:** It is kind of ironic. While we lived in Hawkins, we were in the Big Sandy school district, so the bus just came by and we rode the bus every day.

**TC:** Was there a bus only for the colored school?

**LH:** Yes.

**TC:** What was the condition of that bus?

**LH:** It was a nice bus. And the same thing at Hawkins Colored High School.

I just like to inject one thing. We did not have a car, and I wanted to attend college, so Mr. Burton, who was the principal then at Hawkins Colored High School, said, “If you want to go to college, you can just go to Jarvis, and we’ll provide the transportation.” So that was one time I was really glad to be bused.

There were about four of us. We would get on the bus as though we were going to the school, and we would come to the school. If the bus that came to Jarvis came early, Mr. Burton would have them to wait their bus, so that we could get on the bus and come to Jarvis, and then we just reversed the evenings. We would come back to the high school, get on the bus to take us home. So we did that for four years.

**TC:** So education was very important in this community for blacks. I guess that shows by the extent they went to to provide transportation to make sure that you reached your destination as far as for college. Was that an attitude of all the blacks in this area toward education? Did everyone feel that it was very, very important?

**LH:** Our teachers encouraged us to continue our education, but for some it was not. It’s just like some of our students today, they want immediate gratification, get out, get a job, get some of the things that they were denied. But education was instilled in us—from my mother, she was a domestic worker, and when I graduated from high school, I wanted to get married. But she would not sign for me to get married. At that time, if you were not eighteen, the parents had to sign, and

she said, "I do not want for you to have to wash, iron, and clean houses for a living all of your life." And I am glad that she made that decision for me, because I was really in love.

**TC:** Your mom was a domestic worker. What type of work did your father do?

**LH:** My father was a music teacher and a carpenter by trade. However, I don't remember very much about my father because they were divorced when I was five.

**TC:** Can you describe the location and the physical condition of your elementary school, which was all-black, in Big Sandy, as well as the Hawkins Colored High School?

**LH:** They were very good schools and in good physical condition, and we were encouraged to take care of our buildings, which we did.

**TC:** Did you all have to do the maintenance basically yourselves? Were students involved in the upkeep of the building, maybe the grounds?

**LH:** No, if I recall correctly. The only thing we did was to dust and keep our immediate area clean.

**TC:** How did you receive your textbooks in the black elementary school and the colored high school?

**LH:** The textbooks would come to the principal's office, and I remember very vividly we had a book room, and of course they probably, like they are now, they were restricted to the teachers, and we received those books. Of course, most of them were used books.

**TC:** Did you all as students have to do any type of cleaning of the books? Were they in good condition when they reached you all?

**LH:** Overall, the books were in pretty good condition.

**TC:** By them being used, were they current, or how old were they?

**LH:** Now, that is a long time ago. I would say they were fairly current. Of course, we had good teachers who were very resourceful, and they supplemented the textbooks with current material, so we were still aware of what was going on.

**TC:** How did they receive the current material that they used to supplement those textbooks?

**LH:** Of course, they read widely, too. Go to the public libraries.

**TC:** Do you think they spent money from their salaries to purchase materials that they were not receiving from the school district?

**LH:** I really don't remember, but I know that we always had sufficient materials to accomplish our objectives.

**TC:** Was there a standardized test given at the all-black elementary school and the colored high school?

**LH:** No, no.

**TC:** What type of curriculum did you all have?

**LH:** Oh, we had the basic curriculum—reading, writing, math, algebra, biology, chemistry, civics, English, literature, music. We had to take music, we had public school music. Home economics, agriculture, and shop. Those are basically.

**TC:** Do you feel that the colored high school were training their students and gearing them towards a certain career, maybe as teachers and clerks and different things like that.

**LH:** Well, you must remember now, there were not a lot of opportunities available to us then. Basically, it is was beautician, mortician, preachers, teachers, and that is about it. In terms of businesses, that was almost unheard of. Businesses were not opening their doors for us.

Now a lot of the persons were resourceful and went into entrepreneurship, but in terms of what it is like today, we just did not have the opportunities to go into the corporations and work for them.

