Jefferson School Oral History Project

Project Credits

The transcripts of the interviews conducted as part of this project are housed at the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society and the Carter G. Woodson Institute at the University of Virginia.

An additional set of transcripts has been provided to the Alumni Reunion Committee for use in establishing a museum about the school and Charlottesville's African-American heritage.

Funding for this project has generously been provided by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the American Architecture Foundation's Accent on Architecture Grants, sponsored by CNA Insurance Companies and Victor O. Schinnerer & Company.

In addition to those graciously offered to be interviewed (see list of interviews), numerous individuals have donated their time in support of this project. They include:

- Mary Anderson
- Daniel Bluestone
- Reginald Butler
- Mary Hill Caperton
- Lynne Carter
- Ted Corcoran
- Helena Devereaux
- Clifton Ellis
- Chara Ewing
- Ben Ford
- Adriane Fowler
- Scot French
- Julie Gronlund
- Amy Hill
- Elizabeth Howard
- Ida Lewis
- Lois McKenzie
- Lindsay Nolting
- Nancy O'Brien
- Teresa Price
- Lois Sandy
- Alexandria Searls
- Ashlin Smith
- Corey Walker
- Matt Whitaker
- Priscilla Whiting

Many thanks to all! This project would never have happened without the tremendous efforts of these individuals.

Liz Sargent and Jacky Taylor, project coordinators
# Jefferson School Oral History Project

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Interview with
Charles Alexander (Alex-zan)

Interviewers: Liz Sargent and Alexandria Searls
Date: June 17, 2004
Location: Jefferson-Madison Regional Library, Central Branch
          Charlottesville, Virginia

Transcribed by: Jacky Taylor
Date: June 2004

Proofed by: Liz Sargent
Date: July 2004

[This transcript has been reviewed by Mr. Alexander, who has corrected the spelling and grammar. This transcript has also been edited for readability.]

LS: The first question that we ask everybody is to state your full name, your address, and your date and place of birth.

CA: O.K. Charles E. Alexander, also known as Alex-zan. I live at 5675 Roswell Road, Suite 51D, Atlanta, GA, 30342. And I was born in Charlottesville, July 1952.

LZ: And how long did you live in Charlottesville?

CA: I left Charlottesville when I was 42.

LS: So you lived a lot of your life here.

CA: Right, and then I moved to Richmond.

LS: Before you moved to Atlanta?

CA: Before I moved to Atlanta, right.

LS: And what do you do now in Atlanta?

CA: I'm an entertainer and educator, as well as a motivator for parents, and children. I conduct workshops and seminars.

LS: Great! And have you been an educator all of your life?
CA: Pretty much, on and off, one way or another, you know we’re all students, and we’re all teachers.

LS: So you went through the public high school system here in Charlottesville? And did you go to college?

CA: I went to college about a year and a half in Columbia South Carolina—Allen University—a small black historical school.

LS: And then you moved back to Charlottesville after that? What were the kinds of jobs that you did here in Charlottesville?

CA: I was an account executive at a radio station, but most of my time was spent being a pharmaceutical technician.

LS: In going through the school system here in Charlottesville, it sounds like you were born at a time where things were about to change, and you experienced right at the early part of your education the Brown vs. Board decision. Did things start to evolve here in Charlottesville while you were in school? What school did you attend first of all, and when did integration start to play a role in your life?

CA: I was part of the court case that was brought on by Hill, Tucker, and Marsh out of Richmond to desegregate the Virginia school system and the Byrd machine—Virginia Massive Resistance—we had to go to court, and in 1958/1959 it was declared that our schools must desegregate, although we had to wait. My first grade year was spent at the Superintendent’s office, which is a little building next to Venable; in second grade I moved into Venable Elementary School, in 1959/1960.

LS: So did you go to a kindergarten?

CA: Yes, a private Kindergarten in a home... My teacher’s name was Miss Cooper.

LS: Miss Cooper? Were there a lot of students there?

CA: No it was small.

LS: It was small? Was that a typical thing that kids in your family or neighborhood went to a private kindergarten?

CA: No.

LS: That was unusual for you?

CA: Yes.
LS: Then you sat in the Superintendent's office for a year waiting for Venable to allow you to attend?

CA: I think it was about six months.

LS: Six months. What kind of schooling did you have?

CA: Oh it was small, it was a group of about nine of us in there... and it was just personalized lessons, tutoring, and what have you.

LS: Where was your home at that time?

CA: I lived on 11th Street, which was right around the corner from Venable.

LS: So you could walk to school pretty easily, you were very close? And were most of the other children in that situation?

CA: Oh, sort of spread out... I was about the closest.

LS: Were you there because your parents and the other children's parents chose to do this? Were there segregated schools that they could have gone to?

CA: Well, I think at that time my mom was approached by the NAACP in terms of being one of the complainants.

LS: So she was actually part of the suit?

CA: Yes, she played an instrumental role in one of the court cases. And that was one of the things that I mentioned to the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities when they recently had the panel discussion on Brown vs. Board of Education, it was that there were not any parents; in reading the stories on the Internet, they didn't interview any of the parents. And, you know, its O.K., actually only one of the students out of the eleven remains in Charlottesville, which is Don Mark. But I was a little amazed and surprised that they didn't go to any of the parents 'cause they were in the forefront, they took the brunt. I mean we were six, seven, eight, nine years old.

LS: What was your mom's name?

CA: Elizabeth Taylor.

LS: What kinds of help did she get? Did she work with Eugene Williams and the NAACP?

LS: Can we photocopy that today?

CA: Yes. Uh huh. I may have a copy of it. Eugene Williams and my mom enrolled me—pre-registered me at Venable in May of 1958.

LS: Wow, they let you do that?

CA: Yes. And the article stated there that there was a parent and a son, but they assumed that Eugene was my dad because he came with my mom and me and we pre-registered at Venable.

LS: Are you contemporary with his children?

CA: He has a daughter my age, and he has another daughter that's just a little, may-be a year or two older.

LS: Was she there with you as well?

CA: No, no.

LS: Was your mom open to talking to you about what was going on? Did you have a sense of the historical …?

CA: Pretty much, you know... being six, you know, you go along...

LS: What kinds of things did she have to do or face?

CA: Well, it’d probably be better if you gave her a call... but I am not sure she got many phone calls. She may have had some outside pressures, but I wouldn’t say threats per se.

LS: What do you remember from that time?

CA: I remember going to court.

LS: Oh you do? Wow.

CA: I remember going to court over in Harrisonburg.

LS: Oh my gosh…

CA: Part of that whole court case…

LS: Did you have to speak?
CA: No. The judge was Judge Paul, and he oversaw the case. And I remember also going over to Prince Edward County to a picnic... they were a part of it... Charlottesville and two other schools were instrumental throughout the state. Prince Edward had closed down earlier.

LS: Didn’t they stay closed for a long time?

CA: Yes, they did. They stayed closed up a pretty good while.

LS: Because Charlottesville was only closed for a half a year, isn’t that right?

CA: Yes...

LS: And then once the court case occurred... did they pretty much allow you to go to school?

CA: No, that’s when we went six months to the ...

LS: To the Superintendent’s office? And then the following year is when...

CA: The following year, which was the fall of ’59, is when we actually got into the school itself.

LS: You were in second grade then? And how many students were there that you had gone to court with... was it all eleven? Did they all go?

CA: No, no it was nine elementary and two high. There was one... I think it was two others, in my grade.

LS: Did others who hadn’t been involved in the court case decide to come?

CA: No, no ... just those in the court case...

LS: Just those, wow. And how did it feel to be in school?

CA: Well, it was... you know it was fine, I mean. You didn’t know... All my friends went to Jefferson, though...

LS: So you were separated a little bit?

CA: Yeah, yeah.

LS: Did you feel like the teachers were accommodating and kind?

CA: Yes, they were pretty nice...
LS: Did they ever start to integrate the teachers or the faculty?

CA: I can’t remember when that even came about...

LS: Jefferson remained an elementary school... a segregated elementary school until what, ’65?

CA: Something like that.

LS: And then in ’67 is when the Superintendent forced all of the sixth graders to come together at Jefferson ...

CA: Well that’s when we did Buford and Walker.

LS: Buford and Walker?

CA: And I was a part of that as well. Walker was held in the morning and Buford was held in the afternoon.

LS: What do you mean?

CA: They split the day... you didn’t go a full day... One went from 8:00 to 12:00 and one went from 12:00 to 4:00.

LS: Really?

CA: Yes.

LS: And how did that work?

CA: It ... well, we were pleased to go in the morning and go a half a day... Matter of fact, years later I came across my history teacher of that time and she was former first lady of Virginia, Jeannine Baliles, whose husband Gerald became Governor.

LS: That was before my time, I didn’t move here until the ‘80s, but you went to Venable through fourth grade and then you did Buford and Walker?

CA: No I went to Venable through seventh grade...

LS: Oh, so that’s different...

CA: There was no middle school... see the middle school came about at the time they were building Walker and Buford.

LS: Mmm, O.K., so what years did you go to Buford and Walker?
CA: I went to Walker, I guess, in '66. I got to Lane in '67. I actually did go to Walker one year.

LS: You did, O.K.

CA: And then I went from Walker on to Lane. So I was in seventh grade...no I was in eighth grade at Walker, when it was a half a day... I went to Venable for the seventh grade...eighth grade half a day at Walker, and ninth grade at Walker.

LS: Hmm.

CA: Then I went tenth, eleventh, and twelfth at Lane.

LS: At Lane... starting in '66?

CA: Lane had to start in '67.

LS: O.K. So you were there right when things started to happen at Lane?

CA: Yes, right.

LS: Do you remember what that first year was like?

CA: Oh I remember Lane a lot because we did a lot. We had walk-ins, sit-outs, boycotts, and everything at Lane.

LS: So there was a student group or organization?

CA: Actually a lady did a book on it... I can't think of that lady's name, but the book is called *The Bus Stops Here*, I think I mentioned it to Jacky. And she has a good chronological listing of data of what happened during that time, and they got us in the book—me, Cherry Pie, and all of us—in the book. I was reading the book, and I remember one thing specifically...it was stated that in '68-'69 a radical group came in...there had been some tensions, but they were talking about us when we got there.

LS: So you were the radical component?

CA: Yes, I was.

LS: What did that entail?

CA: Well, that entailed that we were a little more defiant, a little more militant, just less in terms of the same old, same old. We wanted to say, well "you don't have black history, you don't have this, you don't have that... Why is the principal, why is the staff doing this?" We definitely came in asking questions. Of course...
during those days, the Black Panthers and the militancy and the fist raising was happening.

LS: So were those some of your models?

CA: Oh yes, yes.

LS: How did the Martin Luther King/Black Panther thing...

CA: Not so much Martin Luther King as the Black Panthers... we were more in line with the Black Panthers.

LS: They were more...

CA: Yeah.

LS: What kinds of responses did you feel you got from say the principal of the school?

CA: Well, we were definitely marked in terms of being militant or radical. I got suspended I think when I was in the tenth grade... And I share that now with the audiences when I do presentations. Me, Cherry Pie, and another gentleman named Roger Richardson, we got suspended... and we threw our books in the dumpster on the way out. As a matter of fact, I can still picture the dumpster right outside the Albemarle County office building where we threw our books away... we did get back in school...

LS: What did you guys do to get suspended?

CA: Well, we supposedly had instigated a fight the previous day or something...

LS: So there was some violence?

CA: We were declared a threat to the Virginia school system... and when I share that with audiences, they can’t believe that Alex-zan was a threat to the Virginia school system. I get real tickled 'cause they say, "Oh, not you Mr. Alex-zan." I say, "Yeah, you know."

LS: I guess I’m curious about whether there were any opportunities for whites and blacks to get along, to come together?

CA: Well, that was one... Yeah, we would have our little meetings and what have you, but...

LS: It wasn’t that effective?
CA: Yeah, it wasn’t that effective. We basically looked at it as we just weren’t being treated right, and what have you.

LS: You’ve already mentioned some of the grievances that you felt—there was no black history—what were some of the other things?

CA: Right. The teachers, there weren’t enough black teachers, how we were being treated and what have you. In that book, *The Bus Stops Here*, it was interesting that the author wrote that she couldn’t understand our grievances because one of the students had been in the system with white students and other students so long, and was almost like, “What’s his problem? What’s his issue?”

LS: Was that you who were at Venable?

CA: Yeah, exactly, exactly. She was pinpointing me, because I was supposedly one of the ringleaders as far as the militancy and advocacy, and they couldn’t actually mesh that and put it together with my having gone to integrated schools all my life. I used to wear a bullet around my neck in high school, a bullet about like that, and I tell folks now that it’s amazing at that time I wore a bullet and now I wear a drum...

LS: So, times have changed a little bit?

CA: And if you were to go on my website, I mention a little bit about it on my website.

LS: Is the web site under your name?

CA: Alex-zan.com.

LS: O.K.

CA: Actually, even here, I think I do mention it...[reads from something] Read it, top paragraph.

LS: “An early trail-blazer being…”

CA: “...being one of the first blacks to attend Virginia’s desegregated schools, Charlottesville’s greatest journey started out in high school on a mission…” It says a little bit more when you go on the website.

LS: Well, I’ll go check that out. So, in those days it was important to... the only way really to get heard, you guys felt, was to be militant and to be...

CA: Oh yes, we had to be defiant. I mean, we had to speak out, I mean, we weren’t passive... and we would challenge other blacks that didn’t speak out.
LS: And did you feel like you started to get people to hear?

CA: Oh yeah, they definitely heard, we made sure people heard. I mean you couldn’t help but to hear...

LS: What kinds of things were effective?

CA: Oh, you know, we would basically hold up a hallway or a staircase, we would block a door, or any number of things to get the... we would confront the principal.

LS: How did he respond?

CA: He would call our parents, or he would call a session or what have you, but it was clear that we wanted to be heard and we would be heard. We marched one day from school. We walked out, and marched from Lane High School up to Trinity [Church] at the corner of 10th and Grady.

LS: Yes, I heard about that, yes... and what was said when you all met in the church?

CA: Well, I think Reverend Mitchell at that time was head of Trinity, and you know we just expressed some grievances about how were being treated, and what have you.

LS: One of the things we’ve heard repeatedly is that one of the flash points was the extra-curricular activities because all of the students who were being brought in from Burley or wherever weren’t given as much of a chance to be on the sports team or to be in the band...

CA: I think the sports team was a little bit different, the band, well... even today you’re always a little bit more welcome in sports than you are maybe are in the band, the drama club, and all the others things. But I do remember one day they had a Home Ec. Class... they brought a special reading teacher in, a black reading teacher in from Richmond named Miss Green, as a matter of fact she’s at Union to this day.

LS: Virginia Union?

CA: Virginia Union College. A reading instructor named Miss Green.

LS: Uh, huh. We spoke with a white teacher who experienced a lot of this with you all.

CA: What was her name?

LS: Susan Cone Scott.
CA: Yes, Miss Cone...English teacher, yes, yes.

LS: She was very enlightening in describing the experience. She was very young at the time that she started teaching...

CA: Oh yeah. She...we were sort of supportive of her... we sort of like created a little bond with her. I don’t know—because she young and attractive, or what—but she was sort of a little more open...

LS: She felt, I think, that she wanted to help with the cause because she didn’t think that what was going on was fair, and I wondered if there were other teachers that you remembered that were similar?

CA: She stands out, I could tell you a couple we actually just about drove crazy... but on the supportive end she certainly stands out.

LS: How many black teachers were there in the school at that time?

CA: I can’t quite remember, it might have been two or three. if that...

LS: That’s what she thought, too. I can imagine it must have been awfully hard for them. Were you in classes where you had a black teacher and a lot of white students?

CA: I can’t remember having a black teacher...

LS: You can’t remember... hmmm...

CA: I’m trying to remember back in Lane did I have a black teacher? I don’t think so.

LS: Ever at Venable?

CA: No, No... definitely not at Venable...Did I have a black teacher at Walker? I can’t actually remember having a black teacher at Walker.

LS: That’s got to be tough. We’ve heard, you know, at Jefferson, that was actually one of the benefits, that there was a lot of support and a lot of encouragement..

CA: But see, and it probably occurs even today because a lot of the sentiment, and you may have heard that it’s hard to teach who you don’t love, and black boys today are really being, to a large extent, given a bad deal. Although some of them are irresponsible, some of them do not have a support system in place. I think they’re just looked at early on in terms of being combative, violent, disciplinary problems...
CA: Yes, Miss Cone...English teacher, yes, yes.

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LS: Do you feel like you got any support in encouraging you to go on to college or to do a professional career from the administration?

CA: Not really.

LS: Because that must have been a huge change from Jefferson as well. I mean everyone was encouraged to go on and find something that they would feel proud of, and so we've kind of thought of your years there... I mean, it almost feels like there's a lost generation out there... kids who didn't get a lot of support and didn't get a lot of encouragement.

CA: How I did get to college was through Upward Bound. Yes, it was Upward Bound. I think Steve Waters at the time was with Upward Bound and got me tied in based on my grades...

LS: So you had some people helping to get you through, because it takes more... I mean parents can only do so much, and the school system...

CA: Oh sure, sure. Well parents, just like I'm going to be talking in the session this evening with the teenagers, the power of knowledge is fueled by information; if you don't have the information you won't get the knowledge.

LS: Do you feel like it's changing at all now?

CA: Not that much. I don't think the support systems... the support systems are definitely not in place. At least back then, you did have a little bit more support system in the family, in the home, in the community. It is less today.

LS: Yes, that's pretty scary, too...

CA: Because, you know, it's so scattered. People are so scattered.

LS: Well and also the city chose to destroy Vinegar Hill... We've spoken with Eugene Williams about his thoughts, and he feels like there's been a backsliding of the opportunities for education and for relationships between blacks and whites.

CA: I do think, too, that possibly the ministers haven't... ministers in Charlottesville have never really been that vocal per se... and there's a fine line in terms of being vocal, and then being looked at as being a radical.

LS: But as you probably came to the conclusion in the '60s sometimes being a radical is the only way to effect change...

CA: Oh yes, you definitely get heard. Oh yes, oh yes. I mean even today, if you want to get noticed, you throw a bottle into the Paramount theater or you light a fire... You know what I'm saying? You're going to get coverage.
LS: Well you get coverage but is it a positive thing? Is it going to get you where you want?

CA: Well at the time when folks are doing it, they just wanted to be heard or get coverage, the same thing... I mean the folks over... the terrorists, they know how to get PR...

LS: What do you think we need to do today to make something happen, change?

CA: Well I think its going to take, it’s going to take a group of people that’s actually committed...there’s making a commitment for the well-being of children, the well-being of the community...and that gets back to. I was telling a group yesterday—Wayne Dyer has a quote in one of his books, that says if you want to solve the problem, you have to change the mind that created it. And we’ve got to have that change of the mindset, be inclusive and include all children and not just a very small group. And we’ve also got to get away from the labeling and the stereotyping and all of that... And along with that, I’ve always felt there needs to be really a good strong parenting crusade. People do what they know, if they don’t know, they don’t do. So that’s the whole other element. But you need people that are in responsible positions to actually... that are committed to change and are about real progress as opposed to—that’s the thing to say, because that’s the time of the day and that’s what you’re supposed to say. But then you’ve got a whole other group of every day community people who need to hold these folks accountable.

LS: Yes, the everyday community I guess was a another key that we keep hearing about from people ... we spoke with a gentleman who ran an organization out of the University of Virginia, and they were paid by the federal government to go to different school systems and help bring the faculty members together...

