

Yvette Crawford Interview Transcript

I'm Yvette Crawford, an Ausitnite, born and raised in Austin. Lived here all my life for 63, almost 64 years.

I grew up in East Austin, went to the schools here. I was blessed to raise my children in the house that I grew up in, and left Austin to go to college at Texas Tech University and got a degree in telecommunications, which is radio and television, not knowing that I would be coming back to live in Austin.

So here I am. Boom. So another thing is just like, what is your occupation now? application right now is.

I grew up on 2103 Stafford which is on the corner of Rogers and Stafford and across the street from Campbell Elementary School. It was very nice. I mean, we knew the majority of the neighbors.

I knew a lot of the residents who lived on this street because I have friends who lived on the street. Went to school with them. My godparents lived on Maple Street and had friends on Maple Street as well. I knew almost everyone knew almost everyone in the community because that's just the way it was at the time.

It was close knit. We knew everyone. There were functions. We'd always seen them at different functions in the city on this side of town, so it was a nice community.

It's hard to find that because a lot of people that are in Austin are not native Austinites. They've moved here to, to raise a family to, you know, to get a job here. So it's totally different. It's not the same, unfortunately.

I mean, I knew everyone. If I didn't go to school with them, I knew their parents. My parents knew their parents. Like I said, it was a close knit community.

We knew everyone because we all lived on this side of I-35, east of I-35. And it was nice. But now it's totally different. I mean, now we're all spread out throughout the city. And unfortunately, I had to make the decision to sell my parents' house in 2012 because of gentrification. Then the property taxes on my parents house was \$10,000 for one year, and there was just no way that I could afford that.

Driving here today to do this interview, it was very hard for me to come back to this neighborhood because it's just totally not the same. Entire East Austin has changed

tremendously, and it hurts. It really hurts.

But I still do go to church over here. I'm a member of Holy Cross Catholic Church, it's on East 11th Street, but it's just the surroundings in East Austin are totally different.

More white businesses popping up. More anglos living here who are truly now the residents of East Austin, there's hardly any African Americans living in East Austin anymore because of affordability.

With the investors coming in and purchasing homes – for example, if I had friends whose parents passed away, my friends lived in another state or city, they had no reason to come back to Austin if they had sold their house at home, then that investor would probably gut out that house, probably use that back yard if it was large enough to build another house behind it.

That's what was the main cause behind the property taxes increasing. And it was affordability, my people could no longer afford to live here.

And I often wondered, those who are retired who were on a pension. How are they able to stay afloat and pay their property taxes? And those just I just don't see how it is. So basically, African-Americans and Hispanics are being moved further east to Pflugerville, to Hutto, and to Manor in order to survive. And it hurts. It hurts.

I hate that it happens, but I read that it was something that was kind of like predetermined in between 1927, 1930s by the city council that this is what they were going to do. Because African Americans used to have businesses on East Sixth Street, which is now where they have parties. I used to go down Sixth Street when I was younger, but we had businesses down there.

There were African-Americans who lived where I-35 is, but they decided to come and cut through where we lived to make that the interstate. And so when we were shifted over here from Clarksville, in those areas in West Austin, we made this our community. We built it up for us. And it seems like everything has been taken away.

Majority of the black churches have moved further east and it's just not the same anymore at all.

My father moved here to go to law school. He was one of the first seven to make it to attend the University of Texas Law School. And so once he graduated, he married my mom. And then they moved here and then they had me and started a family.

I'm glad you asked me there because my father passed away in 1996, and see my parents are from Texarkana, my dad from the Texas side of Texarkana, my mom from the Arkansas side of Texarkana, and my mom had passed away before my dad.

And when my dad passed away, had someone from the Austin American Statesman call me.

“Well, you know, sorry to hear about your father being lost, but with his accomplishment, what does that mean to you?”

And I said, “He was just my dad. You know, please understand that when he accomplished those things, I was just a little girl.”

I mean, I wasn't born when he graduated from the University of Texas, but she was talking about his appointment as being appointed by Waggoner Carr, who was the Texas attorney general back in 1962, 1963. He was appointed as the first African-American to be appointed to serve the state of Texas. He was the assistant attorney general for Texas. He dealt with federal issues, so he had to go to DC a lot to do that, and that was like a stepping stone, basically for African Americans at the time.

And then he later left there, went to practice law with Virgil Lott, who was also one of the seven who attended the University of Texas and they had a law office on East Seventh Street. And while my father was practicing law, he had Dana Jean Smith, who had graduated from Anderson High School, which was the only black high school here in Austin due to segregation. She had applied to attend, which is now Southwest Texas State University, to do her studies in education.

