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Transcript of Interview with Wentford Gaines

Interviewer: Jerone L. Dudley

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Transcript

Wentford Gaines: --semesters. But there, they are, they still on quarters there?

Jerone Dudley: Nope, we on semesters. I think it's 12, 15 weeks, I believe.

Gaines: Ok.

Dudley: I mean, It's long.

Gaines: Yeah. It was short, quarters are short. So you know, if you're not on your peak at the beginning of that, you end up getting lost.

Dudley: I think they typically eight, eight weeks or so?

Gaines: Yeah.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: So, what I did. I had, I had I went to junior college in Virginia. It was called Ferrum College, but now it's called Ferrum University. Now back when I went, it was a Ju-Co. And uh, they had—the coaches, they had just won the OVC—the Ohio Valley Conference. That's when they had this one football player named Jim Youngblood that got drafted by the Rams as a linebacker. So they had come to Ferrum to recruit me and two other guys. They chose not to go. Me, I decided to go because what happened I left school early and I was supposed to go there and work up until the fourth quarter, and then enroll in the spring. Because they wanted me to come in and play spring football. But they told me they were going to have me working a decent job, my job was working in that sorry behind football stadium they had there with these rednecks that were there. So my experience with them was not very good at all. So when I finally—and I didn't even have a place to stay. I was moving from one person's room to another room. So I told them, I was going to go home. I said, "I'm going home to South Carolina," which is where I'm from, "and I'll be back when the fourth quarter starts." So when I came back, that's when we got, when we started the football program. That's when spring football started. Had

to get like 20 sessions in I think within 30 days, something like that. But once we started, we found out after we had went through maybe two or three--well, three or four sessions, that the tennis coach had left the best tennis player in Johnson City, Tennessee, where they went for a tennis match. Now then, with five dollars—he gave him five dollars and told him to get back the best way he could. So we didn't want to hear that. So, every Monday you had what you call a—I don't know if they still have President's Open Forum where you can go speak with him. So, what we did we went there and told him what our grievance was. We wanted something done about it right away. You don't leave a kid 200 miles away from school and tell him to get back the best way he could. And it just so happened that the baseball team was there so he road back with them. So, we went to the football coach and told him that—well, we had a spoke, a spokesperson, he did it. Told him that what concerns were and what we wanted to do before we came back for spring football. We wanted that settled before we come back out and practiced. He reassured the guy that—and plus, we let him know that what we're doing could be considered a boycott, and if you boycott, your football scholarship could be taken away. So we told him that's not what we were doing, we wanted to make sure that things were right before we came back to practice. So, we meeting as a group: we had eight football players, we had a few basketball players, and I don't think the baseball player participated in it. But we had the most athletes of any, which was only eight. And of course all eight of us were starting. But, he told us, "Nah, nah, that's ok, you go ahead, we'll iron this out and we'll see you when you get back. Hopefully we come up to a reasonable agreement." So, we found out later on that same night, the head coach had taken up all our football equipment. Hey, it didn't matter to me because I was ready to get out of there anyway. Me as a person, I didn't want to stay there anyway.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: I wanted to get out of there.

Dudley: You saw something inethical—

Gaines: So, that's kind of like per say what happened. Back at that time, I know myself, Jay Bonds, and Paul Hunter we the three, the three of us went to the University of Cincinnati. One kid went to Vanderbilt. I'm not sure what happened to the others. But that's what happened to some of us. But, like I said, my experience at Tennessee Tech was bad from the beginning to the end, til I left there. And to compound that problem, Cincinnati was sending down a—one of the coaches to sign us. He had an accident on the way down and almost killed himself. So now, we're still wondering what the heck was going to happen. So they ended up mailing them to us. So we went back, we got the scholarship papers and we signed them and ended up going to the University of Cincinnati. But I can't give you a lot of in-depth things about Tennessee Tech. What I can tell you is that I didn't enjoy my time there, for the little bit of time that I was there. They had this one little town close to Cookeville that said it had a sign. Now, I never saw the sign.

00:05:00

They say the sign had that “if you’re Black, don’t get caught in this town after dark.”

Dudley: After dark, yup.

Gaines: So, that within itself made me further not want to be there. Even though I’m from South Carolina, but I had never went through anything such as that. So, I wanted to get out anyway. So any questions you have for me?

Dudley: Yes. You just answered—

Gaines: I can’t hear you.

Dudley: I’m sorry.

Gaines: I can’t hear you.

Dudley: Can you hear me better? Can you hear me better?

Gaines: Still can’t hear you.

Dudley: Huh. I have my sound on. Let’s see.

Gaines: Wait a minute, hold on, let me see here.

Dudley: Can you hear me now?

Gaines: I got you now.

Dudley: Ok, great. Great. Ok. Alright. Alright, so, yes, I do have some further questions. However, you answered the experiences at Tech. The questions that I have for you are experiences at Tech. Which is great. Ok. Let’s start from the top. Can you give me a bio, a bio and background of yourself?

Gaines: Ok, of course I’m from South Carolina. I came to Tech during 1973. I had just withdrawn from my JUCO to come play football, spring ball. That’s when they wanted me to come there because basically the safety that had come there the year before had come from my junior college and he was graduating, so they wanted to put somebody in there in his place. The head coach at the time—can’t think of his name—had been an assistant coach at Clemson, which is like 14 miles from my hometown. So he was having, he was having conversation with my high school coach, who I didn’t get along with. So that wasn’t a feather in your hat trying to get me. That made me want to get further away from you.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: So, after there. After the semester, I mean quarter being there, I went to the University of Cincinnati. Was myself, Paul Hunter, and Jay Bonds. I know Jay eventually coached at Cincinnati and he ended up going to Kansas to run some type of business. Paul ended up signing on with the Steelers as a free-agent defensive tackle. But, he didn't stay. He saw some things he didn't like, so he didn't stay there. I got drafted by the Steelers in '76 in the ninth round. And I stayed there for two years and then I went to Chicago and I played with Chicago for three years. So I played a total of five years in the NFL.

