

**Interviewee:** Goff, Hilda Rebecca  
**Interviewer:** Katherine Cox  
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**Cox:** I understand that you grew up on 48 acres of land in Ocala, Florida and that your mother gave birth to you in your home, so I guess you must have a special connection with it. Please give a brief description of this house that you grew up in.

**Goff:** Oh, I loved it. We loved living with all that land. I guess you'd call it a Florida Cracker house. Windows everywhere - where there was always a breeze. And of course we didn't have air-conditioning, but we always had electricity. 'We had one bathroom with three doors. You could go down to a hall to the bathroom or you could come from the two bedrooms to the bathroom.

**Cox:** Did you have electricity in this house?

**Goff:** Always had electricity.

**Cox:** Was that common in Ocala during the time?

**Goff:** No, I think maybe we had more, because a lot in our neighborhood just had out houses. But my father came from England and they had started a business - moving business. So, people were always moving.

**Cox:** Please give us your father's full name for reference.

**Goff:** Eric John Collier [Born September 1, 1887 in London, England]

**Cox:** And your mother was born in the United States, correct?

**Goff:** In Louvale, Georgia.

**Cox:** What was her full name?

**Goff:** Julia Rebecca Meadows Collier [Born November 29,1893]

**Cox:** And just for clarification, your sister's name is Frances. When was she born?

**Goff:** I think 1923. [September 17, 1923]

**Cox:** She was your older sister. And then you have a younger brother named Jack.

What is his full name?

**Goff:** His name is Eric John Collier, Jr. [Born November 12, 1928]. And I'm the magic link between the oldest and the youngest. [smiles and laughs]

**Cox:** How many years apart are you and Jack?

**Goff:** He's born in 1928. Its probably almost three years.

**Cox:** When you grew up in Ocala during the Great Depression, around what year do you suppose your parents settled in Ocala.

**Goff:** My grandfather drowned in the Galveston flood. I think they were out in Texas or Pensacola or somewhere. I think that was in 1906. Then they moved to Ocala - the brothers and the mother - whose name was Francis Collier - two Englishmen and the mother. [Mrs. John Travis Collier, Sr., Eric, and Travis]

**Cox:** Your parents met and married in Ocala? Is that correct?

**Goff:** Yes, she decorated hats; she had a hat shop. Everybody wore hats.

**Cox:** I understand she also went to college for a year.

**Goff:** One year. It was called Besiff College in Georgia. She was one of twelve children, sort of the youngest of twelve. And had one [school] dress; and she remembers the first automobile she ever saw. In Ocala, I remember the first airplane I ever saw.

**Cox:** When was that?

**Goff:** Well, I was just a kid. [chuckles]

**Cox:** Was it a war plane?

**Goff:** No, it had two wings. I think it was a bi-plane - just one person in it. There was an airport there in Ocala.

**Cox:** To jump start our memory about your childhood, please think about what scent or sound immediately takes you back to this childhood.

**Goff:** We always had chickens. We had little bantams, too, that we made pets out of. I especially liked little bantam hens; I could carry them in my arm and we'd even take them in the house. So even when we moved to Winter Park, if I hear a little hen singing, I get that feeling like I'm young again [laughs] - back on the farm. Chickens are my favorite pet.

**Cox:** Is there a special smell that comes to pass?

**Goff:** Always had roses. It was always like Easter if you had bantam hens because they'd hide their nests. In the spring time - that's when they would be laying. Then you could hear roosters crow.

**Cox:** How many years did you live in this one house?

**Goff:** 22, till I married]. Till 1982, the house was always there. My roots are all at that house, with my mother, sister and brother.

**Cox:** And you visited her often even after you moved away to college?

**Goff:** Yes, after I married. When we moved here [Winter Park], we'd go there for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

**Cox:** Your favorite activities as a child in Ocala?

**Goff:** My brother made me play "Cowboys and Indians." [laughs] We always played with big marbles would be the horses and little marbles would be the cows. If it was raining outside or a hurricane maybe going, we'd spend all our time driving these cows from room to room. And then once a week we'd go to movie. It cost \$0.10 - when I was a little bit older - to go to the movie. It'd be a cowboy movie on Saturday. My sister played "paper dolls."