CA: Who were they?

LS: His name is... Hank Allen.

CA: Yeah.

LS: It was basically right around the same time that you were at Lane, it opened up and it kept on going until 1980, and so it was there for a long time. He spoke about how important it was for him to get people in a room together.

CA: Yes, at that time nobody, nobody knew a Hank Allen existed...

LS: And he could have been there for Lane High School...

CA: Nobody heard of... I didn’t hear of Hank Allen until years later...
LS: Well the school system had to be receptive, open to...?

CA: Yes, see that's one of the things with the program I'm doing this evening. See a lot of our young people are ... black, white, they are left out there to fend for themselves... and we say, well, what's wrong with them, they're misguided, but so are we... so they're not given the proper attention, the proper direction, the proper tools to work with ... so they do it their way, and their way sometimes can be very negative and destructive, but they do it their way. They're fending for themselves.

LS: Well, he was there to offer the tools and not everybody was willing to accept them, and I guess even here in his own community they weren't willing to...

CA: Well, like I say, I didn't... years later I found out who Hank Allen was.

LS: I like what he has had to say about bringing people together and forcing them to talk to one another.

CA: Yes, that's always a good thing as Martin Luther King used to say, you get to know the folk once you get to talk to them.

LA: Yes, he just felt there was no way anyone was going to respect another culture until they actually got to interact with it. Well it sounds like the work that you're doing now is all about dealing with these issues.

CA: Well, I like to say, particularly what I'm doing in reference to the whole youth initiative, its called Youth Stepping Up. I see it really as a life saver, testing and academics and all the other things are good, but there's a strong undercurrent among students—black, white, and other—that has this rebellious this "I don't care" or this attitude that is running rampant: "You owe me, I'll get what I can today, I'm not worried about other people, disrespect, disconnection." All of that exists, it exists as far as I'm concerned for a number of reasons: money, prestige, television...and you know, movies, all of that plays a part and young folks see that, and they want a piece of it, but they don't have a vehicle and the tools to... how to access that, and so they do it their way, and a lot of times it's illegal or making a bad choice. And in the meantime, that anger or frustration builds up and that's where the tension falls. When you're looking at me, "what does she want, what is Amy's problem, she's got issues, I don't like her, no way, what did Amy say about me?" So all of those little trivial issues come to the surface because there's a void going on in one's mindset, and so therefore I'm going to confront you. And depending on what you say, I may attack you, or I may get my crew or my boys and... you know... so this gets back to letting stuff go. But when you let stuff go, you also have to give youngsters who let stuff go, and move on, something to move on to. And that's why you've got to provide the vehicles and the options for what young folks can get into, because it gets back to, really it's the battle of one's mind.
LS: And what are you offering, or recommending?

CA: Well, I’ve got a ten-point initiative for the city officials here, with ten different ideas that they can utilize. I’ve also got a couple of groups that are ongoing that are doing things that they can tie into.

LS: So there are organizations that have activities?

CA: Yes, one in particular is Charlottesville Abundance of Life. They’re doing some things, and other folks are doing some things, too. One of the things I am providing is some information, sort of like a resource of information, for youngsters. Because a lot of times, as I say, it is information, and a lot of people are not informed and see they’re going to be receiving this also, it’s called “contacts.” [pulls out a sheet of paper from his bag] So a lot of times you may not go through a whole phone book, you may have a health problem, you may have a problem with age, you may have whatever... and you have some contacts there. So we’re going to have some groups and a few organizations, and people who’re doing things, to tell them what they contact...they can contact any of those folks on that list.

LS: Have you found activities that people seem to latch onto and that have been successful?

CA: Well, I don’t know, see I don’t live here now, so it’s not like I know all that exists. But I know the Charlottesville Abundance of Life seems to be doing some very positive things, and of course there can be more activities and things because not everything is going to fit everybody.

LS: And how old are most of the children that you’re working with in these programs?

CA: Well, they vary. I don’t have any programs set per se at this point. But I’ve done mentoring programs in Richmond and Charlottesville. I used to do Club Rapp here over the summer before I moved to Richmond in ’94. Used to do talent showcases, programs, community organizations, tenant groups... I used to do a variety... in fact I did so many programs people used to think I was a city employee, they thought I worked for the city.

LS: You do seem pretty plugged in.

CA: I offered the initiative to the Mayor in Richmond. It was primarily a ten-point initiative that any group or any organization could adopt. These are...this is—that’s Cherry Pie. [shows Liz a photograph]

LS: O.K. We haven’t met.
CA: I couldn’t play varsity basketball because I was a militant, and they cut me because they thought I was going to be a threat to the team. They thought I was going to control the team. So I played in the recreation league, years ago... We were called the “Wrecking Crew,” and we did some wrecking crew things, and three years ago we got together and we re-initiated the Wrecking Crew.

LS: Oh, very good.

CA: So now we’re doing some positive community things, giving scholarships, doing small things that we can do.

LS: Who would have thought, right?

CA: Yes, who would have thought... Exactly.

LS: Do most of your friends from the Wrecking Crew live around here?

CA: Some do, one lives in Michigan, two live in Maryland, but some of them are still here.

LS: How many were in your group?

CA: Oh, we had about eight or nine, and then we had some stragglers you know. Folks that wanted to be a part because we were so popular and we were well known, and... I am looking for that ten... its called “Take Ten,” and “Take Ten” is your...

LS: Your ten points?

CA: The ten points of the organization, and things that I’ve done over the years, and any community can adopt, pick up....

LS: Are those on your website as well?

CA: No, no. I think I may have it in the folder. Yes, I’m...we feel really good about the Wrecking Crew. Here it is... see that’s called YTN and YTN is Young Thinkers Network. And everything I do has a thinking component to it. Because, as I say, what we’re facing here today, out here today, is the battle of the minds. Nike knows it, Cocoa Cola knows it, T.V. knows it, and all the movie people, they know it.

LS: Having our minds controlled?

CA: Exactly.
LS: How do you feel the work that you’re doing in Atlanta has to be modified for Charlottesville? Are there differences in the way that people live, relate to the city?

CA: Well actually, to be frank with you, the problems in Charlottesville also are the same as the problems in Atlanta. The reason Atlanta may get a little more attention is because there’s more people. But the neglect, less services, less attention, less commitment to children, is in Atlanta, Richmond, across the board.

LS: So it’s not any different?

CA: No, no. You’ve got adults that... children are really an afterthought. Oh you were talking about the programs, and I just happened to notice this. In a couple of schools in Richmond I’ve got what is called the Thinkers Club. And the Thinkers Club, which has worked very well in Richmond... I was looking for a photo of the Thinkers Club...that’s the Thinkers Club in Richmond, the children love it. And what they do is, they get the buttons in the morning and they can wear the buttons all day as long as they make a good choice, make a good decision, do what they’re supposed to do, bring in their homework; the teacher keeps a chart of everybody, but if you disrespect Miss Sargent in the band room, in the cafeteria, you’ve got to give up your button. And they literally cry and get totally upset when they’ve got to give up the buttons... They will get it the next morning, but they’re still monitored in terms of “you’re a thinker, you’re a thinker” all the time wherever you may be. And they’ll get into the habit of thinking and making good choices.

LS: It probably works for a point and then when they get older, you have to come up with a different incentive?

CA: Well, it works, right, right, it works to a point in terms of, I would think after the...probably after the fourth grade.

LS: Yes, my son is about to enter fourth grade, and I can see him in a while not thinking that was so important any more.

CA: Yes, exactly. And then see what I’ve got ... on here is the bugs. “Take a moment” campaign, “I’m thinking club, just kickin’.” O.K. they can go into the Originators—that’s a brotherhood, sisterhood group. When you can have buttons, hats, and shirts as opposed to calling people out their names, they are originals. You are created to be an original, so you can have a whole group called...it would be sort of like the flip descript of a gang, but you’d be called the Originators.

LS: When you guys were the Wrecking Crew, did you have any kind of a symbol or anything that you would do?
CA: No, actually, its amazing you said that because our symbol now is the fists [holds up two and indicates includes a third] because back then it was just one fist.

LS: Like the Black Panthers.

CA: And now we’ve got a little symbol now with three fists like [holds up two again, indicating a third on top].

LS: I was just wondering because I know it usually helps when you have a...

CA: Well, see, I left the Originators open that if any community were interested in the Originators, that you could have the youngsters create their own logo.

LS: Hmm.

CA: The first one creates their own logo, you their own cause, and then you can just spread it from city to city. But you’ve got to have some committed people. I really like Ride, take a look, you’ve got Ride, you’ve got hidden treasures… Ride deals with diversity and with individuals’ differences and expressions.

LS: So you try to encourage different groups?

CA: No question. If no more than, if not different groups just for people to respect differences. We are different, and we’re supposed to be different, we’re not supposed to be alike.

LS: Have you been back to Venable?

CA: Not really, the Principal that was at Venable, that Broadbent, who just retired. He kept giving us a lot of lip service, and I told him that I was one of the originals and this and that... He said “yeah, uh huh, uh huh, sounds good, yeah, uh huh.” But that was about it. So I’m sure the youngsters do not know the role that Venable played.

LS: Yes I was curious if they highlighted that at all?

CA: I doubt it if they would know the valuable role that they played, you know, that the school played.

LS: I think that’s one of the things about why we’re doing an oral history is because there are so many people who come to Charlottesville, who weren’t born here, who don’t know all of this history...

CA: Yes, you see a lot of people that serve on the boards, are in groups and organizations and what have you, they don’t have a clear sense of Charlottesville.
LS: So, it’s helpful to get this history. So, I was just wondering if there were any other things from that time that you remember that were important?

CA: Well, we used to have some little riots up on Main Street, we used to hold up traffic...

LS: Oh you did? With the Wrecking Crew?

CA: Yes, oh yes, we used to stop traffic on Main Street, and we didn’t allow traffic to come down 10th Street from Main Street.

LS: Really? You just stood in the road?

CA: We stood in the road, or we’d just create chaos, you didn’t drive down 10th Street if we didn’t let you drive down 10th Street.

LS: Did you have any police intervention?

CA: Oh yes, the police came. Yes, yes, but we didn’t really have what you’d call a confrontation with the police. [Holds up a paper] Did you say you wanted a copy of that?

LS: Yes, I was wondering if we could make a copy of that. There’s probably a copier downstairs I can use. Did the police ever come to school?

CA: ...this is the original letter from Oliver Hill that was sent to my Mom in 1958.

LS: Wow, can we copy that?

CA: Yeah. That was February 2, 1959. From Oliver Hill.

LS: [Reads from letter] “Strenuously and ably as we could for the admission without further delay of your children to the schools to which they have been assigned.” But you weren’t just assigned, you actually had to choose to go and sign up and go to school there? It wasn’t a given that you were assigned to a school?

CA: Yeah. Well, that was the school, that was the only school that we were assigned to at that time.

LS: Not Jefferson?

CA: No.

LS: Because we have talked to a lot of people who went from...

[Alex Searls enters the room]
AS: I know you.

CA: Hi... How are you?

AS: Fine.

LS: Hey, Alex.

AS: I’m sorry I’m a little late.

CA: We don’t even know...I don’t even know what time it is.

[Chatter about why Alex is late]

CA: [Hands a piece of paper to Liz] And what I did, they were going to do a story on me a couple of years ago in the Richmond *Times*, and they didn’t do it, so I did a list for their story, did a little research—1954 Brown vs. Board, 1955 Charlottesville Albemarle petitioned the School Board to desegregate the schools. Albemarle Petition never got to the Board, NAACP parents in Charlottesville was the basis of the school suit. In 1956, Judge Paul ordered desegregation of Virginia schools effective immediately, state the order pending appeals by Virginia Massive Resistance. In 1957, the Governor, Attorney General, and I remember this, or I remember when I wrote it down, the Attorney General leaves the Army and campaigns for governor, against integration, raised his right arm and proclaimed that he would lose his limb before a single black child would enter a white school. In 1958, May 12th, Judge Paul set September effective date for the desegregation decree. O.K. And in May in ’58, that’s what this is—Charlottesville Negroes apply at Venable.

LS: That was you.

CA: Right. In ’58, Virginia schools closed down to fight integration. In ’59, the schools were ordered to provide special tutoring. That was in January of ’59.

LS: Is that when you were in the Superintendent’s office?

CA: That’s when I was in the Superintendent’s office, and then in the fall of ’59 is when we actually got into the regular schools.

LS: Great... you’ve got a copy of that too?

CA: Yes!

LS: You have everything in that briefcase!
CA: I had that because I was supposed to have met the other day with, Amy Tillerson of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, so I brought some information for her.

LS: O.K.

CA: She didn’t show up, so I was going to keep the information. But yeah, this is sort of like a good...

LS: Yeah, that is a good summary. I appreciate that. Yeah, the VFH is the grantee for the project that we are doing. So did the police ever come to school at Lane High School to deal with any of these issues?

CA: I remember them coming, but they just came. They never... I can’t remember... now I do remember once that they came and they arrested my cousin because he swung and hit the principal, the assistant principal, who was Dave Garrett, and he had to go to court. That’s in the book as well.

LS: So, *The Bus Stops Here* is a good opportunity to read more?

CA: It’s a good... I didn’t find out about *The Bus Stops Here* until about four or five years ago.

LS: It wasn’t written about one of the Wrecking Crew though?

CA: Oh no, this was a lady that was at the University.

LS: Did she interview you guys?

CA: No.

LS: No? How did she find out all of the information?

CA: Well, I guess she worked through the University and she talked to people and what have you. But she was pretty accurate.

LS: She was pretty accurate? O.K., that good to know, too. That’s very interesting. I have a couple of other questions—when you got out of high school and you all had had this reputation and you were pretty well known, did you ever have trouble getting a job or did people worry about...?

CA: Not that I know of, but, I still think to this day, people may not say it, and although I’m pretty well known here, people still probably think... “I remember when he was a little …militant, he was a Panther, he was,” you know...

LS: I didn’t know if they’d had any reservations about...
CA: Well, see, they may but that never altered my course because if I wanted to do a program, or if I wanted to do a festival, whatever, I wanted to do, I did it.

LS: But even as a pharmaceutical technician?

CA: Oh, no, oh, no. That didn’t matter.

LS: What did some of the other Wrecking Crew go on to do? Did any of them go and get into a sort of profession related to protesting, raising consciousness...?

CA: A couple of them are entrepreneurs, different jobs...

LS: Did any of them go into any organizations like the Black Panthers or become serious protestors?

CA: No, no.

LS: Did any of you guys end up fighting the system from outside?

CA: Not really. I’m probably the one that’s still the most, that probably has done the most as far as carrying over, over the years because I’ve been involved over the years. So I’m the one that sort of like through some means in the last thirty some years have still participated in community activist type things.

LS: Yes, it sound like it from what you do...

CA: Not on the level being militant or combative, but just being involved.

LS: Yes, and right now you’re here in Charlottesville to be involved in a program?

CA: Well, actually, yesterday I did staff development for Parks and Rec.

LS: Oh, great!

CA: And I did a session with the children over at South 1st Street. And this evening I’ll be doing the session with the teenagers, and tomorrow morning I’ll be in Petersburg, and tomorrow afternoon I’ll be heading back to Atlanta.

LS: Were you also here for fiftieth anniversary of Brown vs. Board activities, you said you’d been interviewed a lot?

CA: No, I was interviewed a couple of years ago in Richmond. I think if anyone at the Virginia Foundation knew what I knew, if they knew what I knew and knew about me, they probably would have flown me in. I wouldn’t have been surprised if they had flown me in for that. The only student that exists in Charlottesville that I know of is Don Martin.
LS: The only student who was part of...

CA: Part of the...

AS: Kenneth's older brother.

LS: Oh, O.K.

CA: Yes, yes.

LS: We interviewed Julia about how she...

CA: Who?

LS: Julia Martin, Kenneth's mother...

CA: Oh yes, yes... I talked to her the other day on the phone.

LS: About being one of the parents who had to go through what your mother went through. She didn't... she never was afraid, she never, you know, she always felt like this was the right thing to do...

CA: Well, see that's the thing... when I talked to Amy, I just happened to see it on the website of the Daily Progress. I was sort of concerned with, I said "Hey, Amy, why don't you talk to the parents. These are the folks that were on the forefront at that time. They were taking risks."

LS: Yes, that's how I felt too...

CA: I mean it wasn't really any risk to me, I mean, I'm six years old, I mean... you want to go to court, you want to eat some cotton candy? You want to... I'll go...!

LS: She didn't express any reservations or doubts, she just said it was the thing to do and she did it. And that impressed me a lot.

CA: Yes, yes. So whenever I get interviewed or that comes up, I always bring up the parents that played a vital role.

LS: Well, it would be good to talk to your mom some time.

CA: I can give you her number, she's a... she's... her personality's more beaming than mine...

LS: I spoke with her on the phone trying to reach you, and she was very pleasant.

CA: Yes, very, very, very pleasant.
LS: Does she ever talk about those times?

CA: Not really, unless somebody was to enquire, you know... but just to talk.

LS: Does she feel proud that she was involved in that?

CA: I think she feels very proud, and I think she’s very proud in terms of early on, some of the work she did with 4-H and how that has transpired, has moved from her on to me, and on beyond. She’s certainly proud of all the people I’ve touched and am touching... so I’m sure she felt, you know she had a role in that, which she had.

LS: Do you, or maybe she, have any sense now, are there individuals in the community who you feel like are doing... are serving as great role models, that are doing some of the things that need to be done. Do you have people that you would hold out as examples of positive...?

CA: You mean at the present time?

LS: Yeah.

CA: I guess when I think of Charlottesville, one person just sort of like always comes up on the radar. And I pretty much know who’s who and who’s what over the years. I guess I always think of Alicia Lugo.

LS: Alicia Lugo?

CA: Yes.

LS: O.K. Where is she?

CA: Alicia is with Focus.

LS: Would she be someone for us to talk to?

CA: Oh yes, she taught at the black high school, Burley, she’s been very instrumental in... she was on the Charlottesville School Board once. But I’ve always seen her as being a person... but... you know over the years, very few people just maintain that commitment, and that’s really what it’s going to take, and this is why when people see me... if I go down the mall I may have twenty-five conversations from one end of the mall to the other...

LS: Well you had four on the way up in the elevator.

CA: I mean because people know me and... you’re known... as I tell people when I speak to church groups and what have you... you can know the Word, you can
speak the Word, you can read the Bible, but the bottom line is, are you living the Word? And what are your deeds? And people are familiar with my deeds. They know of my works, that goes without question. So, nobody questions my commitment or dedication to making a difference.

LS: They probably wish you were still around.

CA: Well, I’m sure some people wish I was still in Charlottesville, but when I left Charlottesville, Charlottesville did not do a whole lot to maintain me here, and although they did a lot of lip service, “Oh, we miss you so much...” and then I would tell them, “Well, you know I’m in Richmond, I’m only an hour away, I could be here in the morning and back in Richmond for lunch.”

LS: It’s a tough place for employment.

CA: And you know I’m still, now I mean they like my works but they still don’t acknowledge... I still don’t feel like I’ve been acknowledged in terms of what I’ve done for Charlottesville, making a difference. I see some of the youngsters now, that I was mentor to, now they’re parents. And you know, of course they just love to see me, they just light up and let me know what that child is going and what have you. So you like to know that you’ve made a difference, and now you know I’m dealing with folk, up in Atlanta and various other places.