Dudley: Were you on a Super Bowl team?

Gaines: No, I was there—I was in between. I was there the '76-'77 season. They won '74-'75, '78-'79.

Dudley: '78-'79, ok.

Gaines: So what happened, I was there for one game in '78, and then they released me and I ended up going—

Dudley: Ah, ok.

Gaines: I got released after the first game.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: I ended up going to Chicago and I stayed in Chicago for three years.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: And because of a bad knee, I ended up not being able to play. So from that point, I went from, I went from there to—I was supposed to go to Southern Oregon, to become a Grad Assistant and get into coaching college side.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: I picked things up really easy.

Dudley: Right.

Gaines: So, Buddy Ryan who was the defensive coordinator—

Dudley: Buddy Ryan.

Gaines: Yep, who—yeah, I know Buddy real well. I know Ricks and Rob—

Dudley: Ricks and Rob.

Gaines: Yep, used to be the little ball boys on the sideline.

Dudley: Yep.

Gaines: So, and Jim Rouleau who was the defensive back coach--

Dudley: I've heard Jim—I've heard that name before, too.

00:10:00

Gaines: Yeah, had gotten in touch with some friend of theirs that was the head coach at Southern Oregon so I was supposed to give him a call. But I never did. At that time I was somewhat mad at not being able to play. And also I want to throw this in is that I did leave Cincinnati with a degree. Healthcare administration.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: I got that in 1976.

Dudley: Uh-huh.

Gaines: But I didn't want, I really didn't want—I should've would've you know when I think about it now. I'll catch up with that later—

Dudley: Yup.

Gaines: I ended up moving to Texas to be with my girlfriend who eventually became my wife.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: Ok. In '85, I had twins that were born, Gerald and Jeroy Gaines. Gerald and Jeroy Gaines. And they were born in '85. Getting to have some problems in my wife and I, so she ended up taking the kids and going back to Ohio where she is from. I stayed in Texas for a total of about 15 years.

Dudley: Did you? Ok.

Gaines: And I left Houston in March of '97.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: And came to Jersey City, New Jersey. And that's where I've been since. So I came here, like I said in March of '97. By August—June, August or June or July of '97, I started working at the Urban League of Hudson County and I was running the program there. That took place from '97 up to 2000. Then I went to—I was running what you call, are you familiar with AmeriCorps?

Dudley: I've heard of them before.

Gaines: Yeah, AmeriCorps means that you got volunteers that come in. They volunteer their time in return for an education award.

Dudley: Ok, yeah.

Gaines: So we had full-time members and we had part-time members. I ran that program for three years and for the Urban League. And then I went to Kean University—K-E-A-N University here in Union—Union, New Jersey. And I ran their program for a year. They also had an AmeriCorps program. So after that, Urban League got the program back, so I ended up moving back to, I came back to Jersey City and went back to the Urban League until 2005. Ok, in 2005, this one gentleman—the guy who is now superintendent of New Jersey City Public Schools, at the time was an associate superintendent, he knew my sister. And my sister knew that I was trying to get into teaching. Into coaching and teaching. So, he came by my job one day and asked me was I interested in coaching. I said, “yeah, might as well. But If I'm going to coach, I also want to teach.”

Dudley: Want to teach.

Gaines: So, I—cause I didn't feel like just going out there and coaching and going back to the Urban League. I want to still, I just wanted to be in that field period. So I hooked on with a gentleman by the name of Robert Hampton who was getting the head coaching job at Lincoln High School in Jersey City. And that was in 2000—the fall of 2005. So, I was with him from 2005 up until 2018. I didn't coach the 2019 year. But I eventually went back to help coach this year, 2020. So I have coached for the last 14 or 15 years.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: We have went, we went to three state championships. We didn't win any of them, but we did go. Coach Hampton finally won his 100th game about two or three weeks ago. You know, cause he still, he was still coaching since 2005 up until present. We sent a lot, we sent too many kids to college. Now, whether they stayed or not, we don't know. A lot of them stayed, a lot of them got in trouble and had to end up coming back to Jersey City. And we tried to tell them that when you're looking at going to college, your whole lifestyle has to change. You can't—

Dudley: Right.

Gaines: --not go to class, you have to go to class because that's the big thing to you keeping your scholarship. If you're not performing academically, you can't, you can't play. So a lot of them, some of them ended up back in here in Jersey City. We have—let me see, has anyone ever tried out for pro. We haven't had any try out for the pros in that time, but we have some that have went to major universities. We

00:15:00 have a kid by the name of Ronald Buckley. He went to Utah State. We had another kid by the name of Manny—what's the name of the school. Manny went to one of the local schools, but I can't think of the name. But as a matter of fact, when you get the chance to watch Arizona State, one of their starting wide receivers is one of our players. His name is Frank Darby.

Dudley: Frank Darby?

Gaines: Yeah.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: So, and he's out there with—what's the coach that was with the Jets for awhile? The head coach? You know who I'm talking about?

Dudley: I know who you're talking about.

