

Edmund Lake

Interviewed by Joseph Dupuis

My name is Edmund Albert Lake. My nickname, Ed, is just short for Edmund. When I was your age, people called me Eddie. By the time I got to be an adult, it became Ed.

I grew up in the South End not too far from here. It was a little more urban then than it is now. Growing up, I lived with my mother, my father, and my three sisters, Adena, Edris, and Rhoda. I was the youngest. My mother's name is Rhoda Lake and my father's name was Edmund Lake. Hilda Martinborough was my grandmother on my father's side. I never knew my grandmother on my mother's side or either of my grandfathers because they had already passed away.

I went to the Boston Public Schools and all of the schools I went to no longer exist, or they changed their name. I went to primary school (K-3) at the Asa Gray School, then I went to elementary (4-8th) at the Sherwin School. The Sherwin burned down after some disgruntled student set it on fire. The schools were right in my neighborhood so I walked to school up until 8th grade. Then I went to Boston Technical High School, now known as the O'Bryant.

As a kid, when I got home from school I would play. Being the youngest, and being a boy, little did I know that I was spared from a lot of the house

chores. My sisters did a lot of that. My friends were boys that grew up in the neighborhood around me. From time to time one would move away and another would take his place. We would create our own games. Give us a couple of six-shooters around Christmas time and we would play Cowboys and Indians. We would play in buildings that were being torn down and take the wood to make swords or skateboards. We would play kick the can, hide-and-go-seek, marbles, have snowball fights, and all that.

When I was in high school, it was interesting. Three of the four years I was at Boston Tech, we were in three different buildings. Boston Technical High School later became John D. O'Bryant High School. So, my first year at Boston Technical, we were in a building in the Back Bay that was torn down to build the Hilton Hotel. During my second year, we were in a building called Boston Tech Annex in Jamaica Plain. I think it was on School Street. During my last two years, we were in the building that used to be Roxbury Memorial High School. I think it's called Roxbury Latin or Latin Academy now.

What I liked about school was just about everything. It was OK. It was all boys at that time. There wasn't much drama. People came from all of the elementary and middle schools around the city. It was an exam school so everybody coming in was new and in the same situation. I don't remember fights or anything like that. The only kind of competition I can remember was maybe during gym class or in sports.

If I had to pick a favorite teacher, it would probably be Mr. Gibbons, my high school history teacher. His classes were less about history and more

about politics. It was easy for us to get him wound up talking about politics or the election because at that time Kennedy and Nixon were running for the presidency. So we would spend a lot of time talking about politics, but then, of course, the tests were all about history. So, if we got him off the topic too much we didn't know enough to do well on the tests!

My high school experience — I enjoyed it, but I let my older sisters condition me not to work too hard. I used to be an honor roll student until I got into high school. Then my sisters said 'you can forget about that.' So when my mother would go to parent-teacher meetings, they'd tell her I could do better. And when she talked to me I'd say, 'well, I'm in high school so I'm not suppose to do better than this!'

One conflict I had during those years was with my father about what time I needed to be in the house. I was supposed to be in by 11PM. You know, I'd break the curfew and come in the house and make some excuses. I think that I probably broke the curfew more than not. Part of the reason I got in trouble with my parents was that they had no idea what there was to do after 9pm — and I couldn't understand why they couldn't understand. Of course now I realize we were from two different eras. After all, electricity wasn't even all that popular in their time so of course they couldn't understand what I could do on the streets after 9 o'clock. When I look back on it I realized that I was 'one spoiled puppy.' My sisters told me that I 'got away with murder!'

As a teenager there was some shift in friends. My first friends were in my neighborhood but I was a Seventh Day Adventist. We went to church on

Saturday so that added another whole other group of friends. I would hang out with my neighborhood friends during the week and my church friends on the weekends. Church wasn't necessarily a favorite place to go, but it was a cool place to meet friends. Sometimes the church would throw parties that we called socials. Around that same time we started invading the movie houses. We would spend Sundays in downtown Boston roaming around theaters in an area that became called the 'combat zone'. We would watch movies anywhere in the neighborhood theaters like the Rivoli, the Puritan, and the Uptown. We loved them.

When I was a teenager, one time we got all hyped up about camping out in the Blue Hills. We were going to put our camping gear together and find our very own camping spot and just hang out there for days. So, I remember us getting there...and I don't remember exactly how this happened, but we ended up at a friend's house. His mother worked nights and his father worked days. We would get to his place around 10 or 11PM. His father would be asleep and his mother would be at work so we'd hang out there eating, joking, and just generally having fun. To be a part of my group of friends, a sense of humor was required. So many funny things happened.

My father had many proverbs that I didn't give him credit for when I was younger. He would say, 'It is better to have it and not need it than need it and not have it.' My mother was more of the role model and doer. My heroes were members of the Boston Celtics — people like Bill Russell, Sam Jones, and Satch Sanders. Back then the Celtics won almost all of the NBA championships.

When I was 15 or 16 years old, I got a part-time job rehabilitating apartments. There was a guy who would buy a large apartment building and rent them out. We would paint, plaster, and fix them up. I could work as much as I wanted so I would put in around 4 days a week. That was enough to earn me spending money. When I started the job I was making 50 cents an hour. When I left it I was making \$1.25. It was nice because I had a chance to make my own money and could stop asking my parents for money. It's funny though, I'd work 6 hours and make \$3.00 and feel like I was rolling in dough. That's how much times have changed since I was your age.

