

Interviewee: Lanzing, Andrew
Interviewer: Jennifer Lanzing
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Lanzing: When and where were you born?

ALanzing: I was born April 20, 1961 in Largo, FL.

Lanzing: How old were you when you moved to Avon Park?

ALanzing: I was about eight years old.

Lanzing: Do you think that the racism in Florida during your childhood was more overt or subtle?

ALanzing: I suppose it was more subtle, but there were certainly overt actions that I witnessed growing up.

Lanzing: What overt actions do you remember?

ALanzing: Oh, I remember in Avon Park, there's a section of town that was known as, still is today as far as I know, known as the Colored Quarters, and it was the one area in town that all blacks lived in. We lived on the border, probably 3 blocks, 3 streets away, from that, and outside of the Quarters, I don't recall there ever being any black family that lived anywhere else. There was certainly racism at school, a lot of the white kids called black kids niggers, and all sorts of racial epithets were used. There were often when I first moved there, the schools had only been integrated for maybe 2 or 3 years, and there were probably white on black fights at least one almost every day. At least, it seemed like that to me.

Lanzing: Did you ever attend a segregated school?

ALanzing: No.

Lanzing: Which schools in Avon Park did you go to?

ALanzing: I went to Avon Park Elementary, Avon Park Middle School, and Avon Park High School. It's a very small town.

Lanzing: Did you have any friends who were black?

ALanzing: I did have several friends that were black. As I said, I grew up just on the border, and we were certainly not, we were lower middle class. We moved to Avon Park because my father had been sent to the prison out there in Avon Park. He had stolen some money from a company he worked for. So, we weren't exactly what you would call well off. And our home was located, as I said, kind of on the border of the white area and the black area, and also across the street from the school, which had a basketball court. My brothers and I were all very much into sports, so through that I had many associations with blacks and Hispanics.

Lanzing: Were you ever mistreated by other white children at school because you were friends with blacks?

ALanzing: I was. The only real one that I would point to that I would say stood out was again, probably a year after we moved to Avon Park, I met a black kid playing basketball, and we were playing ball late into the evening, and I asked him to spend the night with me, and he did. And when I got to school the next day, I was called nigger lover by several of the students, many that I had considered my friend at the time. That always stuck with me, that A) that it even made it the rounds in less than a night that I had anybody spending the night with me, much less that I had a black friend spending the night with me. That one definitely has always stuck with me.

Lanzing: Did it occur to you when you asked him to stay the night that it would be an issue?

ALanzing: It didn't occur to me really. But I do also remember, we went to his house first in the Quarters to get his parents' permission, and I do remember when we were standing there asking him, the look on his father's face, I could tell that it was a problem at his end as well. It didn't just end up being a problem for whites. It was kind of a dual situation there.

Lanzing: I know that you were very much involved in sports all through your childhood. Did you ever play on teams that were both whites and blacks?

ALanzing: Every team I ever played on had whites and blacks on it.

Lanzing: Were blacks ever mistreated or treated differently than the whites while playing?

ALanzing: Not while playing. That's the one area, and still to this day, that everybody is pretty much treated equally. The worst I could say is perhaps there might have been somebody that might have been a little bit better at one position than another, but say a quarterback, but maybe a white always was a quarterback in Avon Park, but that would probably be the extent of it. On the field, everybody was treated the same. You earned your positions, and you earned your assignments, and you were treated accordingly how you performed, not what your color was.

Lanzing: So, it was more important to win the game than it was to support whites over

blacks?

ALanzing: Definitely.

Lanzing: Your mother mentioned some occasions where she saw neighborhood white children teasing or making fun of black children. Do you remember any instance by other white children you saw picking on black children?

ALanzing: Well, as I said, there were fights all the time at the various schools. I mean, even all the way through high school, although it certainly was worse in the beginning. After the first two years of integration, I would say that it got more normal so there weren't quite as many daily problems, but yeah, to my knowledge, I can't remember any of the fights or any of the instances in classroom that were initiated by the black students. It was always one of the white kids that either said something to the black kid or pushed him or was egging him on or whatever that erupted into a fight, so yeah, I mean there were lots of instances of antagonism and trying to bait the other person.

Lanzing: Do you remember any adults in your neighborhood ever saying anything negative in your presence about blacks?