LS: What church did you go to when you lived here?

CA: Zion Union.

LS: Zion Union? Hmmm. One of the people we wanted to try and interview is Carter Wicks, but he’s been...he’s had surgery and we didn’t know if...

CA: Well, he wasn’t... there really has been no...maybe early on there was a couple of ministers during the Civil Rights era, but there hasn’t really been a minister, even though you’ve got Reverend Edwards and you’ve got the other ministers, to me there’s no in the churches minister.

LS: And that’s what we feel like we are missing in our oral history, is that we haven’t spoken with a minister.. I didn’t know if the minister from your church...?

CA: Well see, the minister at Zion Union, he’s from Danville. Reverend Edwards came here from Illinois, I believe. He’s been here for a while...Reverend Johnson has been here the longest. Reginald Johnson.

LS: Reginald Johnson... would he be an interesting person to talk to?

CA: Yes, yes, he was here during the marches... and early on.
LS: I just feel the lack of that component, because as you mentioned... you have come to that a couple of times... that the church holds an important place in the community.

CA: Well you know the church is a place... to me, to a large degree, they serve who comes to that church. Not that they're not open, they wouldn't close the door on anyone, but I don't think they beat the streets to bring people in either, or to make it known that hey, come to you know, with open arms... and it's not something that you know, to me, its either a part of you, or you just go and play the game.

LS: Right.

CA: To some of us, that's what we've always done. To me, nobody's surprised what I do because that's what I've always done. Now, of course, now I get paid for some of it, but still that's what I do.

LS: Yes, it sounds very interesting, I'd love to come and hear you sometime.

CA: Well, you could come this evening. You could hear a little bit about me, because I'm going to be the coordinator, we've got the chief of police coming this evening.

LS: Where is this?

CA: At the Music Resource Center, which is the old Mount Zion Church and the Captain of the University of Virginia Police Department will be there. I don't look at the program as being a means to an end, though after this evening, everybody's going to let stuff go. They're going to be so happy, and get along. No! We're going to have some angry people this evening, tomorrow, and days to come. So we can start the process of getting people to realize that it's not that important, don't get caught up in the trivial stuff, don't get caught up in the small stuff... focus more on what you need, less on she says, he says, what people say about me, the gossip and the rumors, and a lot of it is just... let it go, let it go. And we can all live a little longer and be around a little longer, if we let stuff go.

AS: I hear that in my life...

CA: What's that?

AS: Just what you say is true.

CA: Yes, yes. That's it. And what I'm sharing, and what I'm going to share this evening, is universal. It cuts across, it crosses all borders, I mean, you've got whites killing their wives and assassinating family members, and it's across the board, that's why it shocks me sometimes when people say "It's not supposed to
It happen in my community.” “Oh, you don’t have crazy people in your subdivision?” I mean let’s get real, people are losing it everywhere...

Alex: That’s true.

LS: Going postal.

CA: Yeah, yeah. So I think I’ve given you pretty much... and you can get some information once you go on the website, you can get some insight.

LS: Well the last question that I have, which we ask everybody, and I know you never went to the Jefferson School, but we always try to see if people have creative ideas for what they think that that building could be or do for this community...

CA: Well, you know just to put it in a nutshell, just a center for learning, for knowledge, a center for information... I don’t know how that would take place, whether it would be a library, or a cultural center or just a center of information and knowledge, but one of the biggest things that bothers me that with all the black history programs and all the other programs that we have and the historical society and all that, all that sounds good. But to the everyday, Bob, Johnny or Tiffany, or Jamal, it means nothing. No significance whatsoever. So what these people haven’t done, they haven’t made it applicable to everyday children and people. They don’t know anything about black inventors, they could care less about Jefferson, they don’t care anything about history, why because that oral history hasn’t been passed down, and they haven’t made a connection and why it’s relevant. What’s relevant to them is where’s the concert at? Where’s the party? Where’s the dance? Where they’re moving? That’s relevant.

LS: So we’d have to make that place applicable?

CA: You’re going to have to make, whatever we do, attractive to young people, you have to make it relevant. See, the reason this can attract young people is “Yo!” You know, “Hey Yo!” You know you’re always saying “Yo, well Yo let it go!” And maybe a voice can whisper in one’s ear when they get to arguing or disagreeing, they can say “Yo, let it go. Yo! don’t do that, don’t pick it up, don’t pick up that gun... don’t pick up the knife... let it go, it’s not that important.” See one of the things I’m emphasizing this evening is a friend steps in when others step out. So are you a friend? Don’t allow your friend to get into this situation, then you’ve got these penal institutions that are institutionalizing folk...

LS: Great, all right...

CA: So you picked the right person to talk to, I must say...

End of interview.
Interview Consent Form
Jefferson School Oral History Project

The Jefferson School Oral History Project offers Jefferson School alumni an opportunity to share their memories of their education at Jefferson School. A transcript of this interview will be shared with the Jefferson alumni association. Copies of the transcribed interviews will be donated to the Albemarle Visual and Performing Arts Center in Charlottesville, Virginia. It is also hoped that a portion of the material gathered from the interviews will be selected for inclusion in an exhibit or book about the Jefferson School community.

I hereby relinquish all rights to the material which I have or may have now or hereafter have and hereby consent to the use of the material for historical and scholarly purposes including, but not limited to, the publication of a book.

1) All legal title and interest in which I have or may have now or hereafter have in the manuscript and its contents thereby become the exclusive property of the Jefferson School Oral History Project.

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(email)

Date: ____________

Charles Alexander - “Alex-zan,” June 17, 2004

(photos by Alexandria Searls)

Jefferson School Oral History Project
Interview Consent Form
Jefferson School Oral History Project
Preservation Piedmont, Charlottesville, Virginia

The Jefferson School Oral History Project is conducted by Preservation Piedmont as part of an ongoing program to support preservation of the Jefferson School.

The purpose of the interview is to collect the stories of those affiliated with Jefferson School in order to document and preserve the history of the site for the benefit of current Charlottesville residents and future generations. Material developed from the interview will be shared with the Charlottesville community through publication of a booklet, a video documentary of the interviews, and a conference.

Copies of the transcriptions and other materials derived from these interviews will be donated to the Albemarle County Historical Society, and The Carter G. Woodson Institute for African and African American Studies at the University of Virginia.

It is also hoped that a museum will be established at the Jefferson School where material gathered from this oral history project will provide a permanent exhibit interpreting the history of the Jefferson School and its role in the community.

In support of this program:

[Signature]

(name)

5675 Roswell Rd., Suite 517
Atlanta, GA 30342

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Interviewee

(date)

Interviewer

(date)
Interview with
Hank Allen

Interviewers: Jacky Taylor, Liz Sargent
Date: May 11, 2004
Location: Charlottesville, Virginia

Transcribed: May 2004
By: Liz Sargent
Proofed: July 2004
By: Jacky Taylor

[This interview has been edited for readability.]

We met Mr. Allen at his home. As we were explaining the goals of the project, and our interest in hearing more about the center he had directed at the University of Virginia, the conversation got started, and we began the tape...

HA: It was near the school of education... And they put them in that building. Eventually, the government required that you keep records for five years, I believe, after closing. Then you can do what you want with the records, throw them away or whatever. After five years, they threw our records away. If I had all of these [points to a book that included a year’s paperwork to support the center’s annual funding requests] then we could have pieced together the center’s history. There’s a fellow who lives near me, a retired professor. He, Jim Bash was the first director of this center. He wrote the first proposal. He and I have been working to pull this thing together, to put something down in writing. We have worked with the Institute...

JT: The Carter G. Woodson Institute?

HA: Yes, we have worked through them. We had a young intern there, and he did quite a bit, but when he finished, we weren’t really satisfied with the product. And so, the project just dropped off. But, we always felt that that should be in writing because very few people knew about the center. Very few people at the University knew about it. Very few people at the University ever wanted the center to be located at the University. That’s part of the attitude of Virginia.

JT: Can I stop you right now?

LS: Do you want to start with the baseline questions of name, etc., and I’ll take some photographs?
JT: Yes. Could you tell us your full name, and address, and your address at the time that you were involved with the center, and the full name of the center.

HA: At the time I worked at the center, my address was over in Mill Sedge (?) Drive. I’ve forgotten the number. But I moved here in 1974. I moved here in 1974. The center closed in 1980.

JT: What was the exact name of the center?


JT: Consultative Resource Center…

HA: On School Desegregation.

JT: OK.

HA: That was the name of it.

JT: And you were the director there from…

HA: I was the director from 1973 until 1980, when it closed. I had been there since 1969-70. I was working there as a staff member from ’69 to ’73. I need to go back and tell you something about that time. How it was staffed. At that time, basically graduate students staffed it. We had a director, and an assistant director. They were faculty members in the School of Education. But the rest of us were staff members, and we had time to go to school while we worked. We scheduled our work around our classes and schoolwork. Most of the people who worked there ended up with their Doctorate degree. And when they received their Doctorate degree, most of them left and went and took jobs as superintendents, principals, you know. When I finished, in 1972 I believe it was, the director left, and went back to the School of Education.

JT: To teach?

HA: Yes. The former dean was here. Dean Cherry was getting ready to retire, so they asked him to be the director of this center for a year. 1972 to 1973. By that time… I had been studying from 1969 until that time, I was close to finishing my dissertation. In 1972, I was writing my dissertation. The dean called me in and said to me, “Hank, you know I’m going to retire. I’m going to leave. The center is going to need a director next year. You’ve been here longer than anybody, you know this work very well, you’re the only person who knows it well enough to be the director.” He says, “I’d like to recommend you for that job, but it depends upon your finishing your dissertation and your Doctorate.” Which I was scheduled to finish in June. Well, to make a long story short, I finished my Doctorate, and we made an arrangement with the dean, the Dean of the School of Education, that I would be the director of that center. Also, I would be assistant professor in the School of Education, in my department, which was Curriculum
and Instruction. That was my request. And so I did that and they did that. After I got my Doctorate, I became the director of the center, and from that point on I was the director until it closed.

JT: And how many staff members did you say there were?

HA: It varied.

JT: Because they were graduate students?

HA: Yes. We always had at least four or five.

LS: Was it dependent on the funding that you secured through your annual budget proposal?

HA: It depended upon the funding, and it also depended on the people that we… we had to recruit the type of people we wanted. For instance, we dealt with counseling, and so we wanted someone appropriate. We had a young lady who was working on her Doctorate in counseling. So she was one staff member. We had another staff member, Saunder Stanley, do you know Saunder Stanley?

JT: No.

HA: She’s the Dean of the Continuing Ed, now. I hired her from West Virginia, where she worked for the state department in desegregation in West Virginia. That’s where I discovered her. I asked her to come join our staff. She joined our staff and worked on her Doctorate, got her Doctorate, and eventually left for where she is now. But anyhow, she had some expertise in desegregation, so we needed her. And we had some other people, one guy was a principal, former principal of a high school. Most of the people had some kind of expertise that would fit with our program and along in the line of what they were studying. Their Doctorate.

JT: What was your dissertation about?

HA: My dissertation? My dissertation was about desegregation! It was about student activities in selected desegregated schools. And why? You would be surprised. I selected that from working with the school divisions. We found out that, believe it or not, student activities in the schools were causing more problems than any other single item in the schools. Activities in the schools. You’d be surprised!

LS: What kinds of things were...

HA: Cheering squads.

JT: Cheering squads?
Believe it or not, cheering squads, when they desegregated the schools, caused a problem. You see you had kids... see in the South...Are you from the South?

No.

None of you are from the South... I wasn’t raised in the South either. I was born here in Virginia, but I was raised in the North. The reason I asked that is you don’t understand if... you have to understand where we were in the South. Why, for instance, did we have twenty-seven centers like the one I’m talking about. Like here. There were twenty-seven throughout the United States. Most of them located in the Southern states. Here, in the Northeast, in the West, in the Far West. And you can understand because they were trying to desegregate the South mostly. The Southern schools. Now, this is a tough problem. You have black people in the South, and white people in the South who very seldom communicated with each other. The only time they communicated was when they were working. Black people were working for white folks. That’s how they communicated. Other than that, there was no real communication. There wasn’t a whole lot of respect. And so now we’re going to desegregate the schools. Now, we’re going to bring all these kids together, black and white kids together. We’re going to bring black and white teachers together, administrators and councilors and coaches and directors of cheering squads and all. Bands. Bring them together. Now we’ve got to do a job to get them to understand what this desegregation process entails. What it’s about. First of all, if you’re going to work with this, then you’ve got to believe that desegregation is the way to go. And this was not always true. In the South, during this time, during the transition period, you would think that educators would have had a lot of influence in directing the desegregation process in the schools. But that wasn’t true. The politicians took over. Yes, they took over. And so that made it very difficult, because most of the politicians didn’t want to desegregate the schools. Did you ever hear of Massive Resistance?

Uh huh.

You’ve heard of that? That was right here in the state of Virginia.

Harry Byrd and...

Harry Byrd, yes indeed. I was here throughout all of that. Prince Edward County closed their schools. You’ve heard of that! Charlottesville closed its schools for a while. Norfolk, too. And a lot of it was because the federal government—the Supreme Court—issued the verdict, but Virginia said “No,” and the South said “No,” they didn’t want that. And they did everything they could to avoid it. The decision was handed down in what was it...1958?

1958?

No, no, before then.
JT: 1954?

HA: Yes, '54 I believe it was.

JT: Brown vs. Board, you mean?

HA: What?

JT: Brown v. Board you mean?

HA: Yes, that was the case. They handed down the decision, but it took them from that time until 1970 to really desegregate the schools. The politicians did everything in their power to avoid it. They did everything they could to stop it. They used all kinds of ideas, and anything they could to avoid desegregating the schools. The federal government says you've got to do it, and finally they accepted the idea that they had to do it. They had to, but the court did not lay out a plan for how it should happen. That wasn't their job--the Supreme Court--or their responsibility. So, the government had to do that, when I say the government I mean the state government. They had to see to it that the decision was carried out. But the states didn't want to do it.

LS: Did they have any time frame or guidance or anything?

HA: They had to go back to court, and the courts had to put a time frame on it. "With all deliberate speed," they said.

JT: So where does the center come in?

HA: Where does the center come in? O.K. Good. Well, the federal government, title 4, decided that in order to move, have a smooth transition into desegregation, someone had to help the school districts and the people; they couldn't do it on their own because they didn't know enough about it. So, what they did was to fund the centers with federal grants. The centers, the first thing that they had to do, was to train their staff. They had to do that first. In this process of desegregation. I came up here and I took a couple of courses, and then I took some training on the side one summer.

JT: Where did you get that training?

HA: It was basically human relations training. That's what it was, because that's what the problem was a human relations problem. When people don't speak to each other, don't understand each other, you've got to a human relations problem.

LS: And what year was this that you were taking classes?

HA: 1968 I came up here, that summer.

LS: That's 14 years after the...
HA: Yes!

LS: Wow!

HA: Yeah. It took that long because they were determined not to do it.

LS: The center had some federal funding to help it get started?

HA: The center was funded. The government granted us funds to run the center, to train people to work in desegregated schools. That's what we tried to do.

LS: All over the state, or were there other centers that were more regional or local?

HA: That's a good question. Our center here had an area that we worked in. Each had different areas that they covered. We covered the states of Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland, and Washington, D.C.

LS: That's a lot!

HA: Now, you wonder why we had Washington, D.C., since Washington, D.C. was mostly black school systems. There were a few white schools, but they were included. So what we did was, we worked with those school districts. But the most difficult thing was getting into the schools to work. Because we had to work through persuasion. We could not tell a school district, "We are coming to help you. You need help and we're coming up there to help you." They wouldn't want that. Then they wouldn't cooperate. So what we did was, we had a man who had been a superintendent of schools in the state of Virginia. He knew most of the Superintendents in the state of Virginia.

JT: Do you remember his name?

HA: Copenhaver, he's dead now. George Copenhaver.

JT: O.K.

HA: George went around to these schools and talked to the superintendents, told them what we offered, what we could do for them. And then in some cases, not all cases, they decided that they needed our help. And once that was identified, we sat down with them and planned on how we were going to train their staff, when and where we were going to train their staff. But the superintendent had to approve it. Cause everybody in the school system had to know we were coming. And they had to know that they had to cooperate with us, because the superintendent wanted it. But, we had to convince the school superintendent first.

JT: Did many of them say no?
Some of them did. We didn’t work with all of the school districts. But we worked with quite a number.

How about Charlottesville?

Charlottesville was cool. We worked a little bit with Charlottesville. Albemarle was worse than Charlottesville.

Really?

Yes, they were worse than Charlottesville.

What do you mean that they were worse?

They wouldn’t request our help, they didn’t think they needed our help.

Ah. But Charlottesville was open to your help?

No, Charlottesville wasn’t open either. Not totally. We helped them because they had problems in their schools.

What kinds of problems did they have?

Let me give you an example of what I’m talking about—problems. When you bring black students from all black schools to an all white school, and that’s the way it flowed. You never had white kids going to black schools during that time. Politicians did that, because they knew that the black schools weren’t equal to whites’. They knew that. O.K.? So now, you have that, and then you have black kids. And there’s something else that happened during that time that didn’t help the process at all. When they desegregated the schools, let’s say when they finished desegregating the schools, tied to that were 214 black principals in the state of Virginia. When they finished desegregating the schools, there were 14. Black coaches disappeared. Assistant principals disappeared. Councilors disappeared. Coaches disappeared. So now, when you bring black kids into a white situation like that, these are kids that had been used to going to school and participating in activities and all, and they have their way of doing it. They go to the white school, and the white school says this is the way we do it. This is what we do, you come in and do what we do. Because we know what we’re doing, like they didn’t know what they were doing. See, I was teaching then. I taught in the black schools for seventeen years before I came to the University, down in Danville.

Oh!

Yes, so I know about what happened.

Was it a high school?
HA: Yes, a high school. And, there was no such thing as equal. There’s never been. As far as school is concerned. Black schools have never been equal to the white schools. And, I went to school in the North. I never had a black teacher, black counselor, black principal, or anybody. All the time from second grade through high school. I know what it’s like going to a white school. And these kids are coming to white schools for the first time, and they, you know, they’re lost. And then they weren’t treated well. You had teachers there that didn’t want to teach those kids. That’s the truth.

LS: And then they had no more advocates if they didn’t have a coach to help them…

HA: Who’s going to help them?

LS: Right.

HA: They look around, these kids who have been used to having their own principals, and councilors. They look around and say, what in the hell happened to our principals? And our administrators and our councilors? They don’t see any. They don’t see any. So, they became angry. The black kids became angry. And they caused a lot of problems. And rightly so. I would have done the same thing had I been a student. [discussion of taking a picture]

LS: What school districts were more open to having the center involved here in Charlottesville than others, if there were any?

HA: Lane High School, you know Lane High School? We were at the Lane School. Most of our work was with the Lane High School here in Charlottesville. We didn’t work with Albemarle High School, very little.

LS: What about the elementary schools? Did they have the same problems?

HA: Yes, they had problems. But, we still couldn’t work there unless they wanted us. We knew they had problems, and we could see that they have problems, but they didn’t see it.

LS: What community was your biggest success where you were able to come in and really feel like you made a difference?

HA: We had quite a number of what we felt were successes with school districts. We’ve had some. I recall one school district that did what they should have done to prepare for desegregation. It was the school district in Moderndale. Have you ever heard of Moderndale, Virginia?

JT: Uh, uh.