**Cox:** And those are his favorite. He's a cowboy now, isn't he?

**Goff:** Yes, he's always been a cowboy - has a big ranch.

**Cox:** Despite the twentieth-century trend towards urbanization in the 1930s, when people are springing up around larger towns, nearly half of all the Americans still lived in communities of populations of 8,000 or less. Tell us a little blit about Ocala. How big was it, do you remember as a young adult?

**Goff:** Compared now, it was sparsely settled. It had a beautiful courthouse and Saturdays we'd go and walk around the courthouse. There's no comparison now.

**Cox:** Do you enjoy going back and visiting Ocala at all?

**Goff:** It doesn't seem the same at all. I still have two acres there.

**Cox:** Your family had forty-eight acres back when you were younger. How did your family use this land?

**Goff:** Usually, this black man that lived across the tracks would farm it with a mule. And then we had a family that lived in the pump house - he would farm it, tie a handkerchief at the end of the field. So it was fenced, mostly - or it was fenced. It was always fenced. There'd be cattle. Instead of lawnmowers, you'd just let the cows into your lawn to cut your lawn. But we did have a lawnmower and the two mules would pull the lawnmower and I remember that the mower cut off the leg of a chicken. If anything happened like that, we would always dress him and eat him. We didn't waste anything. [chuckles] And if animals got sick - if your dog got sick - you'd shoot 'em. You wouldn't call a vet. That's a lot of land to take care of - Well, it would grow up in weeds.

**Cox:** The cows, they were dairy cows, weren't they?

**Goff:** They were then, when I was younger - till my father died - but then we just had the one cow. Dewdrop. [laughs] And one time, Buttercup, seemed like she'd have a calf, or something. There was a railroad track that cut through our field and we saw the cow had broken out of the fence and was running in front of the train. Back then, trains all had cow-catchers. We thought that was the funniest thing and my mother was so worried that the cow might be killed because that was important to us. We always had good milk. I loved - I could drink warm milk - and clabber - we always had clabber and homemade butter.

**Cox:** What is clabber?

**Goff:** [laughs] It's the raw milk. You let it set out [side] and you'd take the cream off and it's like yogurt. But if milk's pasteurized, apparently you can't make clabber; it just would sour.

**Cox:** Did you physically work on the farm? Help out with the hens?

**Goff:** Oh, yes. Jack and I always had a garden - together. We'd try to grow popcorn; we didn't know you had to have a field to grow and pollinate. Then we could grow radishes. We had fun growing a garden. Also, this big barn that was torn down, we had a lot of boards. We'd get the nails out and we'd build houses. We'd make windows by just a piece of tin leaning out. We had a wonderful time! Frances helped in the house-liked to cook, sew, play with dolls.

**Cox:** And this is during the depression. Do you remember times being difficult at all?

**Goff:** My mother was a good business woman and I can remember her being worried - sometimes if she was late coming home. But, I didn't realize it was a depression because we always had plenty to eat. It was not like in a city, as I learned later. We farmed. Some men from the seeds store came and planted a big field of tomatoes. By the time they got them all growing good - they couldn't get enough price for them - so we would throw tomatoes at the cows. They'd just rot in the field 'cause no one had money to buy them, I

guess. And we'd make homemade ice cream. We had cousins; I had a cousin that came and lived with us - to help mother.

**Cox:** What was her name?

**Goff:** Ida Lee worked in the warehouse. That was uncle Jim's - had seven children. They lived in Dade City [Florida]. They were real poor. But Ida Lee worked in the warehouse helping dad, like a secretary. And James stayed with us - cut our hair, ironed our clothes. That was in high school, though, that was later. But when we were little, men that worked the warehouse - young, strong, black men - their wives, like when we got the measles and mother would always be at the office, they would take care of us.

**Cox:** And they worked for your father's moving business?

**Goff:** Yes. So I have a special feeling about black women. They would comb my hair so carefully. They were such good cooks!

**Cox:** What was the official name of the family moving business?

**Goff:** It was called the White Star Line first. They came over on a boat from England - I think in 1900 - on the White Star Line. And so that was the name of the business. Brothers separated in 1928. Ours became Collier's Terminal Warehouse and Van Company.