ALanzing: Oh, sure. I mean, the use of the word 'nigger' or 'coon' or whatever was very common place, especially with some of the older parents of my friends, and my friends didn't tend to use those words, but you could certainly sense that they were raised that way, and they had racist feelings about blacks even if they didn't say the exact words that their parents did.

Lanzing: Did your parents ever have any black friends?

ALanzing: Not that I'm aware of Now they did at work, work associations. And my mother and father always took great pains to raise us to treat everyone equal, but I don't recall many black friends that my parents had.

Lanzing: Do you remember ever seeing KKK members in Avon Park?

ALanzing: Yes. There were at least two occasions early, now that was like '69, '70, '71 where the KKK actually had marches in Avon Park downtown. I mean, they were sanctioned events in the park, so we saw that. And there were certainly, even though I never saw them, every once in a while, when you got to school, the word would be around that there was a rally the previous night out at someone's home or out in the orange groves or wherever it may be that there was a rally that was held in the area.

Lanzing: Did you ever know anyone that you knew was a member of the KKK?

ALanzing: No. Many people that I assumed were, and that people mentioned and talked

about as being, but nobody that I knew for sure was.

Lanzing: When you saw the KKK members, did you ever see them doing any violence or was it just marching?

ALanzing: Just marching and speaking.

Lanzing: Was this surprising to you or your family when you first saw that?

ALanzing: At the first exposure, I grew up in St. Petersburg and certainly there's racism there, as anywhere at the time, I'm quite sure, but you just didn't see it. At least, I didn't see it, only being eight, seven, eight, nine years old. So, when I got to Avon Park, and it wasn't hidden at all. It was right there. It was certainly something that I had to get used to.

Lanzing: Do you think that maybe was a difference between urban and rural areas?

ALanzing: I think that's a great deal what it is. And not only urban and rural, but Avon Park is a fairly homogeneous population. I mean, they've all been raised there generations back. Whereas, St. Petersburg, you have a large influx of Northern blood that comes in, and it's a more transient population. So, it's more of a melting pot, I guess is what I'm trying to say, than Avon Park was. It definitely reflected that.

Lanzing: When you went around in public, did you ever see any of the whites only or coloreds only signs?

ALanzing: I didn't. I believe that they had all been removed by the time I was growing up there. I certainly don't recall seeing any. But having said that, there were virtually, any number of places, restaurants and that sort of thing, where if you were black, you just didn't go in. And if you were white, you knew that there weren't going to be any blacks in there. So, it was just an unspoken situation that it doesn't matter whether there was a sign that said it. It was pretty much enforced by agreement between the blacks and the whites.

Lanzing: Did you ever have any instances where blacks tried to use a restaurant or public facility that was generally understood to be whites only?

ALanzing: Not that I'm aware of.

Lanzing: Did you ever see anyone protesting or campaigning for civil rights?

ALanzing: I don't think so. I mean, certainly we talked about it in the schools and so forth, but I don't remember any instances of actual political marches or speeches or what have you that went on in the town.

Lanzing: Did you ever watch that on the news?

ALanzing: Oh, I watched the news all the time. I was, and still am, a big history buff, but back then, I watched television and was well aware of Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement, and Watergate, and everything that happened in that era, so yes, I was well, even at nine and ten, I was pretty well versed in everything that was going on at the time.

Lanzing: Did you ever hear your parents or other adults in Avon Park commenting on the civil rights movement?

ALanzing: Sure. Again, my parents were very outspoken in favor of civil rights, and again, always taught us that everyone was to be treated on their merit and the same, but I also had conversations even with my own fellow classmates and people my age, as well as their parents and stuff. When we go to baseball games, and everyone's sitting around and you're hearing the conversation that were definitely not in favor of civil rights.

Lanzing: How did segregation affect you and how you viewed your social surroundings?

ALanzing: Well, I don't believe that I was too affected by segregation as I said, but when I went to school in St. Petersburg, at least from the time I can remember, first grade, second grade, it was an integrated situation. And when I moved to Avon Park, that same thing was there. So, I don't believe that I was adversely affected by segregation because by the time I was in school, it was fairly integrated.

Lanzing: How did the racial tensions affect you?