HA: It’s down below Danville. It’s 30 miles southwest of Danville. Not a big place. But they decided, O.K., we’ve got to desegregate the schools. So they decided they would take time out, take a whole year and get prepared for desegregation. During that time, they had
black and white teachers' meetings, meetings and training sessions. They had black and white students...they even had students...we didn’t work with students at the center. We never worked with students.

JT: Oh, you just worked with the teachers?

HA: We worked with the adults in the school system. Because we felt we couldn’t work with both of them at the same time. If you work with the students, and you get them ready, they are going to meet hostility from teachers, because they’ve got teachers who didn’t want the schools to be desegregated. The white teachers didn’t want it, see what I mean? So we sat down. If we get the teachers, the people that work in the schools to understand the process, accept the process, and know something about some of the problems that they are going to face and how to work with those problems, then they can work with the students as they come to them. See what I mean? So that’s what we did. And, we were fairly successful with that, I thought.

JT: Do you think the teachers... did they respond well to your advising them how to deal with the black students who were uncomfortable? How did it actually work?

HA: Let me tell you how we did it, how we worked. We had workshops, training sessions. In the summer, we had workshops. The first year I worked there—in ’69—we went down to the different counties and had workshops during the summer. During the school year, we had what we called training sessions. We went down during the school year to do the training sessions. And the way we did it was the teachers would come, and we—the staff members—divided the groups into small groups. Each staff member was responsible for a small group of teachers and admin... we mixed it up with administrators and teachers, councilors, everybody. We also had more whites in the group than we had blacks. You know why?

JT: No.

HA: We found out that white people just wouldn’t talk about this issue. So we wanted them to feel comfortable in a majority environment. Black folks could always operate in a minority environment. We learned that in the South. That was natural for us. So we were comfortable. The black teachers and the black staff members were very comfortable in the workshops and training sessions. You had some white teachers who were very uncomfortable because they had never been in the midst of black people before you know, on an equal level. So, then we decided the main problem was the activities. We knew what they were, and what we did was we made sure that during the workshop we dealt with these types of problems, like student activities, see. And they had some other things, discipline, and what not. We had to deal with those. But we dealt with them in a small group. And I’ll never forget, I was a group leader, I recall, at the very beginning. And I had thirteen people in my group. Now, would you believe that it took a week to get the black and white teachers in there to talk to each other? We would come in and the first day the whites would be over there, the blacks over here. So I said, “No, we can’t have that, we can’t have that. You know, mix it up.” So they would sit down, but they’d
still...when we started talking, they would ask me questions, and I’d talk to them. You ask me a question, I talk to you. You ask me a question, I talk to you. And this is the way we did it the first day or two. I didn’t want that, and I knew that. But I went along with them at the beginning. Then I stopped them. Now the next day I came in, I took a piece of paper and I drew a sociogram, drew it for the conversation, just to, you know, show on paper, where the conversation was going, where it’s coming from? And all of it is narrowing in on me. So, I showed them. I said, “This is not what you are here for, you’re not here to talk to me.” I said, “Because you know, come September, I’m not going to be here. I’m going to be up at the University. I’m not going to be with you! You’re going to be with each other, here. And you’ve got to learn to know each other, know something about each other, respect each other so that you can go to a white teacher, if a white teacher has a problem with a black kid, you can go to a black teacher and say “Hey, I’m having a problem, what do you think?” And vice versa. And I said, “Now you can solve your problem. You can solve your problem. So if you can get to the point where you can do that, you won’t have a problem. And you’re going to solve it.” And so this is what we did. And we talked about all kinds of things that happen in schools. For instance, we always saved to the end of the training session for certain activities, because they were very touchy. When you are dealing with human relations, you are dealing with people’s feelings. And people don’t like to share their feelings, especially white people. We found that out. They don’t like to share to their feelings, so you have to get them in there in small groups so that they can be comfortable. Get to know each other so that they can share their feelings with each other. See. And it took time.

JT: How did you get them to get to know each other?

HA: Pardon me?

JT: How did you help them to get to know each other?

HA: We worked together in groups, small groups. We had them work together on problems.

JT: So they were involved in the same...?

HA: We had to break them down into smaller groups, in little groups and have them work on certain things, come back together, share what they’ve done, and what the answer to the problem was, and share the solution.

LS: Were they hypothetical problems, or real problems?

HA: Hypothetical...well, they were real problems, they may have been hypothetical to them, but they were real problems. So we did that, and I think to tell you the truth, that was the meat of the program because we felt that, if we could get people to sit down and respect each other, you see you have to have respect for people, and if you don’t have respect you’ve got a problem. That’s one of the reasons that we have a race problem in this country, today. Because we don’t have respect for each other. You know I had a, I know this is off the record a little bit, but I had a group once, a small group of white
teachers. And we were talking about school problems and things, and about race
relations. I said, “Now, I want to ask you a question. And I want you to give me your true
answer. I don’t want you to say what you think I want to hear, I want you to tell me
exactly what you think. See, I’m going to make a statement and then I want you to react
to it.” I said, “It is believed in this country today, in education, that black people just
don’t have the intellectual capacity as white people. Is that true or false?” And then I sat
after I asked that question...it’s one thing we learn as leaders, is to listen. If you ask a
question... if nobody answers, don’t worry, just sit there. Somebody knows the answer.
So I asked that question, and I sat back, and nobody said a word for a little while. And I
waited. I had time. Finally, finally, a lady says, “Dr. Allen, you know, I think you’re
right.” And I said, “What about the rest of you?” “Yes,” finally they came around, “Yes.”
I said, “Now, you were cautious and you were sort of hesitant because you didn’t want to
hurt my feelings.” I said, “But don’t worry about that. Don’t worry about it.” I said, “I
felt that was the case. I knew what I thought you should have answered. And you
answered, you finally answered. But I want you to say it, not me. Because if you can deal
with that, then we can deal with this race problem. We can understand why we have
problems with race.” Actually, and this is all part of the desegregation... human relations
plays a major role in desegregation. And we just didn’t have good human relations in the
South. We never had... it’s improved tremendously, but not all the way. And it probably
won’t during our time. But it’s something that we have to work with. You see?

LS: Do you find that there is a difference between the way men and women dealt with these
issues?

HA: Yes. Yes, there was a difference. Women were much more... I think that they gave more
thought to what we were trying to do. And their cooperation was much better than the
men. The men, especially the white men, we had some tough eggs to deal with, because
they just didn’t see it at all. See, when you were always the big boss, and all of a sudden
you’ve got to share some of your power—that’s what you’re doing—Nobody wants to
share power.

LS: And most of the superintendents and principals I can imagine were white then, so...

HA: Yes. That’s right. So you had to convince them. You had to convince them, see. So we
had to talk before we started working with the school district. For the training session, we
had meetings with a select group of people from that district. If possible, we told him to
select some people that we could meet with. And we met with them, oh, I don’t know
how many times before we would be able to start it. And what we were doing was
softening them up, getting them ready for what was to come. See. And it would give us
an idea of what we had to do. With them. With that school district. Most of the time we
were able to do it fairly well. I recall down in Nasron (??) County one year, one summer,
I had a white lady in my group, she was in my small group. And the workshop lasted
three weeks. Along about the last week we were talking. By that time, we were all
comfortable, we could talk, we could talk about anything. So, she said, “You know, if my
husband knew I was in this group, he would raise the roof with me.”
JT: This was a white woman?

HA: This was a white woman. Her husband was a businessman. She was, I think, a principal of a school. And, I wasn’t surprised when she made that statement, I wasn’t surprised at all. But she said it. I was surprised to hear her have the courage to say it. But she said it. And, I think that sort of made me understand, or made me know that she had gotten something out of these sessions because she had gotten the courage to talk. See, you have to be able to share your inner thoughts with people. Good or bad, you’ve got to be able to do that, and people were just not ready for that. Black or white. You know? This is a tough job to talk about delicate things, you know. They just don’t talk. And, now our culture is a little different. My culture is different from yours. And we used to say that. We’d say, “Now, the problem we have is you have to understand the differences between the races. If you understand the differences between the races, then you can deal with the problems. But you must understand. And all we ask you to do, we don’t ask you to change your way of life or anything. We ask you to understand the differences. I ask you to understand where I am coming from. So that you can understand it. If you do that, then that tells me that you respect me. Don’t ask me to change, I’m not asking you to change your ways of life. But to understand the difference. I may not think the same way about a certain thing that you think, but you can then ask me—“Why do you think the way you think about this?”—I can share that with you. So that the next time something comes us, and I say something about it, you know where I am coming from, because you know how I feel about it already. See, it doesn’t excite you, you don’t have to get excited about it. And that’s all, that’s what we’re talking about. If you do that, we can solve all the problems that you have. And I go back to that word respect. Because we don’t have that right now. Two words, ‘trust’ and ‘respect.’ You have to trust me and respect me. And I have to trust you and respect you. Then we can solve any problem that we need to solve. But until you get to that point, as long as you think that you have all the answers, and I don’t, we’ve got a problem.”

LS: Did your approach, or the way that you dealt with people change between 1969 and 1980? Did things evolve in the way you showed people?

HA: Did they come out that way?

LS: Did the way, did what your message was and they way that you conveyed it change over the course of those ten years?

HA: Did what?

JT: Did it, the practice that...

LS: At the center, the way that you dealt with people, did it change over the course of the years that the center was open?

JT: Did you use different methods? Was it always the same method?
HA: We had to change some of our methods. Yes. We had to change some of our methods.

LS: Because the times were changing...?

HA: The times were changing, people were changing.

LS: Did some of the anger and the unrest that had occurred in the classrooms in that timeframe affect the way that you had to deal with people? I mean did you have to deal with violence? And that kind of thing?

HA: Yes. And we had some schools that closed down because the students did it. Down in Danville where I came from George Washington High School is the white high school. Langston (?) is the black school where I taught. Things got so bad down there that they had to close down that school for two or three days. Black kids got so angry that they wouldn't allow anybody to go upstairs or down the steps. They blocked the stairway.

JT: What were they angry about, do you remember?

HA: The way that they were treated. They felt that they were being mistreated. That they weren't given the same opportunities as white kids were getting in the schools. That was the only way of fighting back. Nobody would listen to them so they said, "Well, the heck with you. You don't want to listen to us, then we won't have any school."

LS: And you said that the activities were one of the focuses of the anger and the frustration? Why do you think that it was the activities where some of this really came to a head?

HA: What activities?

LS: You said the cheering squad, and I think that you wrote your dissertation about...

HA: Oh, oh. The cheering squad for instance...most schools, black schools had cheering squads, and white schools had cheering squads. They were different. They had different cheers. They were different. One of the problems that we had was that we always had a white director of the cheering squad. And that meant that very few blacks would be chosen to be on the squad. That wasn't right. So we had to get her to see that she needed to share equally, I mean among the students! See. And so, you know, that applied to the band, the choir, all the other activities.

LS: So this was a form of discrimination that was being perpetuated?

HA: We had to let the administrator know that he needed to have some black cheering directors in his school. You know? Have some black people in charge of the cheering squad, in charge of the band and all. Yes!

JT: Was there ever any attempt to do job sharing, where you had a black and a white teacher doing the same job at the same time, but just doing it part time?
JT: Yeah. We had… I don’t know about teachers, but student government… some of the schools did this. They started out with, “We’ll start out with co-presidents, co-chairmen of the student government, and see how that works.” They did that.

JT: Did it work?

HA: It worked, but we had all kinds of problems. For example, we’re desegregating the schools. But at the schools, at the end of the year we’re going to have a junior/senior prom. Right? How’s that going to be… what are you going to do at the junior/senior prom? Do you see that we have problems with that? Can you imagine what kinds of problems you have with the junior/senior prom?

JT: How to chose the music?

HA: That’s right! What kind of music are we going to have? Choose the music. Yes. That was a major problem, there, see? And then too, for the first time you have black and white kids dancing together. I asked a group of my teachers one day, I said, “If you’re a high school administrator, you know when you change classes, you know the teachers come out and stand in the hallway while the kids are moving, going from one class to another.” I said, “OK. You’re standing in your class, you’re standing in front of your door, and most of the kids have emptied the hallway. They’ve gotten to their classroom. But you look down the hall and you see two kids coming towards you. One male. One female. The male is the black young man, the female is the white young girl. But they’re holding hands coming down the hall. What do you do? What do you do with that?”

JT: What did they say?

HA: They knew that there was nothing they could do about that. Really, there is nothing you can do about that. They haven’t caused any problems. Leave them alone. That’s none of your business. They’re not doing anything. If they were kissing, yes, that’s a different story. But holding hands? I said, “You’re better off to let it alone. Let it alone. Mind your own business.”

JT: Did they do that? Did they work it out?

HA: Yes, they worked it out. They worked it out.

JT: Did you go back and monitor the schools that you had been to see what the progress was like?

HA: Yes, we used to go back. And talk with the teachers and the principals, and the superintendent. Yes, we talked to them.

JT: Did you find that it had mostly gotten better? That it had progressed?

HA: Yes.
We used to see, years later after we had done all the work, some people from these school districts. Some of them had changed school districts. But they would come up to us and tell us about what they had learned from that, and how it had helped them as a teacher or an administrator. To help the students, and that was what it was all about.

When they changed schools, did they take that experience with them?

Yes, yes, yes. That’s right! And helped the other people in the other schools. Sure. But you know, we had a unique situation here at the University. We were located at the University.

Which part…which building?

We weren’t on the grounds. We were located off the grounds. Very few people at the University knew where we were. Because they didn’t care. Most of the people here at this University had the same attitude about the center as the governor and the politicians had. They didn’t really want it. The only reason that we got here, to be honest with you, was the University accepted the center because of the money. The University received a certain amount of our overhead, our budget, the overhead to help run…for the dean to be able to do what he wants to do with the money. Everybody wants more money, so they accepted the center. They accepted the center for the money, not for what the center was doing, because they didn’t want to have anything to do with the center.

Did you have to report to them?

No, we didn’t have to report to the dean for what we were doing, no.

Did they ever come in and look into what was going on, or care…

No, no, that wasn’t his business. He had nothing to do with that. We operated…

You were pretty autonomous.

Yes, we operated on our own. He didn’t want to be bothered with it in the first place. As long as we didn’t have any problems.

But education students did come to help out, they were some of the employees of the center?

Yes. Most of the people in the center were students. In education at the University.

So, did you find that the education students were interested in what you were doing? Was it a large group of students?
HA: The education students?

JT: Yes.

HA: No, no they weren’t. Most of them didn’t know what we were doing. No. And the faculty? No. They could care less.

LS: But you recruited. How did you know which students were of interest to you? Did you teach classes as well.

HA: Yes, well, see the director was a full faculty member. And the associate director was a full faculty member. And so they knew the type of people that they wanted, that would fit in with this. And so, they selected them. I was recruited from Danville to come up to the center. Jim Bash, he’s white. Nathan Johnson, Dr. Johnson, was black. He was the associate director. They worked together in formulating the staff at the beginning. Jim knew the center had to have blacks and whites on the staff. Jim knew that. And when he was looking for somebody, he was looking for some black males and all, Nathan Johnson knew me because he was a principal down at Carver, which was 36 miles away from Danville. In fact I knew him for a long time because he was a principal down there a long time, and I went to meetings with him. So I knew him, and he knew me. So he recommended me to Jim. But I was still teaching. So, then they contacted me to see if I would be interested in coming up there to help them, to get some training and work with them. And I had to go to my superintendent and get permission, and he didn’t like that at the beginning. But, I came up and took a course, and took some training that summer. I was supposed to go back and help them down there. But I didn’t. Ah, I went back to my regular job for that year. The next year they called me again and asked me, they had a man on the staff who was finishing, and he was leaving, and he was going to take another job somewhere. So they had room on staff. So they contacted me. To see if I was willing to come up here. Boy, that was a tough decision for me to make. I am glad that I made it, but it was a tough decision, because number 1, down there I had been there seventeen years...I had tenure. I had just built a home in 1959, and my daughter was a senior in 1970. She finished in ’70. And she said, “Daddy, all I want to do is finish school, and then I’ll be going to college, and you and momma can go wherever you want to go. It’s ok.” So I bought a Toyota and I commuted up there.

LS: Oh my gosh, that’s a long way!

HA: 127 miles! But what I did was, I came up here on Monday, Sunday night, and I stayed until Friday night. Then I went back for the weekend. I did that for a whole year. Then after my daughter graduated, we moved here.

JT: And you were studying at the same time? You did your Ph.D. at the same time?

HA: I started studying after I got here.

JT: So you have a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia?
HA: E.D.D., yes. This is my diploma.

LS: And you said you went to school up in the North. Where did you get your undergraduate?

HA: I got my undergraduate at Hampton, Hampton University. Masters at NYU.

JT: Did you ever get any recognition for what you did at the center?

HA: Yes.

JT: You did?

HA: I got all kinds of recognition. This is a picture, do you see that group of men? I'm in that. That's the community college—Piedmont? I was on the board, eight years, and they gave me a certificate down along the bottom.

JT: Yes, oh, yes.

HA: I'm going to the graduation. They invite me every year to the graduation. All the board members and former board members they invite them and we get a special parking space and...

LS: Do you march?

HA: Huh?

LS: Do you march in the procession?

HA: No, no. I don't march in the procession. I used to do that when I was on the board.

LS: Get to wear your colored cowl, and all that?

HA: Yeah, I did that. I got tired of all of that, too.

JT: Did you get recognition in the local newspapers for what you were doing in the area?

HA: Now, see, that's something else that we didn't do. We had an agreement with the district, I mean the schools, they did not want any publicity about that.

LS: Interesting, it was in a contract that you wouldn't?

HA: That was an unwritten contract. So, therefore we did not...if they wanted to put something...[end tape side A]

[Begin tape side B]
HA: See because....
JT: The schools didn’t want that...
HA: The schools didn’t want that, the superintendents didn’t want it, didn’t know how the politicians in his area would respond to that. So they didn’t want us to do it. They didn’t want publicity, and we didn’t bother with it.
LS: As you went along, and you’d had success stories, and other schools needed your help, but they weren’t convinced, could you use testimonials, or some kind of a reference, or referral system for one school to another?
HA: Yes, yes. We could, we could, we would do that. If we were to ask, if we went into one school district, say we just finished here, if you would like to talk to the superintendent of this school, we have worked with them, they could tell you whether you gave them good service or not. Yes, we did that. That’s word of mouth.
JT: Did you see the work that you did in the schools, did you see that playing out in the community at all? Did you see any of the students that you knew were in the high schools, or the teachers, did you see them out in Charlottesville for example?
HA: No, no. Because most of the places we went, you know, we were far away from them. When we went to their schools. We would go back occasionally, they would have us come back for some additional training. We might see some of them. But by and large we didn’t go back too much.
JT: Mostly all the interaction you had with people was actually in the school itself, there wasn’t anything outside...?
HA: That’s right, not the community. No.
LS: One thing that may happen with the Jefferson School is that they may try to create a cultural heritage center where people could go and research the history of desegregation. Would that be of value do you think to future historians? Do you think that any materials from the center would ever be, could ever be housed there as an archive?
HA: I don’t know what we could put in there because this is the only thing I’ve got!
LS: Because they threw everything away.
HA: Yes.
LS: Well, someday, if it comes to pass, may-be they’ll come and ask if they can make a copy of that.
HA: You, you. This will give you an idea of...if you read a little bit of that, an idea about what we did.