Gaines: Herm. Herman Edwards.

Dudley: Herman Edwards.

Gaines: Herman Edwards. Ole Herman Edwards is Frank's coach.

Dudley: They going to win the game.

Gaines: Yep, yep. Frank is, Frank is an athlete up for the Biletnikoff Award this year, you know, as the number one wide receiver.

Dudley: Ok, number one wide receiver. Yeah.

Gaines: If you get a chance, take a look at that. Look at him. You know he's number 84 on the team.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: Yeah. But--

Dudley: 84, ok.

Gaines: Number 84. And I remember when he was in—cause I teach middle school.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: I remember Frank was a little ole kid, just happy-go-lucky kid. Seventh and eighth grade. Couldn't do much of nothing. But he loved football. He kept

working at his craft til he got better. And like say, we have sent over 75-100 kids to school. And like I said, if they stay or not, that's on them. But we did get them out of Jersey City.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: So right now we're experiencing the COVID-19 epidemic.

Dudley: Yes.

Gaines: So, as a teacher, we are teaching from home.

Dudley: Yes.

Gaines: Which I don't like. Because I'm a special ed teacher.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: So, if I'm dealing with special needs students, they don't pick up on a lot of things easily.

Dudley: Right.

Gaines: So, they need, they need hands-on, they need to see everything right in front of them. And that's hard to do when I'm on a computer screen and they on a computer screen. And then we have parents who allow them to sit in a room by themselves—not just the special needs students, but students as a whole. And they not getting any supervision. So, and they seventh, sixth and seventh graders. So we already know that they can't—their attention span is already short.

Dudley: Correct.

Gaines: So, you know a lot of things go on and a lot of them didn't do very well for the first marking period. So, this past Monday—what was it the 16th? The 16th was the beginning of the second marking period for this year. Yeah. But I'm only going to teach them for maybe one more year and then I'm going to say "c'est la vie, I've gots to go."

Dudley: C'est la vie.

Gaines: I gotta go. So—

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: But like I say, I will provide them, Jersey City, I will help out with the football team because I like to see kids better themselves. Not just athletically, but

also academically. Cause athletics go away. But what you've done in school stays with you. So I did end up getting a certification for, a special ed certification along with certification for teaching kids anywhere between Pre-K to fifth grade. With my special ed certification, I can go from Pre-K up to 12.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: So, I had to go back. I had to go to school. Once I got the job with the public schools, I had to end up going back to school. Cause I only, I never went, I didn't do anything after I got my Bachelor's degree. All I did when I left Cincinnati was ask them, "what's my GPA I need to have in order to go to grad school?" They told me, a 2.65. So, I left there with about a 2.75. No, they told me a 2.5. I left with a 2.65. Cause I never really pushed myself academically cause some things came a little easy to me. When I went to get my certification, special ed certification, you know you only can—they only allow you to get As and Bs. Cs don't work. So I ended up with a 3.75 when I ended up going back to get my certification.

Dudley: Perfect!

Gaines: I'm only like maybe two or three classes from having my Masters in special education. Which I'm not going to get, cause like I said I'm only going to do one more year now. I'm going to be finished.

Dudley: Going to c'est la vie.

Gaines: I'm going c'est la vie, I'm going to leave it alone.

Dudley: Mr. Gaines, what's your birthdate?

00:20:00 **Gaines:** My birthday is February 4th, 1953. I'm 67 years old. Be 68 in February.

Dudley: Ok, alright. Ok, can you tell me a little bit about your childhood?

Gaines: Childhood was—you know, I'm from South Carolina. Anderson, South Carolina. Which is 14 miles away from Clemson, South Carolina, and 29 miles from Greenville, South Carolina.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: You know, grew up in a single parent household.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: My role models basically were females—or either guys from the community. Because when you grow up in the projects, which I didn't grow up specifically in the project, but I lived across the street from the project. I was raised

by my mother's oldest sister, whose children had grown and moved away. So I, my, I ended up being raised by my mother's oldest sister, my aunt. And she drilled in me early in life that "you see how hard I worked to provide for you, and I only have a third grade education, so I have to work extremely hard." So she made sure that I went to kindergarten, which was unheard of at that time in the '50s. I had a—I was picked up every morning by a station wagon. And by the time I got to the first grade, I was on a third or fourth grade reading level. Which helped out tremendously, you know. High school—I went to West Side High School and I also went to McDuffy High School. I played football for West Side, I played basketball at McDuffy and ran track at McDuffy. What was it—in '70, the season of '71, we were the first team that went to the semifinals in the state. I ended up but, I think they selected me to my high school hall of fame—basketball hall of fame--

Dudley: Oh yeah?

Gaines: --at McDuffy, yes.

Dudley: That's an achievement.

Gaines: Yes. Which they did an article on me not too long ago on from what happened to me you know back home. Cause one of the guys who wrote the article was one of my teammates in basketball. And so, I didn't really get any scholarship offers. I also ran track, I remember to put that in there. I ran track. I won the 300 intermediate hurdles my senior year and I ran--won the long jump my senior year. Went down the same day as my high school prom. Went ran track, came back home, went home and got dressed, showered, and whatever else and then went to my high school prom. So, I've always been one—well I know, like they say, in order to get anything out of life, you've got to really really want it or either push. So, I was in sports from football, basketball, baseball, running track. So that kept me out of that lingo of getting in trouble.

Dudley: Right.