**Cox:** How would you characterize it? Was it long distance? Or within city limits?

**Goff:** It was just all in Florida. I just was not interested in it, I guess. My brother wasn't interested in it then. So there'd be other companies that would go long distance. Well, everything then was sent by rail. If you wanted to send a piano or a chest, it would be crated and sent. We didn't have, like now, trucks. No big trucks, except the moving truck. And then they would meet the Atlantic Coastline and the Seaboard [Railroad] when the trains came in - the colored men would meet 'em and get the freight and deliver it. That was another way you made a living.

**Cox:** So the colored men did the physical packing.

**Goff:** Yes.

**Cox:** So you weren't driving down the highway on a big truck from Ocala to Miami, per se. It was on a train moving that way.

**Goff:** Sometimes it would be moving jobs, but I meant - seems like most of it went by [train].

**Cox:** Your father passed away when you were a young girl. How old were you at this time?

**Goff:** I was thinking I was four, but I guess maybe five. I was so young and he was I even cried. Mother's sisters came and I didn't know which was my mother; they all seemed to look alike. There were five sisters and five brothers in her family from Georgia and they were just a sweet, loving family My sister cried and I think she was in the first grade. And my brother was two.

**Cox:** What kind of role did your mother play in the business after your father's death?

**Goff:** Well she couldn't even drive a car, but she learned fast. She had that one year of college that gave her confidence. And so she went up and took over the business. She had these black men that were so loyal, and their wives.

**Cox:** There was a man named "Shorty."

**Goff:** Edgar Mitchell was his name.

**Cox:** Can you tell me a little bit about him?

**Goff:** He always called me Miss Hilda and it was Mr. Jack and Miss Frances. If we had any problems - I can remember we had a Christmas party for all the black men and their families that worked at the office. And a big jar of candy [points behind her]. I must have been really young then, before my father died. I remember we had a fun time around a bonfire. The men would come out and chop wood because we heated with just wood. We had a wood-range in the kitchen that would heat water and then .we had a fireplace.

**Cox:** Was this a tradition? How often do you remember this happening with your family and his family? These get-togethers?

**Goff:** When we were older, "Shorty" would dress up as Santy Claus and deliver - he drove in a convertible -the black men usually had better cars than mother - he would deliver all the gifts for the rich families in Ocala. When I was 'bout not to think of Santy Claus, I saw these black boots run - I saw him [laughs] - so I believed in Santy Claus a long time.

**Cox:** Did you and your siblings have any adventures with "Shorty"? Did he come by the house often, or after work?

**Goff:** He was our chauffeur and I remember we took trips to St. Augustine [Florida] to the fort. And then we took a trip down to Miami. Usually, he'd go really slowly; it was kind of boring. But he never could stay where we stayed; he'd would let us out. Which I didn't think that was right even then - segregation. We weren't allowed to play with his

children. We wanted to, but it's just that we didn't play with the children.

**Cox:** What was your understanding as child not being able to interact with black children? Did your mother ever explain why?

**Goff:** No, they had their separate - it should be separate but equal was the way they -

**Cox:** And you said you didn't think it was quite fair last time?

**Goff:** No. I didn't think it was fair that "Shorty" couldn't stay where we stayed.

**Cox:** So you had a very close tie with him?

**Goff:** Well, with the men at the office. And I wouldn't be where I am today. Then when I got married they helped with the wedding. He drove me; he was a chauffeur.

**Cox:** And he called you Miss Hilda? Is that the kind of etiquette that all black males showed toward white children?

**Goff:** Yes. [The ones at the office]

**Cox:** So you tell me he was proud of his car; it was a convertible. Was it an expensive car back then? Your mother, did she have [a car like his]?

**Goff:** We usually just had a Chevrolet, but I remember he had a Buick and it'd have all kinds of things hanging on it. Be all decorated! [laughter]

**Cox:** That was kind of an expensive thing to have during the Depression, I suppose - with gas being difficult [to purchase].