ALanzing: That was always right on the surface. And even going back to what you had brought up earlier about were people treated differently in sports, well, they weren't, but as soon as you stepped off the field, that ended. I mean, no matter how good, I had friends and so did other white players, and on the field, they were the best buddies. They might be the two starting line backers, and they did everything together on the field, and they kept the defense. As soon as you walked off the field, everybody went their own way. I mean, you may associate with them and say hi or whatever during school time and while you're in the classroom or on campus or playing sports, but there really was no mixing. When we went out to parties, and especially in high school and what have you, there were no blacks that came out with us. It was whites only party, and the blacks had their social gatherings, and I wouldn't say it was a lot of tension, but it was always on the surface that whites and blacks didn't really mix.

Lanzing: Was that difficult for you to maintain black friendships if you couldn't invite them to go with you and your white friends?

ALanzing: It was, and not only did I not feel comfortable inviting them to certain places, I don't think they felt very comfortable. If you did invite them, they wouldn't have felt comfortable

coming, and I wouldn't have felt comfortable inviting them. So, again, it kind of works both ways. If you're raised in that environment, both sides know what's easiest is just to keep things the way they are and not try to force yourself into the one or the other's camp.

Lanzing: Do you think that your mom had to struggle to overcome racism in the area to teach her children that that was not proper?

ALanzing: Well, fortunately, again, we moved there late, and I was the eighth of nine children. So, several of my other brothers and sisters, by the time we moved to Avon Park, were already in college and out of the house. And the other ones were certainly older and already in high school and middle school. So, my parents had laid a pretty good foundation for us, I think, by the time we got to Avon Park, it would have been very difficult for that environment to have changed what my parents had already started. So, I don't think it was as difficult as it could have been had we been born and raised in Avon Park, and my parents had those feelings and tried to instill that in us when at the exact same time, we're being bombarded by exactly the opposite message from the rest of the community that we lived in.

Lanzing: When you heard negative racial comments around you, did you ever say anything to the people who said them, such as your white friends, or were you a little bit too afraid to make a stand?

ALanzing: For the most part, I probably didn't say much at all. There were times, if it was something outrageous that I thought somebody was saying or they were coming down on the guy as a person, not necessarily on their race, then I would certainly speak up. But I'm not, I won't sit here and say I defended every instance that was thrown at me. When you're nine, ten, eleven, fourteen, fifteen, there's a lot of peer pressure, and that's something that I had to deal with, and there's instances now where I wish I had said something, but I didn't at the time.

Lanzing: After desegregation, do you think that the racism became more subtle?

ALanzing: Oh, I definitely think that it had to. Just the nature of it, that's going to be the law of the land, but people aren't willing to change, then it has to somewhat go underground, and it is going to be more subtle. And it still is today. Now, I think as the years have gone by, it's always gotten a little better and more and more whites are more comfortable with that as the older generation gets older and dies, and the newer generation is more able to make better decisions, better judgments and gauging, but there is still a lot of racism in this country. It's really not below the surface. It's there, and everyone knows it. It's there, and I think it'll be a long, long time before the vestiges of it are done away with. It's not going to be anytime in the next one or two hundred years I don't think.

Lanzing: Did you ever see any interracial couples, interracial dating?

ALanzing: I did. I had a little bit of experience with that, with the dating aspect, just with

students in high school. I can recall two instances, and both of them took a great deal of heat from it. One guy was in a couple of fights because he was dating a white girl, and the other instance was a white guy dating a black girl, and he got a lot of abuse too from both blacks and whites. Again, none of these happened, are all one-sided just because of the nature of it, both blacks and whites looked at that at that time as a bad thing. And still, again, to this day. My nephew is married to a black girl, and I know that, just when talking to my sister, his mother, that there are people that she knows that are white and people on her side of the family that weren't in favor of them getting married. It may be a little better today, but it's always again, going to be there, and I certainly witnessed it a little bit growing up.

Lanzing: Did you think it made a difference if the man was white or black?

ALanzing: I guess maybe the severity of it, but it was looked down upon either way, but just viscerally, a white woman dating a black man makes more of an impact on a white person than it does vice versa. I just think that's human nature is more to be the case. It's not quite offensive as a white man dating a black woman.

Lanzing: You mentioned that they got a lot of heat for their interracial dating. Can you elaborate on that and be more specific?

ALanzing: Well, there were things said to them at school, and at least, with the black guy that was dating the white woman, he was in a couple of fights, fist fights, because of it, where different guys took exception to it and decided to teach him a lesson about dating a white woman. To my knowledge, neither one of those relationships lasted very long.

Lanzing: So it was more than just verbal abuse?

ALanzing: Oh, it was definitely more than just verbal.