Gaines: Always busy. But I did have friends that ended up in a lot of trouble. Which ended up with a lot of them getting locked up. Which ended up with a lot of them dying, leaving this earth early than what they possibly should have. So, I always said that being from the racist South I didn't really want to go back—I left home at 18 when I went to college. I haven't been back since I left. I go visit my family, but as far as living, no. But now I'm getting ready to retire, now I'm thinking about going back there to live. Because of the cost of living.

Dudley: It's cheaper.

Gaines: It's a lot higher here than it is down there. If you talk about getting a one bedroom apartment, now, in Jersey City, you're talking about \$1600 or higher.

Dudley: Woo, that's expensive.

Gaines: And I don't really want to buy a home here, because of the tax problem, taxes, because I see how my sister who lives here is constantly paying quarterly taxes on the house. The house is paid for, but you still got to scarp up money for the taxes every quarter. And like I said, when I did move here from Texas, my sister lives here. So that's how I ended up here. Like I said, I only have my two sons. But that's how I grew up, in Earl Home, which is a project.

Dudley: Yep.

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Gaines: But the way I stayed out of trouble was by being involved, I mean athletically, playing sports. And at my high school, West Side, what made me transfer to McDuffy was that I tried out for the high school basketball team, JV team, and they cut me. So therefore I said, "ok, you don't want me here, I'll go over here and play." So I ended up going to the other team and playing, and ended up going to the state semifinals. Like I said, I didn't have a lot of scholarship offers at the time, so I had got a little job working. Well the reason I didn't have scholarship offers was because I had attitude problems somewhat. I had a friend that was going to Ferrum. Ferrum is spelled F-E-R-R-U-M. Ferrum Junior College by the name of George Gents. So he came home one weekend and he saw me. And everybody called me "Mumbo." So he said "Mumbo, we need some defensive backs up here at Ferrum. You think you might want to come up here?" I said "between going to college and working this dead-end job I had, I'm ready to go!" So I ended up going back to school with him. And he ended up—I was able to get on the team just by his word. You know, so it wasn't come from a coach, it came from him.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: My coach had tried to help me out to try to get into a couple of schools, but I didn't really want his help.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: So, when I, when George Lee came, when George came, I ended up going to JUCO. And didn't play a lot my freshmen year—they didn't even know who I was, they didn't know me from a hill of beans. All they know is that George Lee's teammate. He's from George Lee's, George Gents's hometown. So, I kept—I did everything I could to try to get on the traveling squad cause the only time as a freshmen that I'm going to get to play is on the traveling squad. Now, they already had the players picked out, who they had brought because Ferrum was a team, a school where a lot of D1 schools sent guys that couldn't come there immediately. They sent them to Ferrum. We had guys that ended up going to Ohio State, we had guys going to Florida State, we had guys that went to George Tech. We had some kids that ended up going to Richmond. I ended up going to Tennessee Tech of course. But I ended up going to Cincinnati with two of my teammates that I played

in the secondary with. So, they were, Ferrum was known for sending players to school. Now my first year, I didn't play a lot. I kept telling the coaches they were racist. "What you mean we're racist? The majority of our team is Black, and you gonna call us racist?" So, I guess they got tired of hearing my mouth. The only way I could get on the traveling squad was if someone got hurt. So they told me "Mumbo, get out here and cover this guy. Cover him, and I might think about letting you on the traveling squad." So, the guy ran—he ran an out pattern and I intercepted the ball. Gave it back to him and asked him "what else do you want me to do?" So, that's how I ended up getting. And the next year, I was one of the starting corners. Plus I was starting return man, punt returner. Yeah, so, when I left Ferrum I had three scholarship offers. Well actually, we had four: Florida State, East Carolina, Tennessee Tech, and Cincinnati. And I had an offer from South Carolina State, but I really didn't want to go to South Carolina State. Because I was thinking to myself, I was born and raised in the state. You wait until I go to junior college, and now you want me to come back? When you could have had me all the time?

Dudley: Right.

Gaines: So, that's, I almost ended up going to East Carolina. So, Florida State didn't work out for either one of us. Cause the three of us, three defensive backs went down to Florida State and they were supposed to offer us scholarships, then we never got them.

Dudley: Ah, ok.

Gaines: Now, we have to go back and worry about where we're going. Next school we went to was Tennessee Tech. The same two guys that I played secondary with, we all went to Tennessee Tech.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: At the time, I was thinking I wasn't going to go there. Then I ended up going to East Carolina, which is in Greenville, North Carolina. I thought I might end up going there. But, I went from having no scholarship offers coming out of high school and ended up with five offers. Which I think wasn't too bad, considering no one actually knew who I was at the time. But, like I said, I never got in a lot of trouble growing up. Basically, if you see your parents struggling to survive and put food on the table, of course you're going to tell yourself that "no, this is not how I want my life to be." I knew that if I stayed in Anderson, what the only thing I was going to do in Anderson was work in a cotton mill or a fiber glass plant. On my feet all the time. So that's not the life I wanted for myself. So, when the chance for me to go to school to play ball presented itself, I jumped at that opportunity. And like I said, my son Gerald and Jeroy, they both played football. Jeroy was a wide receiver, Gerald was a defensive back. Gerald ended up going to Miami at Ohio, got a chance to play pro ball. He didn't, he wasn't drafted.