**TC:** During the time that you were attending the all-black schools, did integration ever cross your mind?

**LH:** Not really, because I was really enjoying my association with the blacks.

**TC:** You had no desire to maybe even go and visit the white schools and see how things were?

**LH:** Not really, but I had a lot of white friends, and I associated with them, believe it or not.

**TC:** These white friends were a result of neighbors or just—

**LH:** My affiliation was working for their parents and then their friends.

**TC:** Were you able to socialize with them?

**LH:** In a very limited kind of way.

**TC:** What were some of the ways that you would socialize?

**LH:** Sometimes we would go to the movies together, but, of course, when we got to the movies, they sat downstairs and we sat upstairs. Sometimes we would go to their house and read or play games.

**TC:** And you were welcome in their home?

**LH:** These are the people that I worked for, and my mother worked for.

**TC:** How active were the parents in the PTA at the colored high school?

**LH:** We had a very active PTA, believe it or not. A lot of the parents were actively involved in that. They met on a regular basis and provided opportunities for us, fund-raisers to buy different things for the classrooms, and sometimes if there was a student who was excelling and did not

have money, say, for example, to go to an activity, the PTA would also support them in their endeavors.

**TC:** How active was the black church in the activities of the colored high school?

**LH:** A lot of the members of the PTA were also members of the black church, so they were quite active. It was a very supportive community. A lot of the persons who were community leaders were also leaders in their churches and also in our schools, so it made for a good relationship.

**TC:** Did you all receive financial support from the church?

**LH:** Is they indicated that there was some need from the students? And speaking of financial support, I recall you were asking about socializing with the whites. One of the persons that I worked for was president of the woman's group, and I recall my mother telling her, "You know, I don't know where I am going to get that ten dollars for Lorene to get that book." And she and her organization gave me the ten dollars. She still resides here, Joanne Mentua [phonetic]. They are a good friend of mine now. And I used to work for her.

**TC:** I understand that you did not attend the integrated schools, but you were still in the area, maybe returning from college, back and forth. Do you recall any type of hostility in the community during that transition?

**LH:** We were one of the few communities that had a very smooth transition.

**TC:** Why do you think that was so?

**LH:** Basically Hawkins is a good community. There was good rapport among the races. So there were no incidents of violence, to my knowledge. I can't recall any. They just announced integration, and there were some meetings prior to that to prepare the community for the integration, so it was a smooth integration.

**TC:** Were you able to attend any of those meetings?

**LH:** Oh yes, I have always been actively involved in the community and community activities.

**TC:** What were some of the things discussed at those meetings to prepare the black community for integration?

**LH:** It was blacks and whites that were meeting together. So you still had your community leaders who would talk with the persons in the communities. We talked about it's the law, we have to do it, and what's the best way that we can do it and do it effectively. I think that was the key to the smooth integration.

**TC:** After integration, looking back, do you think it helped or hurt the education that black students were receiving?

**LH:** That's a loaded question. We had a good school system, in spite of. We had teachers who were dedicated and who were committed. But I think it's allowed more access to some of the things that the students did not have, and in that way, I think it helped.

**TC:** Are there any ways that you think it harmed the education of the black students? What do you think they lost?

**LH:** I think they lost that close relationship between student and teacher, and sometimes students were reluctant to confide in some of the white teachers when they were having problems. Essentially I cannot think of anything else that was harmful. As I indicated, we had a very smooth transition. Hawkins was a small community, so everyone knew everybody.

**TC:** After integration, how did the community change? The life of people in the community?

**LH:** There was more socializing, invitations to some of the “white” churches, and some of the white members would visit our churches. We worked together on a lot of community projects. In fact, I recall when something happened to one of the black students, it was a white who initiated a benefit basketball game to support that student. We were involved and working together on different projects and community activities that benefited both races. And we are still doing that.

**TC:** Overall, what do you think was the greatest accomplishment of integration?

**LH:** I would say more opportunities for our students and for our faculty.

**TC:** For the community?

**LH:** Well, yes. You had that interpersonal relationship that was not evident before, to a large extent, I might say.

**TC:** Dr. Holmes, it was a pleasure.

**LH:** Thank you, I hope I have helped the project.

**[End of interview]**