Lanzing: When you got to Florida State University, did you continue to see racism there as well?

ALanzing: Again, not as much. It's a big, urban school with students from all over the country. But I believe, I know that there is racism everywhere. It's mostly behind someone's back or what they'll say when it's just whites around. It was certainly at Florida State as well as any place else. It wasn't overt, it wasn't people walking around calling people nigger this and getting in fights and stuff. And college campuses by their very nature are a lot more liberal, so there was a lot more toleration, but I can tell you there were certainly racist comments made when there weren't any blacks around.

Lanzing: Did you see any more activism at Florida State for civil rights?

ALanzing: There was a great deal of activism. Now, that was '79, '80, '81, '82. So, there

wasn't as much demonstrations about civil rights, voting rights, and that sort of thing, but there was definitely activity about being treated equal, getting equal pay, having access to jobs, that sort of thing. And there was a lot of black organizations, black sororities, black fraternities that had a presence on campus as well. You definitely saw more activism than you would have seen in Avon Park.

Lanzing: How do you think that the two areas of Florida differed?

ALanzing: Well, if you're just talking about the campus and the school, it's a great deal of difference. Basically, for most of the reasons I just mentioned, but the outlying city of Tallahassee, and being the state capital, was historically one of the [most] racist places in Florida, and just because it was 1979 or 1980 didn't really change. Rural Tallahassee is about the same as rural Avon Park, perhaps a little bigger, but the same type of Florida crackers that have lived there forever and generations is there so that same attitude is as prevalent in that city as it is in Avon Park. Now, the campus itself was obviously a different socioeconomic makeup, different attitudes and so forth. You got to draw a differentiation between the campus and what I had to deal with and got to deal with than say someone who lived in the city of Tallahassee.

Lanzing: I know that while you were at Florida State, there were instances of homophobia. Do you think that prejudice towards gay people tended to surpass prejudice towards blacks?

ALanzing: Well, I don't know that it surpassed it, but it was certainly more open and tolerated. And that directive came from blacks and whites and as well as anybody else that wasn't gay. Obviously, there's the somewhat famous story of the guy, my first year at Florida State, they put it up as joke to have him run for Homecoming Queen, and he ended up winning, and he was a homosexual, and it made newspapers all over America. He got basically ran out of town on a rail. I mean, he suffered endless amounts of abuse, physical, mental, taunting, you name it, and he suffered it, and none of hidden. It was all right out there for everyone to see, and he did eventually end up leaving Tallahassee, so anti-gay and lesbian attitudes, people that had them, really didn't have to hide them very much.

Lanzing: What happened to him, at that time, wouldn't have been acceptable to have been done to a black man?

ALanzing: No, oh no. Not at all.

Lanzing: Is there anything that you want to add about racism in Florida at the time?

ALanzing: Other than to say, again, I was very young, so I certainly don't know what the rest of the world was like, but comparing it now to then, there is a great deal of racism in Florida today, and in the United States and around the world. I don't know what the solution is as I have said before, whether it's human nature or it's cultivated in each culture, everybody, every culture has divisions within it where one group, either religious or ethnic or whatever, has to have

problems and attempt to get over on the other, and that's just the way that is always has been since the dawn of man as best as I can tell, and I don't see that that's changed. We bury a lot of stuff: we make a lot of platitudes about how everyone should be treated equal and so forth, but we all know that that's not the case. Both black and white. It may be better, certainly it's better than the way it was, but that inner core of racism within most of us is still there, and at the worst of times, it tends to come out. Especially when pressure situations, economic situations, or whatever are putting a strain on the community, you will see it come to the surface even more. Again, it's better than it was twenty, thirty years ago, but it's not anywhere near where it should be.

Lanzing: Do you think Avon Park has come a long way in the last thirty years?

ALanzing: Well, I'd like to think so, but probably not. It's still a fairly isolated community. Now, I haven't been back there in years, so I can't really speak to the day to day. But I live here in Bradenton, and this town is very racist. It is. The community attitudes are that way, and we are certainly much more an intermingled community. We have Hispanics, Chinese, Latinos, blacks, whites, various Europeans, Russian, you name it, we have it here, and they don't have that in Avon Park to a very great degree any way. So it would be very hard for me to imagine that it's much better over there than it is here, and it's fairly bad here.

Lanzing: Well, thank you for taking the time to do this interview.

ALanzing: You're very welcome.

The End