00:30:00

Cleveland signed him as a free agent. He didn't work out at Cincinnati—at Cleveland, and the Bengals picked him up. And it didn't work, didn't work out either. But I already knew that football wasn't—once he met this girl in college, football wasn't his interest anymore. He wanted to be with her.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: Now my other son, who probably had more of a work ethic than Gerald did, who thought football was the beginning and ending of all, didn't take care of, didn't do well academically in school. And plus he was a special needs student. He was supposed to go to Bowling Green University to play ball and had a program specifically for special needs students for him to leave there with a degree. So, we're thinking that's where he's going to go to school. Last minute, he decided that he wanted to go to University of Cincinnati where I went. And I told him, "Jeroy, that's not the school you need to be going to. Cincinnati only had 10,000 students there during the day time, but--I mean at night, but during the day it had 45,000-50,000 students walking around that university. That's—with the problems you have, you don't need to be there. So, it didn't work out for him there. It didn't work out for him when he went to—you might have heard—Jones, Jones Community College down in some part of Mississippi. He went there for awhile. He went to one in Maryland. I can't think of the name of it now. He ended up going to three schools and he didn't get any type of offers as far as going pro ball, so he walked on at Ohio State. And based off of that, he got a try out that he went to Indianapolis to try out. He ran the 40, he ran the 40 but fell and broke his wrist in three places.

Dudley: Oh my goodness.

Gaines: So, that ended that. So he ended up getting into bodybuilding and he also cuts hair. One in Florida. They both live in very good looking—they're wealthy—they're living okay lives. My one son in Florida, Gerald, he has two children. His youngest was born less than a month ago. Now Jeroy, has three—has twin girls, and also has my oldest grandson. So that's kind of like my life in a nutshell. You know?

Dudley: Ok. Can we talk a little bit about Tennessee Tech? A little bit more about Tennessee Tech?

Gaines: Ok, what do you want? Like I say, Tennessee Tech was not a place that I loved being.

Dudley: Right.

Gaines: It's only a few places—only a few students that I hung out with there. Mainly they basically was football players. And we did know some of the locals there. But, just from where it was located, I did not enjoy my time there. Now, if you bring me there under false pretenses and then flip the script on me, I don't want to be there anyway.

Dudley: Right. And that's basically what I want to talk about—if you don't mind talking about it. Kinda like, how many Blacks were on the football team?

Gaines: Eight. It was eight of us.

Dudley: Eight of you.

Gaines: Well actually, nine.

Dudley: Nine.

Gaines: But, we had one guy by the name of Elois Grooms who didn't hang around us and he was mixed. So, they were trying to say that the eight of us that were kicked off the team, only one of us stayed. We didn't count Elois as one of us, because Elois was integrated into the white community. He didn't hang with us. So they tried to make it seem like we all boycotted, and he was the only one that stayed.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: And Elois ended up getting drafted by the Saints. He played a few years with the Saints. But we never counted him as one of us.

Dudley: Right. So, as far as the Cookeville community, would you call it diverse or not diverse back in that time?

Gaines: Not diverse at all. There was a big separation. It was as segregated as segregated could get.

Dudley: Yeah. And it's basically the same way now.

00:35:00 **Gaines:** I was getting ready to say—the isolation of being up in them mountains, it's going to stay that way.

Dudley: Yeah, yeah.

Gaines: And you got all of this negative influence up there from the KKK and all of that. Which is like, at any time, they can come in, at Cookeville with no problem. But like I said, one little town that was next to Cookeville, they had a sign up that said “if you're black, don't get caught in this town after dark.” That's not a good feeling.

Dudley: Was it Sparta or Baxter?

Gaines: It was one of—it might have been Sparta. It was one little town that was close by, it was one little town that was close by.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: But, it's just like you could see the separation as far as the campus was concerned, as far as the community was concerned. Of Cookeville.

Dudley: How was the professors back then?

Gaines: Well, I did my work and left, that's it. Once I knew I wasn't going to be there, I didn't want to keep my grades up and get out of there. But you saw a lot of racism there, too. And like I said, you going to bring me there under false pretenses and tell me that you're going to have me, you got a job for me. My job was to—they were doing remodeling, construction work in the stadium. And I'm there from morning to night throwing cinderblocks up to an old redneck chewing chewing tobacco. And I'm throwing the blocks up to him.

Dudley: *Up* to him?

Gaines: Up to him, right. As he's doing what he's doing.

Dudley: So they was using your talents, your athletic ability for working hard.

Gaines: Yes, yes.

Dudley: Doing hard labor.

Gaines: You have me a job? Ok, I'm going. You know how it is with college students.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: You don't have money anyway.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: And I can have a job? But, and then on top of that, I get there, and you really don't have a place for me to stay. I'm going from one person's room to another person's room. I'm being fed with other, the football players bringing me meals from the lunch room. So, you didn't take care of me.

Dudley: Ohhh. The white players was bringing you food?

Gaines: Nah nah nah, the Black players. The white players—the Black players. The other seven—cause I made eight, we had seven others on the team before I got there. Now they would bring food to me like John, like Paul, Jay, and some of the other ball players, you know. As far as—and they never came to check on me to see how I was doing out of the staff. It was like I was out there fending for myself. And

like I said, I got that first little check, and I told them “I’m going home. When the next, when the quarter start, I’ll be back. But I’m not staying here doing this.”

Dudley: Right. Ok.

Gaines: And of course, trainers making sure that you couldn’t half walk, sore, tired, injured—they still put you out on that football field. It was like I said and the Monday of the open forum to the president of the university, I thought was a good thing. But then again, when we go state our grievances about what we wanted done as far as the Black tennis player being left in Johnson City, Tennessee. And nothing, from my understanding nothing ever happened from that. They take our equipment up, some of us were able to get scholarships to go to other schools, but some of us were never able to play ball anymore. So, you’ve taken our education away from us.