When I was 18, I had the dream of being an airplane pilot but I wasn't solidly grounded in it. This ended up being a pattern in my career. When I look back on my various jobs, I never did the same thing twice. When I got out of high school I went to Wentworth, then when I got finished with my two years there, I felt that I still needed to go on studying but I wasn't sure for what. I took a counseling test and that said, 'you like math' and suggested I go more in a business direction so I went to accounting school for four years. After being a professional student for 6 years and being ribbed by my friends for it, I finally left school. My first real job was at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital. It's now Brigham & Women's.

When I was about 23 I got married. It lasted 10 years and we broke up when I was 33. We have one son. His name is Derrick. He lives in Lithonia, Georgia with his wife and four children. I love going to visit them.

I think the best job I ever had was one where I worked with a team of people administering tests. It was a two-day battery of tests. We would put something like 12 people through them then it took another 3 days to grade them. Then we had to go out to review them in person with the people who took the tests. That was a job where I probably had more independence than in any other. We had to go to places all around New England to meet with them. It gave me a chance to see parts of New England that I had never been to before ...or again!

What do I remember from the 1950's? I was born the same month the Allies invaded France – you've heard of D-day? I don't really remember it myself, but one of the early memories I do have was about President Eisenhower. It seemed all he did was play golf. If you watched the television, he was out there playing golf every weekend. When I look back on Eisenhower's time in office though, he was one of the more productive Republican presidents I've seen. He instituted the highway system we have today. Of course he did it partly in case we had to go to war again. He wanted to be able to move tanks and heavy equipment around the country. That never materialized, but now we have the highway system. I also remember man setting foot on the moon. That was a big thing for me. I was probably in my early to mid twenties at that time.

In 1963 the assassination of President Kennedy was a BIG thing. The fascinating thing at that time was that we had only three TV channels and they were only on in the daytime. They were broadcasting news about the assassination all day long. It was such a shock to everyone. People were

dazed...like it wasn't real, a variation of the impact of our recent tragedy. We watched it all day long as it was unfolding.

My other vivid memories of the sixties were that it seemed to be a time when people in my age group were expressing themselves in rather unique ways. We let our hair grow longer, smoked weed in public, we were part of the "Woodstock generation." The anti-war movement grew and it was a time when individual rights became more important. There was a popular phrase at that time "your rights stop at my nose." It was about doing your thing but not interfering with someone else. So it was a very expressive time for my generation.

The Vietnam War pretty much became the major focus of rebellion in the late 1960s and early 1970s. There were subsequent gasoline shortages. People would be waiting in line for hours to fill their tanks. Gas was still only 65 cents a gallon. Now, if you drive around enough, you can maybe find a station that has gas that's 65 cents less than another station but it's still over \$3.00 a gallon.

As far as adventures go, I've been on some great fishing trips. I also remember one trip to Europe that I went on with my ex-wife. It was like pulling teeth for her to get me to go. But, once I got there it was really an educational experience, looking at European culture from an outsider's point of view. So the trips that I've taken have been pretty enlightening.

One of my more difficult times was when my son was 10 or 11 years old. He was living with me because his mother had moved to Savannah. He

reached a time during adolescence when he got to pouting and decided he didn't want to live with me. That just fractured the hell out of me. I just couldn't imagine him wanting to live with anybody else. But eventually he got over whatever it was and we ended up living together again. That also happened at a time when there were other stresses in my life. I was having problems with my job and that was stressing me out. Then right in the middle of all of this, I had a big oil leak and I was feeling like, "what can happen to me next??" It was a real low point because it was so many bad things happening at once.

Now I'm trying to focus more of my energy on the things I need to do for myself. I live in a house full of unfinished projects! I have a habit of beginning new ones before I finish the old ones. I've also been a person who tends to do things for other people, so as a result of that I'm not getting anything much done for myself. So I'm trying to get a little more focused particularly this year on getting on with some of these things that I want to do for myself. They're only things like gardening and 'housey' kinds of projects like painting. I think if I could spend even one day a week working on those things I'd be quite happy. I wouldn't have thought of it as a 'lesson' when I was growing up, but I think one important thing I learned from my family was a sense of staying with something. I don't know if diligence is the right word, but it's about sticking with whatever it is that I'm involved with until there's closure.

My greatest accomplishment is probably staying as healthy as I am right now. I'm lucky that I can wake up in the morning and feel good and be motivated to do something, it's a blessing to me.

You know, when I was your age they used to say you could expect two or three major life transitions. But now we live in such a rapidly changing time you can probably count on five or six transitions between your age and when you are retiring. Especially with technology and all the things you can do with that. So try to stay aware of that. The bottom line is to try to do what you like. Once you figure that out, then spend as much time as possible doing that. If you like doing it — you'll get better at it. The better you get at it, the more successful you are. Especially if we define success as somebody who gets the chance to do something they really like with their life. So, if you get a chance — do it!! My advice to you is to stay flexible and keep an open mind about your future. Try to stay positive and see the glass half full. Like we talked about before, you may have many careers ahead of you, so stay flexible.