JT: How would you feel if we were to make a copy of this?

HA: You can.

JT: To put with the tape and the transcription, would that be acceptable?

HA: You mean the whole thing?

JT: Well, we could go through it perhaps and see what was relevant. Or what was...

HA: I have no problem with that.

JT: This is your only copy, right?

HA: That’s the only copy I have. I don’t know how I happened to bring that home. [chuckles]

LS: Very fortunate that you did.

HA: Yeah.

LS: We’ve probably taken up a lot of your time and it’s lunch time.

JT: It was very interesting and we’ve learned a lot.

HA: That’s all right. It was. I can say this to you about my experience in that center, I learned more, I think, about people working in that center, than I ever learned in any of the classes I ever took, anywhere. Interesting. It was very interesting to study people. Right now, I am very observant of people.

JT: We better watch out!

HA: Huh?

JT: I say, we better watch out!

HA: You see, we even had to tell teachers about little black kids. You see, these kids in the kindergarten and the second grade and first grade, these kids like to be hugged. And they like to hug teachers. And we told them “Be careful of your body language. Because your body language tells people a lot about you. So now, if a little kid comes up to you, and they grab your thigh and they hug your thigh. They figure they can’t reach you anywhere else...if that kid grabs your thigh and you tighten up on your muscles, that sends a message, that kid a message. You may not like him. Now, there’s one thing about black kids. He may not, he or she, may not be able to read and write and get what you want
done, but there’s something that he knows. He will know if he stays around you long enough, he will know whether you like him or not. And you don’t have to tell him anything. He’ll tell from your body language. Toward him. He’ll know.” I would say, “So you’re not fooling anybody, especially them, you’re not fooling them.” And, I talked to a group of teachers once. During that time, there were complaints from white teachers that black students not progressing academically like the rest of them. And, they wanted to know why, and the teachers lost a little confidence in teaching them. So, we were talking about that in a small group. I was talking very frankly about that. A lot of them would say, “well they don’t come to us ready for school. They don’t come to us ready to learn. Because they don’t have books at home, newspapers, magazines, things at home.” So that’s why teachers form an opinion about that, and therefore they begin to expect little or nothing from their students. I said “Look at me. I’m one of those students you’re talking about that comes from across the railroad tracks. Yes, I came from across the railroad tracks. My daddy was a laborer. Went to third grade, that’s how far he went. My mother died when I was 19 months old, and I’m the youngest. I’m 84 years old now though. But anyhow, I said “that’s not what I want to tell you. You think because they don’t come to you with all the same environment that you have, or the opportunity that you have, that they can’t learn. Don’t come to that conclusion. I said “Now, look at me, I told you where I come from. You know what? I learned how to read, I learned how to write, I learned math. You know where I learned it? In school. A teacher taught me. [laughs] I didn’t learn it at home, a teacher taught me. So what I want to know from you, what happens when you walk in that door, the kids get into your classroom, and you close that door, what happens to those kids? What happens to them? Do you help them? Do they learn? Or do you make excuses for why they can’t learn? What do you do?” I’ve formed a philosophy, my own philosophy of education in about 10 years of teaching. Its one thing...its very simple what this one is. I decided that every child, every child can learn. Every child can learn. I didn’t say how much, or how deeply he can get into his subject matter, but he can learn. He can learn. Every child can learn. If you have patience with that child. Say you’re teaching reading and the book you want him to read, he can’t read. He’s not interested in that. So you say, I can’t teach this kid. Yes you can. First of all, you’ve got to know something about the kid. You don’t teach, you teach kids. You say “I teach math, I teach English.” You don’t teach anything. You teach students math, you teach students English. And in order to teach that student math, you have to know something about him, to help him learn. OK? So, that’s what you’ve got to do. So you got to find out what that kid likes. And you say, well, if you say what do you like? He says I like birds. Fine. We go get some bird books, we start reading about the birds. Read about the birds, keep reading about the birds, and then, we start reading what I want you to read. You see what I mean? But don’t give up on him, don’t say that he can’t read, he can! You just don’t have the techniques and the methods to help that kid learn. Of course these kids are advanced here at the University of Virginia...But at the university level, what kind of method do they use in teaching? One method. Lecture. Lecture. And if you can’t listen, and learn by listening, you can’t learn here at the university level, college level. Right? Yes.
See, you have to use different methods to teach different kids. We learned that. I was taught to teach. At Hampton we had student teaching. Taught to teach. And Hampton’s got one of the best student teaching programs in the country, bar none. I don’t care what it is. Because we had a lady down there. I was in secondary, she was the supervisor in student teaching. That’s was all she did. She was tough. She’s dead now, but she was a red-headed Irish woman. Mean as a snake. But she was excellent. Everybody who had been through her, loved her. A lot of girls wouldn’t take teacher education because of her. Because she would just scare them half to death. But anyhow, what I am saying is, Hampton taught us how to teach kids. This lady used to tell me, ask us, “Do you know who my best students are? Do you know who my best student teachers are? You know who they are? They’re not the ‘A’ students, my best student teachers are my ‘C’ students.” She says, “You know why? I say because the ‘C’ student knows how to struggle to get it. Therefore, when they start to teach, they can identify with a slow learner and stay there with them and help him. See, an ‘A’ student, ‘B’ student, they think everybody should get it just the way they got it. They get it [snaps his fingers] and everybody should be the same. And it’s not like that. So, you have to have people who have some patience with kids. To be a good teacher, you have to have patience.

LS: That’s probably why I’m not a teacher. I don’t think I would have the patience.

HA: You wouldn’t have patience? You learn.

LS: I guess you would learn. I learn with my own children.

HA: That’s right, you’ve learned.

JT: Thank you, you’ve given us a lot of information.

End of Interview.
Hank Allen, May 11, 2004

(photos by Liz Sargent)
Interview Consent Form
Jefferson School Oral History Project
Preservation Piedmont, Charlottesville, Virginia

The Jefferson School Oral History Project is conducted by Preservation Piedmont as part of an ongoing program to support preservation of the Jefferson School.

The purpose of the interview is to collect the stories of those affiliated with Jefferson School in order to document and preserve the history of the site for the benefit of current Charlottesville residents and future generations. Material developed from the interview will be shared with the Charlottesville community through publication of a booklet, a video documentary of the interviews, and a conference.

Copies of the transcriptions and other materials derived from these interviews will be donated to the Albemarle County Historical Society, and The Carter G. Woodson Institute for African and African American Studies at the University of Virginia.

It is also hoped that a museum will be established at the Jefferson School where material gathered from this oral history project will provide a permanent exhibit interpreting the history of the Jefferson School and its role in the community.

In support of this program:

I .......................................................(name)
of .....................................................(address)

herein relinquish and transfer to Preservation Piedmont for such historical and scholarly purposes as they see fit the following rights:

1) All legal title and literary property rights which I have or may be deemed to have in said work. 2) All my rights, title, and interest in copyright, which I have or may be deemed to have in said work, and more particularly the exclusive rights of reproduction, distribution, and preparation of derivative works, public performance, and display.

Interviewee........................................... Date................................

Interviewer......................................... Date................................
Interview with Rosemary Baleister

Memories of Jefferson School by Rosemary Baleister

April 2003

Charlottesville, Virginia

I remember registering my son Philip at Jefferson School just as the first drops of rain from Hurricane Agnes were falling. [Hurricane Agnes affected the Eastern seaboard of the United States between June 21 and 25, 1972.] Moving from a close-knit community in West Virginia, I was a little apprehensive, but several people in Charlottesville helped with the transition. My old friend Marjorie Weinreb found me a boy—Scott Rebhun—who was the same age as Philip, and the Whitaker family adopted my daughter Nicky, and I remember Ann saying what a good year she had in Jefferson. Once he had started, Philip quickly struck up a friendship with Worth Burruss. The boys' link was the Cass train, which was the Burruss family hobby, and Philip had grown up near Cass. Using scrap wood from Home Building, the boys constructed a go-cart in the Burruss basement.

Mr. Kirby was a wonderful teacher interested in the boys and the go-cart. As a former teacher who loved to help with children, he let me accompany the sixth grade on a trip to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond. It was an experience I shall never forget. The museum guides seemed a little nervous as a horde of children passed the priceless Faberge eggs. A most vivid memory is of the whole school piling into McDonald's in Richmond after the trip. The number of hamburgers sold increased dramatically!

I also remember the band program. So different from my English school. Children were matched with the right instrument and it was decided that the cornet was right for Philip. I also remember sewing a strip of purple corduroy along a sheet for a toga to be worn in the production of Julius Caesar. I think a black child was Caesar.

It was the age of Estes Rockets and the boys spent many hours buying kits to make them at Hobbycraft. Mr. Kirby also let me give a talk on English gardens to the class. I always loved to help.

Nicky went to Jefferson a year later and also had a good experience. She played the clarinet. I had never progressed further than the recorder and basic piano in England, and band seemed very strange to me. Nicky had Jane Whitaker as a friend and a lovely group of other girls. I think she won the squeaky note award for the clarinet! In any case, the children were introduced to music in a way that encouraged them, and did not intimidate. I had gone to a school which was so good in music that they could pick and choose. And it was years before I realized that, if I was not selected for a choir it was not because I had no aptitude for music but that the competition was fierce.
I did not realize that my children had gone to a historic black school, but I think the education they received there helped them as they grew up.

End of recollections.

Mrs. Bryant was a teacher at Jefferson School in the 1950s and 1960s. She is also the author of Rebecca-Kinder McGowan, a biography of лереса Jefferson schoolteacher, and Members of a Country Girl. She is a 1946 graduate of Virginia State University.

A.S. How do you feel about Jefferson?

F.B. I have warm feelings. When I came out of college I went straight into Jefferson. I taught in the high school there until Burley opened in 1951. I worked at Burley from 1951-54, then I went back to Jefferson in 1955. I taught English and elementary French. I began working in 1965 at Walker, until Charlottesville High School opened. I worked there until I retired.

A.S. How did you get the job teaching?

F.B. I applied to the superintendent. Jefferson was the only school if you were African-American. The matron of my dorm at college, her husband was the supervisor of secondary education for Virginia. He suggested that I apply to Charlottesville. I wrote a letter, sent it in. The superintendent asked for an interview. My letter was handwritten. You can learn more from something written by hand than from an application blank. Mr. Duncan, the principal of Jefferson School, gave the interview. He said, "See that stack of letters over there? They're all applications for the job you're applying for, but I was impressed by the quality of your letter."

I came straight here in September 1946, I taught ninth and tenth grade English. At that time, Jefferson went to where the library was. I was raised in the country, and I didn't have anything to compare Jefferson to. I was glad to be getting a job, glad to be getting a job in the city. I was so blessed to be coming into an urban school. In the country, there were one- and two-room schools. I was blessed to teach in my major. God has blessed me all my life.
Mrs. Bryant was a teacher at Jefferson School in the 1940s and 1950s. She is also the author of *Rebecca Fuller McGinness*, a biography of beloved Jefferson schoolteacher, and *Memoirs of a Country Girl*. She is a 1946 graduate of Virginia State University.

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My high school had visited Thomas Jefferson’s home. I was from Caroline County, which is flat. Here there were majestic mountains. I was impressed by the area.

I took a room with a lady on Anderson Street. Another teacher, the Jefferson Home Ec teacher, was there also. I had a $1,500 a year salary.

Nobody told me what to teach. There were no curriculum guides. Grace Tinsley’s husband was in my first class. He was a serviceman. I think I had five or six veterans that year. I enjoyed those guys. I didn’t have discipline problems.

Conducting classes was different then. Now there’s so much more interaction with the students. When I came out, it was almost rote. You had your lesson plans.

**AS:** Could you talk a little bit about desegregation?

**FB:** You go along with the system. When I learned that the schools were going to be integrated, I decided to apply to teach at the junior high. Walker and Buford children were going to Jefferson. We held class at Jefferson for Walker in the morning, and Buford in the afternoon. It was a good year to experience integration. There wasn’t any time to say “uh-oh, black and white.” They each had four hours.

They had never had a black teacher before and I had never had white students before. For a few days there wasn’t much participation. They sat very politely, but they didn’t participate. Then I encouraged participation, and it began to happen.

There were five or six African Americans in the class. I told them this was new for both of us. You as students, me as a teacher. We can really support each other, but that doesn’t mean there will be any preferences for anyone.

I don’t recall a meeting about how it was going to be handled. Dr. Tramontin [Charlottesville Superintendent] integrated across the board. Assigned students and teachers. It was an all-sixth grade school.

When Jefferson was closed, Mr. Booker Reaves became principal of McGuffey Elementary School, which was mostly black. The NAACP wasn’t going to let them get away with that, to resegregate the schools. Jefferson was closed in 1965. Venable got the largest amount of black students. Blacks went to their neighborhood schools.

**AS:** What is your favorite part of how the building looks?

**FB:** [The parking lot] was always the playground. The May Day exercises were out there. The May Day pole would be out in the yard. Before they put the addition on, they used to put the seats out there. It was really the elementary school that did the May Day exercises... Each class would have a presentation, the wrapping of the May Pole. There would be outdoor volleyball. All kinds of games. Sack races. All those kinds of things you identify
with May Day. Jefferson was the only school we had, you know. We had an appreciation for Jefferson because of all the kinds of activities, like May Day.

We had the same books as the other schools. We didn’t see any black faces in those books. They were state textbooks. In the high school we had *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, that was about it. We didn’t have a lot of outside reading. Negro History Week... during that week, we all dealt with African-American history in the fields we were teaching in. That was in February, founded in the 1920s by Carter Woodson...

The physical condition of Vinegar Hill was poor. Grace [Grace Tinsley, nee Kenney] lived across the street...When they tore it down, I gave it some thought... It doesn’t matter how poor a neighborhood is, there’s an affinity for the neighborhood, for the people who live there. You’re destroying family roots, which is always bad.

End of interview.
Release Form

Alexandria Searls
1316 Chesapeake St.
Charlottesville, Virginia 22902
(434) 295-4302

I, Alexandria Searls, give to Preservation Piedmont the right to publish the Jefferson School interviews my magazine SPEAK OUT published in Spring 2003. These interviews were with Kenneth Martin, Priscilla Whiting, Grace Tinsley, Bruce Edmonds, Barbara Myer, Florence Bryant, and David Saunier. SPEAK OUT had oral permission from each interviewee to be included in the publication and for the publication to receive copyright to the interviews.

Date: October 1, 2004

Signature: [Signature]

Interview with
Dr. Braxton Coles

[Text of interview]

Interview with
Dr. Braxton Coles

[Text of interview]

Interview with
Dr. Braxton Coles

[Text of interview]
Interview with Dr. Braxton Coles

Interviewer: Jacky Taylor
Date: August 31, 2002
Location: Omni Hotel
Charlottesville, Virginia

Transcribed: May 2003
By: Jacky Taylor
Reviewed: May 25, 2003
By: Liz Sargent

JT: Could you please state your full name, your current address, and your connection with the Jefferson School?

BC: Braxton R. Coles, 2231 East 67th Street, Chicago Illinois.

JT: Thank you. Also can you tell us the date and place where you were born, and how many were in your family when you were growing up?

BC: I was born in a little country town called East Town, Virginia. It’s north of Charlottesville, but we walked here as well as everywhere else. What were the other questions?

JT: You walked here to go to school at Jefferson?

BC: I walked here from about five miles out in the country to go to school at Jefferson.

JT: Wow! What time did you have to leave the house in the morning to get to school?

BC: About six o’clock.

JT: So it took you how long?

BC: An hour and a half to two hours.

JT: Did you walk alone or did you walk with brothers and sisters?

BC: Alone essentially. Occasionally someone else might be going that way.

JT: So there were other people in the...
BC: No. None of my other sisters and brothers walked to Charlottesville to school.

JT: Did they go somewhere else to school?

BC: Yes. They went to the county school.

JT: So why did you go to Jefferson School?

BC: I didn’t like the county school. The bus broke down on my first day and I didn’t like having to gather wood to heat the schoolroom up before we started history lessons.

JT: So, where...how many brothers and sisters do you have, and are they older or younger, can you let us know that?

BC: I’m number 7 out of a family of 14.

JT: Number 7 in a family of 14... So were you the only one who went to Jefferson School?

BC: My sister went to Jefferson, my older sister. She was a music major, and she went here because she was in a music curriculum in a surrounding school to Norfolk.

JT: Was she very talented?

BC: Very, she gave concerts several times. Her major was voice.

JT: How lovely. What was her name?

BC: Her name’s Carrie. She married a soldier named Sergeant Pinkney, and her name was then Carrie Coles Pinkney.

JT: And she went all the way through Jefferson School, all the way through the grades?

BC: She went through the upper grades. She started out at the county school and she didn’t like it. Then, she transferred to Jefferson because she couldn’t get the music major that she wanted.

JT: And how about you? What grade did you start in Jefferson?

BC: Seventh grade, although I hadn’t done sixth grade in the country. I lied and told them I’d done sixth grade.

JT: Ha, ha! And they believed you?

BC: They said, O.K. They figured I’d talk myself into a hole because I wouldn’t be able to do seventh grade work...
JT: But when you got to Jefferson, did you find it was O.K., you could do the work?

BC: I could do the work. There was a teacher who became interested in me. She gave me some review work that summer before school opened to kind of help me to catch up, and with her on my side, the principal finally said, O.K. we’ll try him in the seventh grade.

JT: Do you remember the name of the teacher?

BC: Miss Sellers, Mrs. Elnora Sellers, she was the English teacher at Jefferson.

JT: So, was English your favorite subject after that?

BC: Not really, arithmetic was, but I did well in English.

JT: What were some of the other classes that you had to take?

BC: Oh, I did chemistry, math, English, history, geography. We don’t have that any more, do we? Geography.

JT: Sort of.

BC: The regular what they call college prep course.

JT: So did you expect to go on to college after you’d graduated?

BC: Yes but at the country school I wouldn’t have been prepared. They didn’t have a college prep curriculum.

JT: But they did here at the Jefferson? Did you go onto college?

BC: Yes.

JT: Where did you go to college?

BC: Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia.

JT: And what did you study there?

BC: Pre-med.

JT: Pre-med? And what did you do when you’d finished?

BC: I went to Chicago and got a job. After putting in five or six applications to medical school and got the response that “our classes are already selected from thousands of applications.” It was right after the war and competition was very keen. So I took a course in laboratory technology to have something to do.
JT: Mmm.

BC: And I worked and kept reapplying and finally I got into dental school. They told me they had an opening in a dental school, so I took that.

JT: And did you go on and finish dental school?


JT: Oh wow...and you became a dentist?


JT: Up in Chicago?

BC: Yes.

JT: Was there a particular reason that you went to Chicago in the first place?

BC: They had a recruiter from, not a recruiter, a scout, I guess you’d call it, that talked to me and got me interested in the medical field. He noticed that I was good in math and science... so I got a little steering in that direction.

JT: Mmm... You said that when you first started Jefferson you had a teacher who took an interest in you, but she was an English teacher. Did you find that any other teachers were particularly...

BC: All of them were ... very, very supportive.

JT: Were they?

BC: And then I knew everybody...I was kind of a bad boy too, sometimes... I did my lessons,....

JT: Were you?... but you managed to get by?

BC: I got by alright because I got ‘A’s” and ‘B’s.”

JT: Ha, haa! So living out in the countryside, was it difficult socializing with the rest of the students at Jefferson?

BC: Uh, huh. That was one of the biggest differences. I had no social life connected with high school because after the first two years, I got a job at a boardinghouse and they gave me room and board.