**Goff:** Like I say, it was a good business. And my father started it as a young man.

**Cox:** Do you think that your family's employees were well-paid and very happy?

**Goff:** Yes. Well-paid and very loyal and very happy.

**Cox:** Do you think the Depression affected their families - these black families - in any way. Obviously they were getting paid well, but did you get a sense? I know you were a child at the time.

**Goff:** Mother used to take breakfast up to 'em - fried egg sandwiches and Pepsi-colas. She fed 'em a lot. I didn't realize that they were - And then when we had a billy-goat, it butted me. She gave the goat to "Shorty" and he barbequed him. [laughter]

**Cox:** You told me that their wives took care of you when you were ill, when you were sick.

**Goff:** That would be our babysitters and we were not allowed to have company - our age, like neighbors. Oh, I guess we did have some really good neighbors across the woods. Their name was Love. They were teenage girls, I guess. They were so sweet; they told us fairytales. I had a happy childhood!

**Cox:** Interaction with both black and white?

**Goff:** Yes, and neighbors. And then on Sunday afternoons, the Father would preach out under the oak tree - we'd go. Religion was an important part of my growing-up. Mother was Baptist. We'd sing all the old hymns on Sunday afternoons -- have a little lemonade and boiled peanuts.

**Cox:** And this is an all-white church? A Baptist church?

**Goff:** Yes, where I went to church it was all-white, but then on Sunday afternoons - where we lived - a group would gather - neighbors - and have a little service.

**Cox:** Was it interracial?

**Goff:** No, I don't think. That was just white neighbors.

**Cox:** How far away did these neighbors live from you? What was the distance like between your house and theirs?

**Goff:** It was just a little path through the woods. Half a mile, maybe?

**Cox:** Did you get around town when you were young on a bicycle? Did you walk a lot?

**Goff:** We had one bicycle; we took turns riding it. We didn't go to town but like once a week. I was about two miles out of town.

**Cox:** Is there anything that - your interactions with these black families - had an impact on you as a child or you thinking back now as an adult on how you were raised as a child? How do you think they impacted your lives?

**Goff:** They were our friends. And they way you'd wash clothes back then, you'd have an iron pot and you would boil the white clothes. Then we had a woman that lived across the roadside of the tracks, would come and would wash the clothes - boil 'em with a stick, take 'em out in the woodshed. Then the tubs - first rinse, second rinse - and ring them out an hang 'em on clotheslines.

**Cox:** A lot of work?

**Goff:** A lot of work [nods head]. We always had a dog named "Patsy" and we gave her one of the puppies and she named him "Pitsy." I remember that. [laughs]

**Cox:** So they made life easier for your mother -

**Goff:** Yes! They did. And we were always kind; mother was saying always be nice to 'em because they might come and burn our house down, or something.

**Cox:** Do you feel that other children that you grew up with in the Ocala area interacted interracially to some level that your family did? -

**Goff:** No, I think they were rich snobs. However, the Camps and the Taylors that lived in Ocala, they would move all the furniture out while they had ;all their floors done, or new carpets.

**Cox:** Around how many black employees did your family's moving business have?

**Goff:** Probably three men. Or in case they had a big moving job, men would just stand on the corner down there at the corner of Broadway. They would go and say "Who needs a job today?" And so they'd pick up labor. People would wait to see if they had a job.

**Cox:** Did your mom tell you the specifics about the family business? - 'cause it seems like you know a lot about it. Or is it something you witnessed when you were a child? Or did she describe the business later on as you became older?

**Goff:** Well, she was a good business woman because if she couldn't get there, she'd say "We'll be there." But they'd be so busy, ti1 they'd just get there [around] five o' clock in the afternoon, and would be back first thing in the morning. She took advantage of every job that she could get.

**Cox:** You were aware that your mom was working really hard in the business?

**Goff:** Oh, yes. She was very healthy.

**Cox:** There was an organization of black communities around the 1930s and 1940s' pre-Civil Rights movement. Do you remember any kind of black orgarlzations in Ocala when you were a young adult?

**Goff:** I remember Sunday nights we'd like to go by the church 'cau~set hey'd be in there singing and shouting and it was just so much fun - you could see 'e:m in there.