Dudley: Right.

Gaines: It wasn’t a boycott. We didn’t boycott, we just wanted something done about the problem. And that problem was never addressed. It’s like things go on as usual, you know “hey, niggers going to raise hell for a little while, but they going to stop.”

Dudley: Absolutely. Yeah.

Gaines: Now how would, we asked the coach, “how would you feel if coach would have left your son or your child 200 miles away from school and you give him five dollars and tell him to get back the best way he could. And you say I’m doing this because you’re not playing up to the best of your ability. But you’re the number one, he’s the number one seed on the whole team.

Dudley: I feel like that was distasteful.

00:40:00

Gaines: Yes, very much. And he came back and told us. And you know, that’s when we decided to do something about it. But you know how it is, the powers that be think that “Oh, you Black, so you niggers. We going to let you in and give you a free education. Y’all think y’all can boss—you can tell us what we need to do?” And like I said, not one coach had one conversation with us about anything.

Dudley: No conversation, that’s—

Gaines: No conversation.

Dudley: No conversation, that’s important. That’s a key word: no conversation.

Gaines: Didn’t have any conversation from the head coach down to the trainer. It’s like ok, we got tossed aside and that was it. And my whole thing—you did me a favor. I don’t want to be here anyway.

Dudley: Right.

Gaines: But then again, that's my perception. But then again, we had other kids's scholarships that were taken away that were not able to get scholarships somewhere else.

Dudley: What would you--what advice would you give the current minorities attending Tennessee Tech?

Gaines: Well, what I would say to them would be that—make sure that's the school that you really want to be, because you're going to have obstacles placed in front of you. Like you said, a lot of things that happened back then are still happening to this day.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: So make sure that you are able to handle the abuse that might come your way, whether its from the university, or from your teachers—I mean your professors, or whomever. But you are going to experience it there. You are going to experience it. And once you leave, and once you leave that campus and you're out in the public, Joe Blow ride by you and you don't know what's going to happen. It's like using the instance of when the Black guy was in, was walking down the street, and they came up with a truck and they decide to chain you on the back of the truck. Some part of Texas.

Dudley: Jasper.

Gaines: Yeah. All the man is doing is just walking. So, you know nothing has changed nothing, nothing has changed. It's still the same old same old thing. So, you better be ready, because don't think that you're just going to go there and come for your academics. You got other things to worry about besides your academics. Just make sure that's a place that you really want to be.

Dudley: Right.

Gaines: And I noticed, and I noticed the other night that with the basketball team, they were playing Indiana University. I saw that for a little while. And I saw four to five or whatever with Black on the, on the basketball team. I said “ok, so they still doing the same thing they've been doing.” I'm just wondering has anything changed but you, you solidified that by telling me nothing basically has changed. So, I would say if you're interested in attending that university, you better be ready to deal with more than just academics.

Dudley: I think it's like less than five percent Blacks here.

Gaines: Right!

Dudley: In Cookeville, in Cookeville.

Gaines: There you go! And they all live in that same little old area. That same little area. That's the way it was back then and you know you got to know some of the some of the black town people. But, when you speak with them you didn't know the way you talking to somebody that was black or somebody that was white, cause they sound just alike.

Dudley: And a lot of the Black people that you see they probably won't even say anything to you when you speak to them.

Gaines: Well no, once, cause—

Dudley: they—

Gaines: Don't, they ostracize—

Dudley: Right.

Gaines: You're outside of them.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: But, who to know why they are not saying anything. They may have repercussion they're going to have to suffer because of that. “Oh, you want to, oh y'all want to talk them up with these niggers?” Because you never know in that and that and then it's a small little community anyway.

Dudley: And this is what me and my wife will talk about and experience.

Gaines: Yeah, yeah.

Dudley: We speak and they hardly--it's like they don't want to speak. It's like they're afraid to speak.

Gaines: There you go! Because I'm saying they don't know what's going to happen to them and that's a that's a that's a that's a hell of a way to live.

Dudley: Right.

Gaines: You can't exercise your right to speak to someone when you know where, I'm from we all speak to everybody. I don't care—

Dudley: Right, absolutely.

Gaines: --you know me or not. I'm gonna speak to you. But to be afraid to speak to someone oh, oh they go "we don't we don't we don't talk to the to the students that go to Tech." "We don't talk to them."

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: When, when it's supposed to be you're there as a student to help hopefully trying to improve some of the condition of the community where Black people live there. But, it makes you makes you wonder do you really want to do this?

Dudley: Right.

00:45:00

Gaines: As, like you like you're saying, they don't say nothing to you, to you from-- they no difference between somebody that go to that school and someone that doesn't. And like you say, less than five—

Dudley: I can tell, too. I can tell, too.

Gaines: Yeah, you can tell you tell the way they look at you. And then like you say the, the enrollment hasn't changed. It was probably, it was probably, it was less than five percent back when I was there

Dudley: Oh, that's interesting.

Gaines: And everybody that was there basically were there on academic scholarship. I mean athletic scholarship.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: We had the kid that was from Florida running track. We had the tennis player up from another part of Tennessee that was there. You had eight football players that were there. What else--the baseball player. The basketball players. And, and we made up a majority of the Black population that was there. The girls' basketball team have had, had one or two girls that played ball. So, we were the ones that basically they were bringing in here, but as far as student was concerned, no. And I met and I wonder does people do, doing that consciously by not wanting to come to that school because they don't want, they don't want to go to Tennessee Tech.