JT: In Charlottesville?
BC: In Charlottesville, right. So now I didn’t have to walk to school, and I didn’t have to pay tuition.

JT: Because you were a city resident?

BC: I was a city resident.

JT: Ahh, clever.

BC: And Mrs. Henshaw who owned a tourist home, she was very kind to me...gave me a dollar a week for school expenses.

JT: And what did the rest of your family think about this?

BC: Just fine, they all knew that I wasn’t going to stop because I was pushing on. My brother gave me fifty cents when I left for college.

JT: Ahh, that’s nice...Did any of your brothers and sisters want to do what you had done and come in to the Jefferson School?

BC: No they didn’t want to come to Jefferson. They were satisfied riding the bus to Albemarle Training School.

JT: So they went to Albemarle Training School?

BC: All the rest of my sisters and brothers that went to high school went to Albemarle Training School.

JT: So not all of them went to high school?

BC: No, not all of them went. Some of the boys didn’t go. The girls all went to school, though.

JT: Through what grade?

BC: Well, my older sister went through a masters in special education.

JT: Really! Where did she do that, here in Charlottesville?

BC: No, she trained over in Virginia State College..

JT: Oh right, because she couldn’t go to UVA because they didn’t take women.

BC: Right, and didn’t take black ones.

JT: Right absolutely.
BC: And she did her graduate work in Alcorn College in Mississippi.

JT: Oh, O.K.. Did she ever come back to Charlottesville to work?

BC: No she came back and went to New York and got married.

JT: And stopped working?

BC: No, she and her husband both went to Alcorn to finish their degrees, and then she came to Virginia State College for her masters.

JT: So, when you were a teenager in Charlottesville and you boarded at this...what did you call it? The tourist...?

BC: It was the tourist home that I worked in.

JT: Did you have any free time?

BC: That was the biggest problem because I had hardly any social life. I had no social contact with my school. All I’d do in the morning was go to school, finish that afternoon, and go back to work.

JT: That must have been very sad sometimes for you.

BC: Well, no, not really...I wished I didn’t have to, but I knew it was the only way I was going to get to school...so it didn’t really bother me...

JT: Were there other students who did a similar sort of thing as you did?

BC: Not in my family, no.

JT: But people you knew at the school, were there other people who did as you did, who came in from the county and boarded somewhere.

BC: I wouldn’t be surprised if there weren’t a few, but I didn’t know...

JT: You didn’t know of anybody?

BC: No.

JT: Did you ever have a car when you were going to school?

BC: When I was in college.
JT: When you were in college you did? What do you remember about the facilities at Jefferson High School? Do you remember the classes that you sat in? Do you remember how you felt about sitting in the classrooms?

BC: Like all these people must be very rich because they have a very nice room. Painted, and radiator heat and all. It was just nothing like this at Albemarle Training School. I was sure glad that bus had a flat that day.

JT: Ha, ha. You were very lucky so to speak? So you didn’t play any sports at school?

BC: No, I couldn’t even attend sporting events because I had to go to school and rush to the boarding house and start getting ready to take in the guests and I even started helping her cook.

JT: You helped her cook too?

BC: And, then, the next step was I was the main cook there! I cooked meals for her, and her family, not the guests. But for her and her family.

JT: When was the owner’s name? Do you remember?


JT: Was she an African American lady?

BC: No, Caucasian. Her husband worked at a hardware store in the city, and she ran a tourist home in our area, and I was her helper. If somebody come as a guest, I’d slip on my jacket and bring them in with their luggage and help them to their room.

JT: That’s great. Oh, wow. You were very busy then… cooking and helping… and what time did you get up in the morning when you worked at the boarding house?

BC: Seven o’clock.

JT: So you only had a short walk to Jefferson?

BC: No, it wasn’t far. I used to pass right by here.

JT: Ahh. Where was the boarding house located?

BC: High Street. You know how High Street terminates over here…we called it Becks Hill… That’s where High Street stopped and that was right there down below the hill you know.

JT: So, the other students in your classes… you must have had some friends, did you?

BC: Oh yeah. I had plenty… had a girlfriend, a secret passion.
JT: Oh yes. So when did you get to see her?

BC: I didn't have time to entertain her.

JT: What about the weekend?

BC: The weekend was the busiest time at the tourist home.

JT: Right. Did she ever come to the tourist home to visit you?

BC: No, no...

JT: So you never had a single minute to go out and see this secret passion?

BC: Oh yes, every now and then I'd go home to county. Something would happen after all the guests had checked in. I'd go out to my home for Sunday. But it wasn't enough for me to know the same people and associate with the same people that my brothers knew. That's why a lot of people here I don't know but they'd know all about my brothers and my sisters and all because they all kind of went to school together but they didn't known me because I was in Charlottesville being a city boy.

JT: Ahh, and you were too busy to get to know people here...

BC: There wasn't anybody to know here except those right there in school, in my class. But there weren't any neighbors, anything like that. One little fella raised pigeons next door. Sometimes I helped him with those.

JT: Here in Charlottesville, or when you were in the county do you mean?

BC: When I was in Charlottesville...like a weekend off or holiday or something, I'd help him bind his pigeons.

JT: Ah.

BC: Moore Salad[?] was his name... he was my only friend coming up.

JT: So did you walk to school together?

BC: No he went to Synagogue.

JT: Oh, he went to the synagogue?

BC: Yes, he was a Jewish boy, and they lived right next door to the boarding house where I worked. That's how I got to know him.

JT: So you saw him sometimes in the evenings, or weekends?
BC: Yes, I saw him some... He raised pigeons, and Mrs. Henshaw was very much against my going over there and messing with those pigeons. [they laugh] but I didn’t stop, I didn’t make it obvious.

JT: You did it whenever you could? So you felt that the Jefferson School had a lot of good facilities and the teachers were good and nice?

BC: And I felt that this school was good enough for me to sacrifice those other things, because those boys in my family, all my brothers, most of them dropped out of school.

JT: Did they? What did they end up doing when they dropped out of school?

BC: They ended up taking jobs. One worked on the railroad, another became a shoemaker... just jobs that were available to them at that time.

JT: So when you left Charlottesville, were your parents still living?

BC: Yes, when I left Charlottesville it was to go to Hampton.

JT: Right...

BC: And, that was a big event, I was finally going to college and I told Mrs. Henshaw goodbye, and she didn’t want me to go to college but she didn’t say so.

JT: Why didn’t she want you to go to college?

BC: She wanted me to stay there and handle the bags...

JT: Ha, haa.

BC: But she didn’t...she sort of let up.

JT: Were your parents very proud of you? They must have been.

BC: My mother was sooo proud of me, and I just hoped that I would never do anything to make her unhappy because she was proud of me. She... in a sneaky way, she favored me...

JT: The seventh child, and she favored you.

BC: Seventh son. But, I was almost seventh of seven. But a girl came along.

JT: Seventh of eight. But you said you had 14 all together.

BC: I was number seven. Number one, two, three, four, five six were boys. Number six was a girl. Number seven was a boy.
JT: Did you have any contact with the white children going to school when you walked down High Street?

BC: No, I didn’t cross paths with them. Now going to school, my brothers going to the county school, my brothers they did. They would hide in the bushes at the side of the road and throw rocks at them when they passed by.

[tape is turned off. A discussion regarding Mr. Coles’ age is in progress]

BC: Guess again.

JT: How old do I think you are? 65?

BC: Guess again...

JT: 70?

BC: Again.

JT: 72?

BC: I’m 79!

JT: 79! My goodness! All that walking to school must have kept you pretty fit.

BC: I was born in 1923.

JT: 1923! So how did you feel about growing up in segregation, the period of segregation? Do you look back at the times now and think about them?

BC: No, that’s all we knew. I did not know any different. At our level, we didn’t encounter too many segregated situations because we had our own schools. However, we did have our own school... we just thought that’s what they did. So, I don’t think it had any affect on me really because, as I say, I had white friends as much as any other, because I didn’t have any social contact, too much you know. I was a working guy that went to school that’s all.

JT: What about your brothers who lived in the county and threw rocks at the white kids did they have problems with them?

BCL That’s Earl, he’s so mean... Not really, no, they threw rocks and they threw them back.

JT: Like, boys will be boys? So, you think that Jefferson gave you a good education? It sounds like you had a really good grounding...

BC: I think if it were not for Jefferson I don’t think I’d be where I am now. I think maybe I’d be satisfied as a schoolteacher. That’s what most of the minorities did when they go to college. I’d
have been a school teacher, teaching science in a high school somewhere. But as it was, it was available, and I stuck with it.

JT: Good for you. What about discipline in the school at Jefferson?

BC: Well, one of the principals we had would take you down to the furnace room—the boys—and pull your pants down and use that paddle on you. One time was all I needed. [they laugh]

JT: What happened to the girls? What punishment did they receive?

BC: I think the teachers made them stand in the corner. But discipline wasn’t too much of a problem, because with the control... You didn’t have time to do too much mischief because the teacher was more person to person with you, as much as she could, you know?

JT: Were the classes small then? Did you have fewer children in the class?

BC: No, the classes were smaller in the country as there were few people who lived there. There wasn’t any shortage of teachers or materials that I knew of. Mrs. Sellers, the one that helped me, gave me some tutoring during the summer. She was one direct instrument I think in my coming through and staying at Jefferson. I didn’t want to leave Mrs. Sellers and Mrs. Henderson.

JT: Ahh. But, did she check up on your through the years, to see how you were doing?

BC: No, no... Well, we’d meet at certain events sometimes, and there was always a recognition and praise, those kind of things... yes.

JT: Uh, huh. So tell me about the different classes. Did you have to switch rooms often and walk down the hallways?

BC: Yes, sometimes, but it was mostly next door, or a couple of doors down. Jefferson School is arranged so that you’re kind of close together. You’ve got a big auditorium here, and the classrooms are around the side. In the end, there’s the library and, four rooms here, two in front, four over there, and I think over here was a shop or something. Anyway, they were arranged so that you didn’t have to go too far to go from one to the other.

JT: Where did you have lunch?

BC: I don’t think I stopped for lunch. We got out of school at three o’clock.

JT: Did you have time for a snack or something?

BC: Yes. I’d carry a sandwich or go by the bakery and sell some boxes and pick up some donuts.

JT: Mmm! Where was the bakery?
BC: On my way to school. I don’t remember the name of the street right now, but they would take cardboard boxes you know, that were clean, and they’d give you a bag of donuts.

JT: So, it’s like recycling? [they laugh] So, did you share those donuts with your friends in school?

BC: Did I...?

JT: Share the donuts?

BC: Yes. I’d share.

JT: And were you allowed to eat them in the classroom or did you have to eat them outside, at recess?

BC: No, what I did eat in the classroom was Reeces caramel candy. You know that square, that tube shaped...

JT: Yes.

BC: I was crazy about those, and I kept my pockets full of those. And there were the girls asking for them, and I’d fish in and get them.

JT: Was that allowed, were you allowed to eat candy in the classroom?

BC: No...

JT: You had to do it secretly? What happened if you got caught?

BC: They’d take it all away.

JT: That was punishment.

BC: And you had to stand up in front if you’d been told once or something like that...You didn’t get away with it, but they didn’t act like it was the end of the world. The teachers in the first five grades that I had in the county, they didn’t leave too much of an impression on me. Because just like having everyone in one room, everyone in the whole school was in the same room, and the teachers just went from one desk to the next.

JT: That must have been difficult. Now do you know that there are a couple of groups in Charlottesville that are trying to save the school as a tangible piece of heritage of the African American community. What do you think about that?

BC: Oh that’s interesting!

JT: Yes.
BC: Something else that I would like to tell you about that’s very interesting...My being behind a little bit in starting would have affected me greatly had not... when I... The first week I went to school and the teacher was dividing up the classroom and everything, and she said O.K. all my first grade come here and all my second grade come here and all my third grade come here... and when she got to second grade I stood up. Now I hadn’t been to school a day in my life, yet. Well I stood up and said I was second grade. Well, the county teacher... she probably just laughed at me, thought that’s alright he won’t be able to do the work. I stayed in second grade, I had no first grade in school. I started out in second grade, made it all through to sixth grade when I then went to... Mrs. Sellers tutored me through sixth and I went into seventh, at Jefferson.

JT: That’s amazing.

BC: The poor teacher in the county couldn’t have been more satisfied to get rid of me in first grade you know.

JT: But you had no trouble keeping up with the second grade?

BC: I had no trouble getting placed in along with the second grade kids, and I had no problem with the work.

JT: You told me that your parents had to pay for you to go to Jefferson because you lived in the county?

BC: Yes. But after I got a job, I was a city resident.

JT: Right. What year did you get the job? How long had you been in Charlottesville by the time you got the job?

BC: I had been there about a year before I ....

JT: So every day for a year you walked from Charlottesville from your house in the country?

BC: Yes...down the road, passed by where my father was over in the fields and he would start laughing at me...Ha, ha, ha...Where you going boy? He’d say that, kind of making fun of me. Because I always had a sore toe from stumping on stuff and I limped, so he laughed at me. Now something you were asking me before I left?

JT: Yes, it’s about the preservation of the school. What do you feel about that? Do you think that’s an important project?

BC: To me it depends on what’s going to be done with it. I went through the same thing recently with my church.

JT: Which church is that?

[the tape ended before the interview was completed, but there was very little left.]
Dr. Braxton Coles, August 30, 2003
(above with Rudolph Goffney)

(photos by Alexandria Searls)
Interview Consent Form
Jefferson School Oral History Project
Preservation Piedmont, Charlottesville, Virginia

The Jefferson School Oral History Project is conducted by Preservation Piedmont as part of an ongoing program to support preservation of the Jefferson School.

The purpose of the interview is to collect the stories of those affiliated with Jefferson School in order to document and preserve the history of the site for the benefit of current Charlottesville residents and future generations. Material developed from the interview will be shared with the Charlottesville community through publication of a booklet, a video documentary of the interviews, and a conference.

Copies of the transcriptions and other materials derived from these interviews will be donated to the Albemarle County Historical Society, and The Carter G. Woodson Institute for African and African American Studies at the University of Virginia.

It is also hoped that a museum will be established at the Jefferson School where material gathered from this oral history project will provide a permanent exhibit interpreting the history of the Jefferson School and its role in the community.

In support of this program:

I, R. Coles

(name)
of Chicago, IL

(address)

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Interviewee

Date

Interviewer

Date
Interview with
Bernadine Gines, Ruth Harris, Frances Wood (the Coles sisters)

LM: Tell me where you live?


LM: In Queens. And you live in...?

RH: Richmond, Virginia.

LM: In Richmond...

FW: I live in Washington, D.C.

LM: Let’s talk a little bit about Jefferson School. Do you want to tell me when you were born? Do you want to get that personal? [they laugh] You don’t mind!

BG: 1926.

LM: And this is Bernadine. O.K.

RH: September 26, 1928.

LM: That’s Ruth.

FW: June 1932.
LM: This is Frances. Frances is the youngest of the three. And did you all go to Jefferson School?

All: Yes, yes we did.

LM: Did you go...How many years did you go?

BG: From first grade until we graduated from high school.

LM: So all twelve years?

All: Eleven.

LM: Eleven years. [they laugh]

RC: We graduated from seventh grade, and went to high school for four years.

LM: So you were in Jefferson School for eleven years? And at that time, it was strictly an African-American school. Am I correct?

All: Yes.

LM: Did you have, were there other people in your family who also went to Jefferson School?

All: No.

LM: Did you have any brothers? Or any other sisters, or was it basically the three of you in the family?

All: We had another sister, Doris, who died at the age of three. We had an aunt and our mother who taught at Jefferson.

LM: Did they? An aunt, and your mother both taught at Jefferson School? Did you have them as a teacher?

BG: I had my aunt.

LM: How was that? Did you enjoy that?

BG: Not particularly! [they laugh] She knew me too well. And she knew when I had homework, and she could report to my mother how I acted in class. That’s not too good when you’re in the fourth grade.

LM: I am sure you didn’t do anything terribly scandalous, though, in fourth grade!

BG: Not with my aunt for a teacher.
LM: No, no, you didn’t have a chance.

FW: I had my aunt in fourth grade as well.

LM: Did you? Uh, huh.

RH: Well I was the bold one. When I was in third grade they used to divide the class into two lines. And they’d say, one line goes to Mrs. McGinness, the other line goes to Miss Wyatt. Miss Wyatt was our aunt. So I said to Miss Inge, who was my third grade teacher, “Please don’t send me to Aunt Marion. I’m going to quit school if you send me down to her.” (As if I thought I could.) And I was standing there, just standing, hoping she wasn’t going to send me to Miss Wyatt. Fortunately she said “This line goes to Mrs. McGinness. And I was ready to jump up and down and shout because our aunt lived with us; and I knew I couldn’t go home and say I didn’t have homework, you know. But she was there to say “You do have homework to do!” And then I figured that if I was in her class she would be doubly hard on me, because otherwise people might think that she was giving me a break. So I didn’t want to go to her.

LM: So you had Mrs. Rebecca McGinness then as your teacher?

RH: Mrs. McGinness. You probably knew her.

LM: I know of her. I know she is really well known in the community. And she just recently passed away.

RH: Right, yes. I always kept in touch with her. Whenever the reunions would come around, she looked forward to seeing all of her former students; and her mind was just as clear as anything. She could tell you the names of all your brothers and sisters. And your parents. And where you lived. And all that. She taught me in the fourth grade.

FW: And she was our next-door neighbor also.

LM: Oh, was she! So you knew her well.

FW: Yes.

LM: She was quite elderly!

BG: Was she 108 when she died?


LM: Well over 100 in any case….How did you get to school? Did you live close to the school? Did you walk?

FW: We probably stayed home until the first bell rang, and then we ran to school!
LM: How long did it take you to get to school?

FW: Three minutes.

LM: Oh.

FW: Yeah, if you ran.

LM: Where did you live?

FW: 6th, 7th and Brown. And the school was off 5th Street.

LM: Well, that was convenient!

RH: Yeah, very convenient. Sometimes, it wasn’t too convenient when you wanted to stroll home with your friends and stay out a long time, because you were expected to be in the house after school within five minutes of the time school let out. So you couldn’t play very long.

LM: No soda shop to stop in on the way... Or drug store, or...

FW: No, straight home. Our dinner was on the table waiting for us when we got there.

LM: When you got home from school? What time of the day was this?

ALL: 3:15.

LM: What all did you do for lunch. Did you bring your lunch, did you go home for lunch. Or what did you typically do?

FW: I carried my lunch.

LM: You carried your lunch.

BG: I don’t have much memory of eating lunch!

RH: I don’t think I...I know I ate in the cafeteria in high school.

BG: I really don’t remember if...

LM: If you bought it, or...

FW: I bought something to drink with my sandwich, which I carried from home.

LM: Were there quite a few children in the area in the neighborhood that you would walk to school with? Were there a lot of children growing up right there?
BG: There were many children who passed our house on the way to school. Many of them lived much further away than we did.

LM: How did they get to school?

BG: They walked, too. There were no buses.

LM: No buses.

RH: The only buses that I can recall were going up and down Main Street. So if you weren't going someplace up and down Main Street you walked.

LM: Do you know...

RH: We walked to Washington Park, for example, to our football games because there was no other way to get there.

LM: And was Jefferson School the only school for black children at the time?

BG: Yes.

LM: So it drew the children from all over the city of Charlottesville.