**Cox:** So you weren't actually in the church -

**Goff:** No. We'd go by to listen. And then we'd like to drive down Broadway; we sort of lived past where a lot of the blacks lived. They'd be all dressed up going to church; they were always just so interesting - entertaining!

**Cox:** Because they were different from you or it was just a unique culture?

**Goff:** A different culture. They'd have sometimes a medicine show and they'd be selling something. That might be when I was older.

**Cox:** There are a couple more questions I have - about your school. It was a rural town school; what was it like? How many students [were in each class]? - the young adult age.

**Goff:** We didn't have kindergarten. First grade was so hard and I was so shy. There was a building and there was a first, second, and third grade. Then you'd have to walk across the field to a cafeteria. We always ate at the cafeteria; we didn't take our lunch. For \$0.10 you could get a little square of cornbread - you could get a good meal. And if you had an extra nickel, you could get an ice-cream on a stick, which was so good. Mother would send a check in [each] month.

**Cox:** Did you take a school bus to school?

**Goff:** No, mother drove us to school. But we would take a bus home.

**Cox:** And it was all white children on this bus?

**Goff:** Yes. I remember bad boys though; they'd throw sandspurs and hit another boy in the shoulder. We didn't behave like that. I saw behavior of other families -

**Cox:** Did you witness any bullying when you were younger?

**Goff:** Yea, I witnessed that riding the school bus. It was kind of scary sometimes. Then when my brother started coming with me, we'd walk together [with my sister too].

**Cox:** What about the black school in the area? Was it nearby or way out of town?

**Goff:** It seemed like we didn't go by it; it was kind of way on the other side of town.

**Cox:** Did you know of any conditions that it was in? What were your thoughts on it at that time?

**Goff:** I didn't even think about it. I know ["Shorty"] was so proud of his daughter Donna; she was the first one to graduate - she went to college and got pregnant first thing. That was so disappointing to him. They had two sons.

**Cox:** How do you think your childhood is seen different from others that lived in the same geographic area as you?

**Goff:** I think mine was - I had more things than a lot because my Father left a nice home, forty-eight acres, and a business that my mother operated. Then lots of friends and we went to church every Sunday; that's a lot of our entertainment. We'd go out and see the springs for picnics.

**Cox:** Did you experience any concern about when you were raising your children. How you wereraised - did you want them to live in that same tradition - the cracker tradition?

**Goff:** [chuckles] I want them to and they have so much more. They have too much [laughs]. They did not appreciate as much as we did. I hope they can ;always have that much. But it's so important - education is so important. That's something my mother drilled into us. We were all college educated.

**Cox:** And you went to Stetson for a year.

**Goff:** [nods] Stetson. And mother being a widow, we had work scholarships. If you have to work, you didn't waste time. You appreciated your education more, I think, than some of the sorority girls.

**Cox:** When you grew up - going to college, moved away from home - did you keep in touch with "Shorty" and his family or any of the black families that you interacted with as a child? Do you know where they are now?

**Goff:** No, I remember when "Shorty" died when Joy was born. It was 1968. He just lay down on the pad and had a heart attack at the office - worked all his life for the office. But I didn't keep up with his children.

**Cox:** So once you left Ocala for college, was that the break?

**Goff:** Yes. Then out of college I got married and then I started having children. Mother would come to see me and I'd go and see mother. We had some nice visits. Where I live now, I didn't want to move out here on a lake. I thought my children would drown. Amy, the fourth kid, was only two years old. Curtis went and got my mother and said - when she came, she said - "Hilda, there's *no one* in the family that lives on a lake like this." So she convinced me to come out here.

**Cox:** And Curtis was your husband?

**Goff:** Yes. I had him for fifty-three years. [smiles]

**Cox:** What year did your mother close the business? Or did she sell it?

**Goff:** She lived to be ninety. She retired. Yes, she sold the business,~be cause my brother did not want to be in the business -

**Cox:** He continued with the farming or the cows?

**Goff:** Yes, and by then, Ocala was growing and the race horses were coming in and the people - he was crowded out of Marion county. So he bought two-square [miles] up in Georgia. He had a hard time keeping that up; his ranch is not that big now because of taxes. But that's been what he's always liked to do.

End of Transcription