And the president of the college basically wrote her back and told her, based on the bylaws of the school, we cannot admit any Negroes to this college. So Mrs. Smith's father hired my father to take the case, and my father in Texas State University. And I believe in 1963, 1964, the judge decided that she had every right to be admitted to Texas State University.

So basically that opened doors for people of color to enter their school. And I believe there were three other students who went ahead and signed up to enroll at Texas State that afternoon. So, I mean, I'm proud of my father, for his accomplishments, for what he did because that's how I was able to go to college.

You have to understand, back then, my parents would get their undergraduate work, they had to go to historically black universities because we could not go to white universities. So he opened some doors, and a lot of people probably don't know about it, but he was like a hidden figure that helped to open doors for others to accomplish their dreams.

My mother's mother, my grandmother, she worked as a cook for a rich white family in Texarkana. So my thing is, they probably didn't want to be doing those jobs where you didn't have to go get an education, you just get it – but then what would you have accomplished in life?

They wanted to better themselves, better educate themselves so they could raise a family that would be educated. And my mother was a music elementary music teacher here in Austin. So with me being the first born, I had to set the example and do good in school. And accomplished

those dreams for my parents.

But when I was a senior in high school, I didn't want to go to college but I dare not tell my parents that because here they were, they had been educated and everything. But I'm glad that I went because I went and got my bachelor's degree. For us, for minorities, it was not a requirement, but it would help to better our lives.

We could get better paying jobs by having that degree, having a degree, having a master's or having your doctorate. One of the three. the 2 or 1 of the things you're saying. Yeah. Pretty nice to be like, oh, yeah, I got my degree. I, I don't display it. maybe I should. Anyways, another thing we want to touch base on is, you know, growing up in the neighborhood, what was it like at the beginning?

In a way, it was scary because we didn't know how they were going to react. I mean, we were bused from the east side to North Austin. We were on the bus with the Hispanics that lived in the neighborhood, and I had several friends. It was different. We were treated fairly. I'm not going to say that there was any racism, I don't remember anything.

It was fair. It was fair. And then I just learned to make the adjustment. Going on to high school, I was supposed to have gone to McCallum High School, but they built the new Anderson High School off of Mesa, because they closed the old Anderson High School. I had Mr. Akins as my principal, Charles Akens, because he has Akins High School named after him.

He was my principal. In the office, I knew a lot of the staff in the office because my parents knew them. And it was fine. It was fine. I didn't do that much extracurricular activities because I was more like a bookworm. My parents always said, "you need to study, keep up your grades."

And then I finally tried out for drill team when I was a freshman to do when I was a sophomore. I got cut, I didn't make it, but it gave me the motivation to try out again to prepare, stretch and everything. And I was in drill team for my junior, senior year and it was fine, but it was fair.

I didn't see or feel any racism or anything. We just learned to make that adjustment in high school. But then it prepared me to go to Texas Tech University because I wanted to go to University of Houston or to Xavier in New Orleans. My mother said University of Houston was a party school, Texas State was a party school.

I think what it was, my mother wanted me to go to a school that was far away, but not too far, but within the state of Texas, where I could learn to be independent and I applied to Texas Tech University, and that's where I went and came home with my degree.

I later found out that my father was with Sigma Pi Phi fraternity, which is a black organization just for men. But it's an organization that 's made for men who have professional positions or occupations, because I saw a letter where he had submitted to them to resign from being a

member of that organization.

My mother was one of those who were active in organizations. She was in a sorority of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. She was very active in that, she was a member of Top Ladies because my brother and I were part of Top Teens, which is of course for Top Teens. We were part of Jack and Jill of America, which is an organization that is all across the country, same as Top Teens and Top Ladies.

My mother was a part of the Links, and my father was a Link because my mother was in the Links and I had the opportunity to become a member. I think I had to be before I was 55 or something, but I never did that because I'm not in the organization, just like my mom was or my parents.

But we had that and we were able to be with our friends and go to conferences, go to meetings. We did things where we would go visit nursing homes and visit the elderly because that was a service project. So it basically taught me as an individual growing up of giving back to the community that I was brought up in. Unfortunately, I didn't have the opportunity to have my children and when they were growing up just now, they're adults.

But that's what they did. They did things that were in the community. They were active in the church here, giving back, giving back because it's a way of bettering themselves, bettering the community and passing the torch on to my brother and I to keep up that work that is continuing to me to keep it up in order to keep the community going.