BG: And they walked.

LM: And they all walked? My goodness! The parking lot, or the playground. Was there a big playground?

RH: Well, the Jefferson elementary building was on the ground at that time. So it wasn't as spacious as it is now. Because they've torn the building down.

LM: So where the parking lot is now, that used to be where the grade school was? Is that what you are saying?

RH: I don't know what's there now.

FW: Another building has been constructed there now, but I'm not sure what that building is.

FW: But we had ample space. We just had the high school on one side, and the elementary school on the other. The playground was between the two buildings.

LM: Did you all have a favorite teacher?

FW: All my teachers were my favorites. They were all wonderful people. We had great teachers. Dedicated teachers. Hard working teachers.
LM: Anybody in particular comes to mind? Other than your aunt, of course?

[laugh]

FW: I can think of Mrs. Rosemary Byers, who was my French teacher. And we used to have the French Club and we used to meet at her house. That was one good opportunity to be able to go somewhere. Away from home. And Mrs. Florence Bryant, who is here with us today. I had her in English. All my teachers, as we said, were favorites. I could just go back and name most of them.

BG: I was thinking of my English teacher, Mrs. Elnora Sellers. Because she taught so well, I think the English that she taught us in high school was really beyond some of the English that was taught in college. And she was another... they were ALL so good and so dedicated. They all wanted to help us.

LM: How do you spell her name, do you remember?

BG: S - E - L - L - E - R - S.

LM: Sellers, OK.

BG: Elnora.

LM: Just wanted to make sure that we got the spelling correct when we transcribe the tapes. Anyone in particular.

RH: I think of those same two. I think about Mrs. Byers because she was at the reunions for so many years, and she always played the alma mater. And the first year after she died, we didn’t sing the alma mater because there was nobody to play it.

LM: Oh, my.

RH: So one of our cousins had written the alma mater. And she lives in Richmond. So I called her and she gave me some copies of the alma mater to bring back to give the people who were still here. Also, Mrs. Byers used to have the chorus, the Glee Club I think they used to call it. And we used to go to Virginia State College every year for a music festival. And you had to try out. And I don’t think my voice was all that good. Everybody else wanted to sing first soprano or alto, and they couldn’t find any second sopranos, so I volunteered to sing second soprano, because I knew I would make it. So I’ve been singing second soprano ever since!

LM: Oh!

RH: And I think... another one of my favorite teachers was Leon Armstead. He was my chemistry teacher. And I was crazy about that class. And when I went to college, I said I was going to major in chemistry. And then when I got ready to register, on registration
day, I realized it's not chemistry I liked, it was really my chemistry teacher that I liked after all. So I ended up majoring in something else.

LM: This is Ruth speaking. With the favorite chemistry teacher. Did you all go on to college, then?

BG: Yes, Virginia State.

LM: All three of you? And then did you pursue careers after that? Did you teach? Or...

BG: I guess I'm the only one who did not teach! I worked for the city of New York for many years in the controller's office. For a while, I worked in the Bureau of Excise Taxes, for auditing sales and business tax returns, and then I went to the Data Processing Installation when the city acquired its first large-scale computer. I stayed there for most of time. I did go back to the Bureau of Accountancy in the '70s when the city had the financial crisis, and I worked with that group. All in all I enjoyed the work. It was challenging.

LM: Oh, I am sure it was! This is Bernadine.

FW: Bernadine is a CPA.

LM: Are you?

BG: Uh, huh.

RH: She was the first black female CPA in the state of New York.


BG: And she was the first black female CPA in the state of Virginia.

LM: Oh my goodness!

LM: She being Ruth. Absolutely.

RH: I spent 48 years at Virginia Union University, starting out as an instructor and ending as a full professor. I was the first director of the school of business, when it was created, and, I've been retired five years.

LM: What have you been doing in your retirement? Having fun? Doing all those things you had on the list to do?

RH: Everything I want to do. And very few things that I don’t want to do.

LM: Well, that's good....How about you?
FW: I followed the path that my mother and aunt did. I was very impressed with them as educators. And I began my career as a classroom teacher—fifth grade in Richmond, Virginia. And then when my husband moved to Washington, D.C., for his job, I moved with him, and I taught in Arlington, Virginia (since I had started in Virginia) for about fifteen years. Then I moved into school social work, still in Arlington for another fifteen years, and since then until now I've been coordinator for special education programs for the Arlington school system. I did my graduate work at George Washington University.

LM: That was Frances speaking just now. Well, I would say the three of you had a good background to begin with, would you say, with how you were taught at Jefferson School?

ALL: We did.

LM: Was there a lot of discipline at Jefferson School? Were there ever any discipline problems to speak of, or was everybody pretty well behaved?

FW: In the first place, all the teachers knew your parents, and the parents knew the teachers, and if you did anything that you shouldn't do at school, word got home before you did. So...you didn't want that to get home.

LM: There was a real sense of community then?

All: There was. Yes. Uh huh.

BG: All the neighbors knew your parents. In fact, the people who lived fifteen blocks away or closer knew your parents. And they did not mind correcting you if you needed correction.

FW: And a lot of our teachers were members of the same bridge club that our mother belonged to. [laugh] So they would come to our house to a bridge club meeting sometimes too.

LM: You didn't stand a chance, did you? You didn't get away with much?

FW: We didn't get away with anything. But you didn't get away with much in those days anyway because every neighbor was your parent. As we said, everyone felt free to correct you if they saw you doing something you shouldn't be doing.

LM: So, your neighborhood would have been considered Vinegar Hill? Is that right?

All: Starr Hill.

LM: Oh, Starr Hill, O.K. And did Starr Hill remain fairly untouched by urban renewal, are there a lot of the buildings still there? Would you say?

FW: In our immediate neighborhood where we lived those houses are still there. Some have been refinshed. The one that was right across the street was replaced. But some of the businesses have changed on Main. We lived just off of Main. My father was a dentist on
Main Street just across from First Baptist Church, and that building has been torn down and rebuilt as a restaurant. I think that’s what’s there now.

RH: But she doesn’t remember when our father’s dental office was on Vinegar Hill! Which was by the Omni Hotel, so his office really used to be right here, right in this area!

LM: And, I know that the building where Awful Arthur’s stands now was Inge’s Grocery Store.

FW: Oh, yes, it was. It was, it was.

LM: Let’s see. Do you have a favorite memory of your days at Jefferson School? A humorous experience?

FW: I enjoyed very much participating in the French Club. I couldn’t speak it very well, but I enjoyed Mrs. Byers working with us, and going to her home for the meetings. I enjoyed chorus. I couldn’t sing either. And Harry Johnson was my chorus director. And he would also ask me “For goodness sake, please get on pitch!” [laugh] But I did enjoy him, and I didn’t mind him saying that either! I did my best.

LM: And how about you?

RH: Well, I have so many memories. I think about the operettas that we used to have in the auditorium and the makeshift stage curtains that looked like bedsheets pulled on a string or a rope so that you couldn’t see backstage. And how much fun we used to have rehearsing for these operettas, and all the beautiful costumes that we used to have. And I remember the high school proms, the dances we used to have after football games. And, well, my seventh grade graduation was in Jefferson auditorium. And then we had a football team, but there was no football field here. So they played football at Washington Park. And there were no seats. There was a steep hill. So we stood on the side of the hill and just looked down at the game.

LM: Who did you play? What schools did your school play?

BG: Peabody’s is the first one I think of. Was that in Petersburg? Yes.

LM: So the schools had to travel here from away? Or when you played you had to travel?

All: Yes. Right.

LM: Because you didn’t play other schools here in Charlottesville.

RH: And then the Home Ec. Class. If you were taking cooking, you had to help fix dinner for the football team. [laugh] And that was the only time in my life I remember making any hot rolls; but everybody had to take a turn at that. I wish I had remembered how to do that. And I remember when we took sewing, we made clothes, and we had a chance to
model them in a fashion show. And that was fun! But I remember it so well because I made this dress that I really liked, and I had a pair of shoes that really went with that dress, that had gotten too small. But I made myself get into that pair of shoes and my feet were just killing me; I was happy to get off the stage...

LM: You were going to wear those shoes!

RH: I was going to wear those shoes!

LM: How about you Bernadine, do you have a memory, a favorite memory?

BG: I remember pretty much the same things they remember. I remember the Drama Club. We used to give one production at the end of the school year for which we rehearsed all year long. And I think I recall learning my first act and my second act of the plays and ad-libbing my way through the third act. But I really enjoyed those.

RH: In elementary school...

LM: This is Ruth speaking...

RH: There was no auditorium, so we would have assemblies anyway. And the first through third grades would march from their classrooms into their position on the first floor. And I was always so happy when I got to the fourth and fifth grade, because the fourth and fifth grades could march and stand on the steps, and that made me feel important. I was standing on the steps and looking down on the kids downstairs on the floor. And it didn’t occur to me in those days that we should have had an auditorium. I’d never thought about it, because we never had one.

LM: Do you still have family here in Charlottesville?

FW: Not now.

LM: Your families are all deceased?

All: Uh, huh.

LM: And none of you moved back to Charlottesville?

ALL: None.

RH: But I still own the house here that I was born in.

LM: Do you really, Ruth? Oh, my. And it is on 6th Street, did you say?

RH: Dale Avenue.
LM: Did you say Dale Avenue?

RH: I was born on Dale Avenue.

LM: You were born on Dale Avenue, but lived at 6th and Brown, I think you said? Um, did you have a school nurse? Was there a school nurse?

BG: No, no nurse.

LM: No? What happened if you got sick?

BG: You went home.

LM: You were lucky. Your grandmother would take care of you. Your grandmother was home.

BG: Grandmother was our nurse.

LM: Well, you were lucky. You had what, a block to go?

All: Right. Exactly.

LM: All those children who had a long way to go, no health facilities at the school. What did you do after school? You were in the French Club for extracurricular... and drama,

BG: Chorus...


RH: Worked on the school newspaper. The Jeffersonian.

LM: Were there activities in the school that were used by the community as a whole? For the African-American community, were there after school programs, were there evening programs? Was there anything that brought other members of the African-American community to the school?

FW: The PTA, the NAACP met there at the school. And Daddy was president at one time.

LM: Your father was President of the NAACP here in Charlottesville?

FW: Meetings were held at the school.

LM: Who was your father?

FW: Dr. Bernard Coles. Dentist on Main Street, and Ruth said Vinegar Hill, but I don’t remember those days. She’s older than I am... [laugh]
LM: We don’t need to tell too much about how old you are. [laugh] Well, I think you all look so wonderful that it wouldn’t matter at all! What are your feelings on the difficult issue of desegregating the schools? You were all out of school by the time that happened.

FW: We were gone. But you had issues, I guess we all did, when we finished, like we couldn’t go to the University of Virginia to do our college work, and we were right here within minutes of the University of Virginia. And that’s how we ended up going to Virginia State University in Petersburg.

LM: Was that largely a black school at the time?

RH: Yes. It was named the Virginia State College for Negroes when we were there.

LM: Oh, my.

BG: And they dropped the Negroes just before I graduated. We were sitting there praying, just let them get rid of that before they print our diplomas! They will know we don’t need it on our diplomas. [laugh]

LM: Now Frances, when did you graduate from high school?

FW: 1949.

LM: 1949. So, you were the youngest, Frances, and Bernadine, you graduated in...

BG: 1942.

LM: 1942. It was my understanding that the University of Virginia did not admit women of any color on a full time basis until 1970. As undergraduate students.

BG: I was not aware of that.

LM: It was a long time. On a full time basis. From, I am in education, that’s on a full time basis. Maybe some in nursing...

LM: Some real issues! What do you think about the current program to preserve Jefferson School, do you have some idea about how you would like to see the school used in the future?

FW: Certainly I’d like to see it preserved. And, I am sure there are many community activities that could be based there. And many treasures could be stored there that we could come back and see.

LM: This is Frances speaking. Ruth, what are your thoughts on this?
RH: Definitely they should preserve the building. I really hated to see the elementary school come down. But, I definitely would not like to see this one disappear. It has lots of fond memories for me, and I know it got me off to a good start.

LM: Any thoughts Bernadine on how you would like to see the school used in the future?

BG: First of all, I would definitely like to see it preserved, because it is so much a part of our history! I mean everybody of our generation came through Jefferson. I would like to see it used in some way that would benefit the community, as a museum, for a community activity...

LM: Well, there have been a number of suggestions so far. I don't think they've come to any conclusion, but their main thought so far seems to be to preserve part of the history of the African-American community in Charlottesville, and that it also continue in an educational focus in some way. Rather than be turned into condominiums or retail stores. So, we'll see what happens.

RH: We still want to be able to go back there when we have our meetings! You know we hold our worship service there every time. We'll have it there tomorrow.

BG: I guess that this will be the last time for a while, so we should all get out of bed and be over there tomorrow.

LM: This is going to be the last reunion for a while?

RH: The last time we can get into Jefferson, or the auditorium, until a determination is made.

LM: Because I guess the school has deteriorated significantly, the School Board has not particularly taken care of it. So you really have no, when you were in school, you had no, you had very little interaction with the other high schools in the area.

BG: Uh, huh. None. I think I saw the inside of Lane High School once. When it was being built. I went in there and looked at it. And that was it.

RH: There were a lot of places that you couldn't go. Like the public library. So, the books that we read were housed in the Jefferson building. In the summertime, you couldn't go to a public swimming pool to swim, you couldn't go to the public library to draw out a book to read, so we went to Jefferson and read every book they had to read.

LM: So, where was the public library at the time? Was this...

RH: Somewhere downtown, I don't remember that. I couldn't go there so...

LM: You couldn't go, you couldn't go to the public library. Hm.
The only park that you could go to was Washington Park. They didn't have a swimming pool. So you couldn't swim either.

LM: Hmm. When Jefferson School was closed, was there, have you talked to people who have strong feelings about the closing of Jefferson School, or do you have feelings on that?

FW: Well, we were all away when it was closed. But my feeling is that the people who were still here did not want to see it closed.

LM: Anything else you would like to record about your memories of Jefferson School. Sounds like it was a real memorable...Was it the heart of the community do you think in many ways? And your church, which church did you go to?

All: First Baptist Church at Main and 7th.

FW: Reverend Williams at that time was our pastor. And then Reverend Bunn. And he was replaced after we left.

LM: Did most of the children, most of the people that you went to school with, did they attend church, was that...

FW: Uh, huh. I mean you went to church in those days. Unlike many of the youngsters now, who need to be in church I think more often.

LM: Did you sing in the choir?

All: Yes, yes.

LM: In the church choir, you all did?

RH: Yes. Yes, second soprano. [laugh] Unfortunately they didn’t have second soprano in the church choir.

BG: Ruth and I were organists sometimes. Our mother played the piano at church a lot.

FW: All three of us were valedictorians of our classes when we finished Jefferson High.

LM: Wow! That's truly something of which you should be very proud. All three of you! Overachievers? No. No, just high achievers. That's really wonderful. Do you all have families? Did you all marry, and...

RH: Yes, I have a son and a daughter.

BG: Yes, I have a son and a granddaughter and a daughter in law.

FW: Yes, I had two sons, and I have three lovely granddaughters.
LM: Do you all have family reunions? Do you have a chance to do that every now and then?

FW: We do.

LM: Do you come back here for them? Or...

FW: We rotate among the three of us, and our first cousins. My mother’s brother’s children. They were the only two children in their family, that had children. So the first cousins get together every year, as a reunion. And this is a reunion for us when we come to this. Absolutely.

LM: Are many of your classmates here?

RH: I haven’t seen anyone from my class this year.

LM: No?

FW: A lot of mine are here.

LM: A lot of yours. Frances has quite a few of hers, but Ruth no. How about you Bernadine?

BG: No. There aren’t any.

LM: None of yours!

BG: No.

LM: And you’ve had a chance to see everybody who’s here.

BG: Probably not.

RH: One of my classmates is supposed to come tonight to the banquet. He lives here in Charlottesville, and somebody told me that he’d be here. But a lot of people are here that I knew because you knew people who were not necessarily in your class. All their brothers and sisters you knew. Everybody knew everybody. So if you were in my class and you had a brother or sister two or three years ahead or behind, you knew them, because everybody knew everyone.

LM: Do you have any last thoughts on Jefferson School, and your experiences there, that you would like to record?

RH: It was a wonderful time in my life, and I would certainly hate to see it go, I’d like to see it be here forever.

FW: My teachers were a great inspiration to me. I think that’s why I went into education. I’ve been in it for fifty years, and haven’t set a retirement date yet.
LM: Bernadine, how about you?

BG: I think our teachers were far more dedicated than teachers are now, some teachers!

LM: Except for Frances.

BG: Mrs. Wood is a very dedicated teacher, present company excepted. [laugh] And I think they just gave us such a good foundation in our lives.

LM: Well, I would like to thank you sisters for speaking with us today, and for participating in the Jefferson School Oral History Project. I hope you enjoy the rest of your reunion!

All: Thank you, thank you very much.

End of interview.
The Coles Sisters—Bernadine Gines,
Ruth Harris, Frances Wood,
August 30, 2002

(photo by Alexandria Searls)
Interview Consent Form
Jefferson School Oral History Project
Preservation Piedmont, Charlottesville, Virginia

The Jefferson School Oral History Project is conducted by Preservation Piedmont as part of an ongoing program to support preservation of the Jefferson School.

The purpose of the interview is to collect the stories of those affiliated with Jefferson School in order to document and preserve the history of the site for the benefit of current Charlottesville residents and future generations. Material developed from the interview will be shared with the Charlottesville community through publication of a booklet, a video documentary of the interviews, and a conference.

Copies of the transcriptions and other materials derived from these interviews will be donated to the Albemarle County Historical Society, and The Carter G. Woodson Institute for African and African American Studies at the University of Virginia.

It is also hoped that a museum will be established at the Jefferson School where material gathered from this oral history project will provide a permanent exhibit interpreting the history of the Jefferson School and its role in the community.

In support of this program:

I, Ruth Coles Harris ...........................................(name)
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Interviewee........................................... Interviewer...........................................

Date August 31, 2002 Date 8-31-02
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Interviewee: [signature] Date: 8/31/02

Interviewer: [signature] Date: 8/31/02
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Interviewee....................................................... (name) 

Date 8-31-02

Interviewer....................................................... (name) 

Date 8-31-02
Interview with
Marian Dukes

Interview

Questions by: Jacky Taylor and Liz Sargent

Date: July 2001

Location: Charlottesville, Virginia

The following constitutes a transcription of written responses provided by Marian Dukes upon reviewing the interview questions to be posed at an upcoming Jefferson School Alumni Reunion...

My name is Sarah Marian Bowles Dukes. I was born November 24, 1930 in Charlottesville, Virginia, at the University of Virginia hospital. I was an only child. My address growing up was 210 Lankford Avenue in Charlottesville.

My thoughts on the future of the school building: I would like to see the building preserved, with necessary renovations. Some areas of the school could be used to house trophies and/or other school memorabilia. There might be photographs of how the area looked in the days before Vinegar Hill was razed.

Any school means a lot to an individual, and Jefferson Elementary School and Jefferson High School mean a lot to me. That's where I received my public schooling. My mother attended Jefferson School in the early 1900s—graduated in 1910. Her school days were happy, and she often talked about walking from "Birdwood," which was the property of Warner Wood. The Slaughter family live there, and her grandfather had a blacksmith shop there. She spoke of her teachers, especially Professor B.E. Tonsler. She spoke so highly of him. The students remained in his classes two years where they received advanced subjects, which gave them a better start in life.