Dudley: That's, that's a good question, too.

Gaines: Because you're stuck in between Asheville and Knoxville up in them damn little mountains where those, those white folks can do whatever they want to do up there.

Dudley: So one of the questions I, I have too about you feeling safe at Tennessee Tech, but, well I could see it—

Gaines: I could tell you shit--

Dudley: --I can sense that you was not safe going off the campus of Tennessee Tech.

Gaines: No, the thing about it we did go off campus, though.

Dudley: Oh, did you?

Gaines: But, there was only one little place that was a little bar that was--I forgot the name of the little bar, probably not there anymore--that's the only place that we went to off campus. But as far as, because--

Dudley: What's the name of that bar, I think that bar is still there...

Gaines: Might, only one little bar where everybody go to.\

Dudley: Right there across the railroad tracks as they will say. Ah...

Gaines: And like I said, that's the place that they took us to when they recruited us there.

Dudley: I can't remember because it closed down, it was closed down when I was here but when I initially got here, but now it's open.

Gaines: Ok, ok—

Dudley: I can't remember that name, man.

Gaines: --that's the place that's the only place where we went to--

Dudley: Yeah, I know what you're talking about.

Gaines: Any other place that we went to--

Dudley: It was a Black guy that owned it.

Gaines: Yeah, Black guy own it.

Dudley: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Gaines: And the only other places for as going out we would either go to Nashville—not necessarily Knoxville—we would go to Nashville.

Dudley: Nashville.

Gaines: But, but that was the only place we went to within the community. We stayed on the campus.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: You might wander across the street and go to a drugstore or something but other than that, you back you back within the walls of that university. Which you know you feel safe even though I'm an I I'm an adventurer but you got to be careful with you, you got to be aware of where you are. Even my JUCO where I went to was, was the, the town was the school. The junior college I went to. But, we, we had a, a better personal relationship with the people in town than what they have in Cookeville. And that was only in Virginia. But, like I said we did not do a lot of wandering around in, in Cookeville we went to—we got out we, we went out of town we went to Knoxville not necessarily Knoxville, but Nashville.

Dudley: Nashville.

Gaines: That was it. Nashville seemed to be a little more friendly than Knoxville was. Now, as far as the school is concerned are you looking at going back once, once hopefully this, this blows over?

Dudley: Well, I'm currently a senior at Tech.

Gaines: That's right, that's right.

Dudley: I supposed to graduate during the summer of 2021.

Gaines: Ok.

Dudley: With my Bachelors in Manufacturing Engineering Technology

Gaines: Right, I got you. I got you.

Dudley: Yeah. Yes, I I can say that it has been an experience—

Gaines: Yeah.

00:50:00 **Dudley:** --in Cookeville. It's been a better experience *at* Tech, but I have some problems and concerns here in Cookeville.

Gaines: There you go, that in the city of the whole city as a whole.

Dudley: Yeah, in the city as a whole. I, I feel comfortable at Tennessee Tech and I enjoy the professors because most of the professors that I've had they've, they've helped, help the students.

Gaines: Ok.

Dudley: But it's, it's just mainly just Cookeville. Non-diverse community.

Gaines: There you go, there you go. Like I said, other than that one little place where we went to, would be going to, we didn't really venture off the campus very much.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: And I think with me being a football player, we'll we sometimes can be a little more adventurous than others.

Dudley: Right.

Gaines: Because we all, we and we never went by ourselves. We always was in a pack, at least four or five of us.

Dudley: In a pack, yeah.

Gaines: Yeah. But like I said I didn't have any problem with any of my professors when I was there. Like you said, my whole thing was to finish that one quarter and get out of here once I realized I was gonna-- I no, no longer part of the football team, it's time to get out of here.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: And I, so it still is it's still as separated as it was when I was there.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: Now did you get it, did you get a filled up? Have y'all been able to get quite a few guys to want to interview for this?

Dudley: Yes, we've got men and women. I think it's been 12.

Gaines: Ok.

Dudley: Most of them are recent graduates. I, I would say probably--let me look at, see what I got... I would say the latest of course the latest was, was you because you went there in '72 and '73.

Gaines: Yeah. I was there--I'm not 73. Only spring I, I left there I got up there in February of '73 and I went through the, the quarter the, the quarter '73 and then and then I went home and I went to Cincinnati in July of '73.

Dudley: Yes.

Gaines: Offseason of '73.

Dudley: Yeah. We had somebody from '79 but from, from '79--I don't think we have anybody from 1979 to 1991.

Gaines: Ok.

Dudley: I think the Black Cultural Center came, I believe like in the early 2000s. I think.

Gaines: Ok.

Dudley: But, this is what this is for. It's, it's 30 years of it.

Gaines: Ok

Dudley: Well, 30 years will be 1990, so.

Gaines: Now other than myself is anybody from that period that when we got kicked off the team other than myself anybody else you been able to interview?

Dudley: No, sir.

Gaines: What?

Dudley: Nope. Nope.

Gaines: I'm gonna call--let me see, let me see if Jay Bonds at home, ok?

Dudley: Yeah, I think somebody they mentioned. They mentioned a Jay Bonds. But I don't think they could get a hold to him.

Gaines: I, I think. I mean let me check right now but I had the phone number.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: Cause he was there for—Jay was there for like two years. Paul, Paul is deceased so you really couldn't talk to him. Jay, Jay...

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: Let me see. Let me see, Jay still here, let me see. Hopefully he still had the same number.

