Through 1942 - as a child in the segregated South, during World War II, through a college education that included a stop at Cal Poly, through an extremely rigorous and demanding training program - Hicks has never lost sight of his love for flight and his heroism during the war.

"Hicks exposure to the violence of inequality came early. When he was only 10, he watched as a white man shot and killed a 28-year-old neighborhood friend.

"He was a senior studying theology at Voorhees College; Hicks said, "he was pushing a group of us on swings when two men walked up and shot him. I remember thinking that the bullet hole was small and could be patched."

It was a horrifying event for the youngster - but not out of the ordinary for the time and place, he said. He was born in 1922 in Sparta, Georgia, and grew up "among the ropes, hoods and cross burnings of the Ku Klux Klan; among lynchings and daily violence," he said. "No one should have to live that way."

Hicks learned early on from his mother, though, not to sit idly by. "She was vocal about segregation and inequality," he said, "and that caused me to always question authority."

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