My mom was a perfect angel. She would do so much, she was so caring. I don't know how she did it, but she was also the organist for the choir at our church, as well as teaching and being involved with the different organizations that she was involved in.

Pat and I are cousins by marriage. About the Marshalls, General Marshall and Lavon Marshall, who live up the street off of Givens, I went to school with their children and their daughter Karen, who was the middle child, she and I were in drill team together at Anderson. And then we were in organizations together as well. So, I had friends, Terry across the street from where I lived. She was on drill team with me too. And we would go to each other's houses and play and – not play because we were not at that age – but just do things together, go to the movies.

I had Tonya Norwood, who lived around the corner from me, she was on drill team with me in high school, and we're still friends today. But Karen and Terry, they moved to the Dallas area and like I said, a lot of people have moved a lot. We had a lot of distinguished professionals that lived in this community, like you had, John Taylor King, who lives right across the street, who was a good friend of my dad.

He and my dad were also in the army reserve. So I think they were in the same unit or not, but they would always go to the meetings together if they had to go, like every summer, they would

have to go out of town for a week to go to a camp at a different base. So they would always travel together.

You had the Marshalls who both worked at Huston Tillotson University. You had, Mr. Snell, who was the Travis County commissioner. I went to school with his children. Ms. Kirk, her son, Ron Kirk, was I think the first African-American appointed to be the secretary of state for Texas. And then he went on to be the mayor for Dallas. And he has a law office in Dallas that he works at now.

And that's all I can think of. There were a lot of African-Americans who lived in this community that were accomplished. They had made stepping stones in our community. Which means they opened doors for us, for my generation and then for your generation and my children's generation, to the point that sky's the limit.

You can still pursue what you want to do. Don't let anything stop you or deter you from becoming what you want to become in life. And that gave us some motivation that we could accomplish those things.

I haven't been in this neighborhood, like I said, since 2012. So, no, but I mean, that's good because it needs to be acknowledged. Of the individuals who lived in this community when it was the way it was when it was first developed.

It's all of the individuals who are accomplished professionals that opened the doors and made some type of significance in the black community. That needs to be acknowledged. Definitely, because it's history and we don't want that history to be hidden from others to learn all about. Because if no one tells the story, who's going to know?

Our home was built by Edward Doro, who was a black architect here. He and my dad were good friends. And so he designed the house for my dad, for my parents. And, that's the extent that I know,. I guess that I was a little girl and not really knowing about it. But I do remember that Mr. Doro did design the house.

When you look at it, black architects, you didn't hear about that in the '60s. I mean, that was kind of obsolete with that.

I know Wilhelmina Delco, she's well known all over Austin being the first to be board of trustees for AISD, and served as a representative in the Capitol here in Austin.

I remember she was running for office, and I think it was for AISD board of trustees office. And so part of the service project, because it's for Jack and Jill incorporated, we had to go out and pass out fliers, "Vote for Delco, vote for Delco." And at the time, there used to be a battery called Delco Batteries, which I think it's obsolete, I don't think it doesn't exist anymore.

And I remember people saying like “Delco battery right, Delco battery,” so we helped out to kind pass out the fliers trying to get more people to go and vote for her. And I remember it was down, I believe, on Congress Street. We did that one Saturday. And that was a community service thing to do.

And I remember I went to high school with Lawrence Handcox – Berl Handcox. I think he was the first African-American to serve as city council member for Austin. And Lawrence was my escort for debutante ball. He almost passed out on me. Lawrence was over six feet tall, here I am five foot three. And he was like, “oh my gosh, if you fall I'm going to go down with you.”

But those are, you know, good memories and everything. But like I said, small community. We may not have lived in the same subdivision or whatever, but the organizations that our parents had us and that's how we got to know those individuals. Because you have to think back in those days, there was nothing that we could do outside of our community because our parents weren't able to be a part of white organizations.

So we had to create our own organizations for our community, for our families, in order to strengthen the community. And where we could still provide service, community service, community outreach for our community. But you can see how things have changed. But that's the way that it was at the time.

I'd like for it to be remembered as a vibrant community which had families who were well educated, who had accomplishments and goals, which helped to open a lot of doors for people of color. Regardless if you're African-American or Hispanic, Latino. The neighborhood that was well kept, well established and was part of the community of East Austin.

Even though it has changed through the years, it needs to be remembered as a very remarkable and outstanding community in Austin, and let it not be forgotten that it did once exist.