Dudley: Yeah, I could pass that on to Miss Hannah.

Gaines: Oh yes, may I speak to Jay Bonds? Jay, what's wrong with you man? Yeah, same as always, right? Hey, guess what, man, guess what. You're listening. You know how we went to Tech, Tennessee Tech? Right, well they trying to interview guys that went to Tech at the time when we got kicked off the freaking team. And I've been the only one that they've been able to talk to from that time period. So, I'm talking to one of the gentlemen now. And I would say let me call Jay and see if Jay might be interested in wanting to speak with you in regards to his time at Tech. Now, would you be interested in that? Ok. I want, I'm gonna give you, I'm gonna give him your number, ok? And his name is his name is Jerone Dudley. Ok? No, he he's in he coming, he's calling from--you in, you're in Dallas, right?

Dudley: Cookeville, Cookeville.

Gaines: I know you in Kansas. I already know where you are. You're in Cookeville right now?

Dudley: Yes, sir.

00:55:00

Gaines: Ok, he's in Cookville. But, but, but his phone his phone is going to have a Dallas area code. A Texas area code. Ok. but I'm gonna give him your number. So, how's everything going? I know that's right. I know that's right. I told him I said "Paul's deceased. I can't let you talk—Paul can't talk." I said "only person I know is Jay. Jay the only one that I keep up with." Yeah. But I'm--yep but I'm gonna give him your number, ok, Jay? All right, sounds good. His name is Jerone Dudley. Yeah. I've been doing ok, but I'm gonna call you back later. Today being Friday-- I'm gonna call you over the weekend, ok? Alright, Jay, take care. Alright. Ok, bye. What you say?

[Unidentified third person speaks to Gaines in his location]

Gaines: I'm going to be on here maybe—well, how much longer we gonna be on here, Jerone?

Dudley: We can go ahead and end it. But my last question will be what was your what was your major? What was it?

Gaines: My major was--well when I was at Tech—

Dudley: At Tech.

Gaines: --my major was sociology.

Dudley: Sociology. Ok.

Gaines: Yeah, cause I was gonna, I was looking at trying to become a high school sociology teacher.

Dudley: Ok, all right.

Gaines: But when I went to Cincinnati, I also started out as a sociology major. But I ended up going to College of Community Service and I switched to healthcare administration.

Dudley: Ok, alright. Ok.

Gaines: That's what I ended up getting my, my Bachelor's—my BS in.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: Bachelor in Science in. Ok?

Dudley: Alright.

Gaines: But let me give you Jay's number, Ok.

Dudley: Ok. Alright, that'll be fine.

Gaines: Name is Jay Bonds.

Dudley: J-A-Y?

Gaines: J-Y Bonds: B-O-N-D-S. And Jay's number is [Number redacted for privacy]

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: [Number redacted for privacy]

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: Ok? Cause Jay was there for--Jay was there for two years.

Dudley: Longer than what—

Gaines: We ended up going to Cincinnati. We had two years left. Well, we got, we got red shirted a year then we were able to [?] for the last two years. But Jay can give you a lot more in-depth information than I could on that. But like I say, as far as the teachers were concerned everybody was more or less supportive on the campus. It just when like you say it's getting off that bad boy.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: Once you get out of it's like hey, dog-eat-dog right there. And it's like the little community of Black that was there they stayed to themselves and they didn't they didn't intermingle with us very much. We knew some of the girls because you know you know how it is in college, college guys are. Some of the girls gonna be coming to this college and then pl--and stuff like that.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: But, as far as the whole—

Dudley: Ok. So, Mr. Gaines, I appreciate your candor

Gaines: Not a problem. Not a problem.

Dudley: And appreciate all your, all your honesty and, and I um I'm, I'm very sorry for what you had to go through.

Gaines: But ok man--

Dudley: It's something that you had to go to, to make it easier for us.

Gaines: I, my hometown was just as bad in South Carolina. So, I think just from that, that had already prepared me to go to a school such as that. They've been with me being raised up in South Carolina. Now, me coming from the North—

Dudley: It'd have been totally different.

Gaines: --or from the Midwest, or from the West Coast, it had been a culture shock.

Dudley: Right, been a culture shock.

Gaines: Cause right there you, you're used to intermingling with everybody else.

Dudley: Yeah.

Gaines: It's like when even when I went to Cincinnati—to tell you how it was with Cincinnati—even though we had a large amount of ball players, Black ball players there when we went to eat, Blacks sit by themselves and the whites would sit by

themselves. You might have a white, one or two white guys sitting with the Black players. You may have one or two Black guys sitting with the Black with the white players even because majority of us had either they were from Ohio down, majority of them. So you know we had already just said that that perceived notion in your head about separation.

Dudley: Right.

Gaines: It even occurred there. But then again, that was a whole different time frame back in the 70s.

Dudley: Ok.

Gaines: Yeah. But give Jay a call and, and, and Jay'll, Jay'll be candid with you, too.

Dudley: Ok. Good. I will pass that along to the administrator of this project and hopefully she can get in contact with him.

Gaines: Ok. That's his number and, and, and just let him know that—well, as you already know who here that name Jay Bonds and I gave you the number. So, and if they're telling that tell her there's any problem in trying to contact just let me know, ok?

Dudley: Ok. Thank you, Mr. Gaines.

Gaines: Well you take care, man.

Dudley: Alright, have a good weekend, ok.

Gaines: You, too.

Dudley: All right.

Gaines: Bye.

Dudley: Bye.

End of transcript.