We lived on Lankford Avenue, and I walked to Jefferson out Ridge Street to Main down Fourth Street N.W. to Jefferson. We walked along with others in the midst of the white children going to Lane and McGuffey.

The area around Jefferson was "mixed." The ground around Fifth Street N.W. included many nice homes. (Brown Street, Fifth Street, and Sixth Street.) The area on the lower side of Jefferson—Commerce Street, lower end of Brown Street, Fourth Street to Preston Avenue—there were some nice homes, but there were many which were in very poor living conditions—outdoor plumbing, etc. Many were rented homes wherein the landlords did not improve their property.
The only place that catered to schoolchildren was “Scott Dean’s”—juke box, soft drinks, ice cream, candy, etc. There wasn’t much to do during breaks. We had movies. The Paramount was the nicest of the theaters. I attended the Paramount sometimes.

Old Jefferson Graded School was standing and in use when I first started school. I attended it through the fourth grade. Grades five through seven were housed in the part of Jefferson in rooms surrounding the auditorium. There was no parking lot, no field, or lawn. The area of the lower level where the pre-school playground is now located were homes (on lower end of Brown Street.)

Students didn’t have the use of cars when I attended school—we walked everywhere.

I well recall my classes in Home Ec., which was one of my favorite classes (sewing and cooking). If I’d had the opportunity to go to college after high school, I would have majored in Home Economics. Miss Laura Jane Wyatt and Miss Euanaline Jones taught us well and made a favorable and lasting impression on me. Miss Wyatt’s classes were on the basement level, first classroom after entering the building from the Commerce Street side. Miss Jones’ sewing room was on the other side of the lower floor on the other side of the ‘court.’

There were many subjects that I enjoyed—history, social studies, government, French, and of course Home Economics. English, math, science, and history were required; there were electives also.

Classes were mixed—boys and girls. We changed classes for each subject. We changed classes quickly, we talked—there was a fair amount of noise. It was not chaotic; we had a fair amount of strict rules of behavior. We were dismissed with a teacher standing at her door serving as a monitor.

I remember many of my teachers by name:
- Miss V.G. Terrell
- Mrs. Geneva Knox Watson
- Mrs. Maude Fleming
- Mrs. Bessie Taylor
- Miss Jessie Carey
- Mrs. Rebecca McGinness
- Mrs. Peachie Johnson (Jackson)
- Miss Kathleen Chisholm
- Mrs. Georgie Stone Davis
- Mrs. Rosemond Jemison
- Miss Laura Wyatt
- Mr. L.A. Paige
- Mr. Harry Johnson
- Miss E. Jones
- Mrs. Carrie Michie
- Mrs. Geneva Watson
- Mrs. Rosemary Byers
The teachers ranged in age from new college graduates to experienced teachers. I felt that I could talk to them if I had difficulties with my subjects. (I didn't need additional help.) The turnover wasn’t great though there were turnovers due to marriage, better positions, etc.

Each student received a report card, which was sent home with the child. We had honor rolls. If you didn’t pass a course, you failed and in many cases repeated the course or grade.

Summer school was held. I never had to attend. We always went to school—no such thing as snow days.

When we were sick, we stayed at home. There was a school nurse—Mrs. Imogene Bunn, R.N.—during my high school days.

I am sure we had lockers to keep books, etc. We had homerooms and kept our coats in the closet in the rooms.

There was a library. Mrs. Alberta Faulkner was the librarian. It was located in the space where our meetings [Citizens for Jefferson School] are held now.

Our lunch was taken in the cafeteria. We could bring lunch or we could buy it. I think the cost was $0.25.

Recesses were held outside in the area, which is now used for parking. I do not recall much or any equipment. The teacher was on the ground with his or her class.

Extra-curricular activities were available. There was the French Club, Glee Chorus, Dramatic Club. Our activities were supported by our teachers. My school days were during segregation, so we had no help from any other teacher. There was a school band, which performed during ball games and parades. The uniforms were red and black.

Sports were very much a part of the school activities—football, basketball (girls and boys teams). They competed with other teams from Lynchburg, Roanoke, Richmond, and other nearby cities. The Jefferson football uniforms were red and black and they practiced and competed at Washington Park.

During my school years I was in plays at home and away. I recall a trip to Virginia State University—it was called Virginia State College at that time. Our performances were held in the school auditorium.

Our school newspaper was the “Jeffersonian,” published monthly during the school year. They were printed locally (I do not know where.)
I vividly recall the Junior/Senior proms held each May. Our escorts were Juniors or Seniors within the school.

Charlottesville was segregated during my school days. Our friends lived in segregated parts of the town. Dice Street, Sixth Street, 7th Street, Oak Street, Diggs Street, 1st Street South, lower end of Ridge Street, Hartman Mill Road, Garrett Street, and South 6th Street. There was only one school that black or Afro-American residents could attend and it was Jefferson.

There may have been cliques. They didn’t cause any trouble nor were there any controversial events. Kids were always kids, they broke rules and were punished accordingly.

My school days were over long before the desegregation/integration period. I vividly recall the time when my friend’s children attended formerly all white schools. We did not interact with any other city schools, we never visited or had any activities with the other schools.

Many of my classmates/schoolmates became teachers and came back to teach in Charlottesville—Sadie Gohanna Mason, Lelia Edloe Brown, Bessie Henderson Williams to name a few.

One of my closest friends from high school lives in the D.C. area. We correspond occasionally, and we see each other on her trips to Charlottesville.

This will be the seventh reunion and I have attended all of the previous reunions and plan to attend this one and any future ones if the opportunity presents itself.

End of interview.
Interview with Bruce Edmonds

Bruce Edmonds attended Jefferson between 1969-70 when he was eleven. He was part of an integrated sixth grade class that spent one year in the building before moving on to the city’s new middle school facilities at Walker. He is currently in charge of the McIntire Recycling Center in Charlottesville.

BE: I have been in three schools in the city that have closed. I believe I was one of the last people to come out of Lane High School. I went there the last year it was open. I went to summer school that summer, and I was one of the last people to leave, and walking out with an assistant principal, I believe we locked it up together. I was in the last class that went to McGuffey. I went to the first grade there when it was a regular school—grades 1 through seven—and after that it was closed. I actually got to go to a grammar school. Jefferson closed a few years after I went there.

At all three schools it was known that they were in their last years of service, and so there was no maintenance and the schools were decrepit. When I went to Lane there was no library. There had been a fire, and the city knew there’d be a Charlottesville High School. They told us to use the Downtown Library. The staff were all retiring and defeated. McGuffey was the worst. It was falling apart.

In Jefferson they made you move every hour. I took classes in most of the rooms. I didn’t know about desegregation. We were oblivious.

The building of Jefferson is awesome. Being in there is deja vu. The auditorium looks exactly the same. The preschool head Nancy Gercke was there when I was there [Bruce does not remember in what capacity].

All three schools had excellent cafeterias. Carver Rec. was there. Inge’s Grocery was there. Inge knew it all. Every lunch period we’d go up there. There were empty fields,
barren wasteland all the way from Inge’s to Lane High School. As kids they seemed huge. We used to run in them.

Inge’s Grocery looked out of time, really old. A lot of penny candy, cheap candy. It was a very popular place to go, among students of both races. Mr. Inge always wore a suit with a bow tie and we all called him Mr. Inge. There was just one level of the grocery store. In the 1940s there used to be a hotel for black people, rooms, then there was a mortician’s. Then someone told me there was a wholesale grocery.

I visited Inge’s only when I was at Jefferson. You’d see whites and blacks in there—adults.

I walked to school, all of us did. Until I was in junior high, the buses weren’t run by the city. They were run by Pace’s Taxi, I believe. When I went to school, we had to pay for buses and books.

Everyone who went to Jefferson School knew that the neighborhood had been wiped out five years ago. You had a giant four-lane road, but you didn’t have anything else. They had put the road in first.

For kids, it was spooky. One of the first government phrases we learned was “urban renewal,” so we thought of urban renewal as bulldozers. I vaguely remember the neighborhood as a little kid—vaguely. Commerce Street looks like Vinegar Hill. If you want to know what Vinegar Hill looked like, go down Commerce Street.

So we thought of urban renewal as the plan to resell land to put in different structures. It was in the papers every day. It happened to white people, too. There used to be a joke. When it happened to white people, it was called eminent domain. When it happened to black people, it was called urban renewal.

We had no consciousness that Jefferson School had been a black high school. But we knew it had been something before.

Some of the ladies in the lunchroom had worked there when it was a high school. There were two really old ladies. We’d talk to the luncheon staff. There wasn’t such a class divide as there is today. The principal knew the names of the staff. They actually cooked the food there. It wasn’t that preprogrammed food.

I remember there were black teachers.

Inge’s shut somewhere in the 1970s.

[He remembers on May Day] there being red-sickled banners—that was all we knew of May Day.
On the wall that leads up to the school [where the animal mural is today, on the Carver
Rec side] there was “Free Cherry Pie.” Cherry Pie was jailed in the ‘60s by the local
authorities. It was written in red spray paint. I never knew who he was, but it was really
popular to say, and we all said it Cherry Pie in giant painted letters. He was someone
unjustly accused of offenses. Or maybe he was just someone who was in jail. When we
were first there we were innocent. We thought we had hit the mother lode, and we were
not only not going to be given a hard time, we were going to have free food. We had
made it.

We were all pretty astute. All of us expected to be drafted by the time we were 18 and
sent to Vietnam to die. We were a little more savvy than kids are today. We watched the
events unfold in Southeast Asia.

Charlottesville had a different tone then. It was made up of a majority of working class
people. UVA was miniscule with less than 6,000 students total, and it was a single sex
school.

I lived at 608 Wine Cellar Circle. We owned it until late ‘90. I lived on the block until
2000. Working class people were the majority in Charlottesville, black and white.

The Black Panthers—I knew exactly who they were, out of Oakland. I read Bobby Seal’s
book by the seventh grade. There was a photo from my Junior High, and there was a
photograph of the guy sitting next to me with the caption, “A Typical Left Winger.”
When Kent State happened in 1970 a lot of students, myself included, wore black
armbands, in defiance of authorities who asked us not to wear them. May 2\textsuperscript{nd}.

AS: Did your parents give you the idea?

BE: No, our parents didn’t give us the idea. In the fall of 1970 at junior high we wore them
again.

We had a radicalized great interest in the war. People assumed it wasn’t going to end. It
grew on for ten years. We assumed working class people were going to be drafted. We
didn’t play tag. Instead we discussed carpet-bombing and search and destroy.

End of interview.
Release Form

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I, Alexandria Searls, give to Preservation Piedmont the right to publish the Jefferson School interviews my magazine SPEAK OUT published in Spring 2003. These interviews were with Kenneth Martin, Priscilla Whiting, Grace Tinsley, Bruce Edmonds, Barbara Myer, Florence Bryant, and David Saunier. SPEAK OUT had oral permission from each interviewee to be included in the publication and for the publication to receive copyright to the interviews.

Date: October 1, 2004

Signature: Alexandria Searls
Interview with Nancy Gercke

Interviewers: Jacky Taylor and Liz Sargent
Date: May 21, 2004
Location: Venable Preschool
Charlottesville, Virginia

[This transcript has been reviewed by Ms. Gercke, who has corrected some of the spelling, and grammar. It has been edited for readability.]

Transcribed: May 2004
By: Liz Sargent

LS: Usually we start by asking you to give us your full name, your current address, and your connection to Jefferson School, and that helps us to establish baseline information.

NG: My name is Nancy Gercke. I’ve been an educator in the Charlottesville City Schools for 32 years. I started out as a kindergarten teacher at Venable, and then into working with the primary gifted program in the schools, then moved into working, across the six elementary schools, before becoming the early childhood coordinator working with preschool, kindergarten, first, and second grades—on a system-wide basis—I then became the preschool coordinator of the program, and finally one of the coordinators of the program at Jefferson School in 1995. There is another coordinator that also worked with me, part-time in the building. Her name is Ann Dubliner. She’s the preschool special education coordinator, because Jefferson had eight classrooms of four year olds that were considered “at-risk children,” with a variety of different kinds of riskiness, which is not a term I usually use because I think most people are at risk today. So what does that mean? But, there were also five classrooms of preschool special education children. In the portion of the building that we were in—the centermost portion of the building—there were other programs at that time, which made for some interesting situations while we were there.

JT: Like what for example?

NG: Well, there was the recreation program, there was a seniors program... I was disappointed to have that program go, because I thought it was a nice intergenerational thing that we got started. But they left, and then the suspension center children came in, which caused some very difficult situations while we were there.

JT: Did you actually give the children the opportunity to mix, were they using the same space at the same time?
NG: Well, no...some doors went up. But that was one of the issues of the physical site—security—which you need in any building. This is not a comment about the neighborhood or anything like that, but now a days we need to have security and make sure there’s a limited number of doors opening, but when people from different programs need to get in and out of the building, it’s very hard. There was also Piedmont Virginia Community College who came in during the seven years that we were there. There was the Even Start Program that also came in, which was actually something that under I believe Dr. McGeehan, who was the Superintendent who developed the strategic plan, was a hope that there could be a model preschool center, and that Even Start would be in it. I went after a grant for that, and we got that in the building as well. There was also Adult Education. The building was constantly used at night. I’ve been here a long time and seen six elementary schools, but it was clearly the most used school building that I’ve seen... high use!

JT: High use as in?

NG: All times of day, high use.

JT: But what about the numbers of people, traffic going in and out? I mean you’ve given me the sense that it was a highly occupied building, but maybe what you’re saying is more it was used throughout the day?

NG: When we were there, it was very high use. Because you have the recreation department there, you had adult education classrooms there...

JT: And they ran throughout the day as well as in the evening?

NG: The adult education classes ran really at night as well as during the day. But there was lots of activities, on Sundays churches...and it for the space.

LS: You could rent it out, is that right?

NG: Yes. There was a regular church that used the space.

JT: Did the preschool use the space after...what time did the preschool run from and to?

NG: It ran from the same time that the elementary schools run, from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

JT: No, pre/pre-school?

NG: No, we had no before-school care or after-school care.

JT: Did you use the school after school to do other activities, or on the weekends, or did you have any functions there?
NG: Oh, yeah. We had loads of functions there. Both the Title 1 and the state, the federal funding and the state funding for Virginia preschool initiative classrooms require parent nights, parent meetings, parent education workshops, etc. So it was quite a heavy schedule. And it was interesting because I had had at one time, when I was the early childhood coordinator, my office over at Charlottesville High School. And I felt much more unsafe in Charlottesville High School than I did at Jefferson. Just because I work all hours.

JT: Because you were alone in the high school at night? Or because of something else?

NG: Yeah. I was alone, but you could hear doors and things open and stuff, but I always felt because the Rec department was going on and that there were other things going on, I’d go in on Sundays and the church group was there, and I could hear the church music and stuff like that. So I always felt quite safe there.

JT: So you don’t mean during the day at the high school?

NG: No, not during the day.

LS: When your son is there [to Jacky]. [laugh] So, when you started in the building, which was 1995, you had to adapt the space to become sort of enclosed and walled off from these other activities. How did you find the facilities? And what kinds of things did you have to do to prepare them?

NG: Well, the building was very, very run down. Both inside and out. A lot of cosmetic changes were made when we moved in, you know, fresh paint, new carpeting, those types of things. Tiles were out of the floor... you know this was a building that was used for when other elementary schools were getting renovated, people moved in and out, so they had no ownership. To me, it was very important, knowing the history of the building, that it be brought up to the best standards we could possible bring it up to, given the amount of money that was allocated for this purpose. As a matter of fact, the school staff and parents actually did the landscaping outside on the, what is not the main door side...

LS: On the Fourth Street side?

NG: Yes. On the Fourth Street side, and did that landscaping and really took a lot of care in that. It was very important to the staff and myself that this building would be beautiful, and it would be... as soon as you stepped into it, you’d feel like this was different, which is a hard thing to think of when you’ve got a two floor, brick institution. Although you didn’t know that from the outside as much, just seeing the landscaping, I couldn’t go out the door without picking up litter, you know, because I wanted the children to see that litter wasn’t every place. Because if they didn’t see it without litter, how would they become aware of when there was litter? So, many homey things were done inside the building, but of course you had this big problem for young children, these long hallways, how do you find your classroom? I mean this is immense. I can remember from my own experiences as a kindergarten child, my classroom that I thought was just huge. From part...
of the year when I was in kindergarten I didn’t move to the other half. And that’s just in a classroom. I worried about those long hallways I thought could be very frightening for children; just finding your room could be traumatic. So, there were obstacles in the building, but we tried to make it work because we were so happy to be together.

JT: How did you first come to be in the building in the first place?

NG: That was under Dr. Dorothea Shannon when she was Superintendent here. There was a feeling that they wanted to, in the elementary schools, have fewer transitions for the special needs children so they could stay longer in one place. There was actually way too much transition for the special needs children that some might say needed the most stability. And, so, by pulling out the preschool special education classrooms, and pulling out the four year old classrooms that we had in the schools, that created the space for it to happen.

JT: So you had four-year-old classrooms in the schools at that time?

NG: Oh, we had four-year-old classrooms back in 1988. The program’s been around for quite a long time. It has built up. It hasn’t always been eight classrooms, but it has built up and the irony in this is that we actually started out together with the four-year-old classrooms over at Jackson Via. And then they got split up into Clark and Jackson Via, and then, when there was only three or four classrooms, we were told to go into this one building.

LS: How many students total is this—the four classrooms?

NG: There are 128 four year olds, and a maximum of 40 preschool special education students. And then at one point there was 30 Even Start families at any one time, with babies, infants, toddlers...

LS: Really?

NG: Yes, and their parents who were working on getting their high school diploma, or working on job skills, or working on English as a Second Language, would also work down in the classroom for part of the time, and then get parent education training as well.

LS: Now your faculty, were they stationed only here, or did they also go out to the different schools?

NG: No.

LS: They just stayed here?

NG: They stayed in the one building. And, of course, the reaction when we first came into that building, because it was so run down, the teachers were unhappy, but they fairly quickly—I’d say within the first year—turned around.
LS: Because of the improvements you made, or just because they appreciated the single location?

NG: They appreciated being together and having a focus, because they were relatively isolated in the elementary schools where they were before, particularly the pre-school special education children. And they saw, they started to see, lots of opportunities by us being in the building together. There were obstacles such as I mentioned—the long hallways that we overcame by unifying the whole school with symbols, room symbols, from nature and things they all picked, and then we had flags that hung those symbols outside the room, and then on the wall of the playground, those symbols were put there and became an identity, and then we had the school song too, “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands, we’ve got the big, big whales from the ocean at Jefferson…” You know so they each felt a part of things. We had community assemblies where everybody came together, and once a month we had cultural events.

LS: Did you hold the assemblies upstairs in the auditorium?

NG: Yes, in the auditorium, which again, was not a very conducive site, but we kind of set a goal of once a month having cultural events, different cultural events. We had Irish dancers, clog dancers, a variety of different types of cultures and events for the children to be exposed to outside of the world that they knew everyday. Some of the other physical problems that we had, and this is really the first major complaint that the teachers had, was toilets. They had come from places where they had toilets in their room, and now they didn’t. Which meant that they would have to spend time going down the hallways, or the assistants taking children down the hallways, or breaking up the natural routine in the classroom by taking a group of children to the bathroom, who of course all didn’t need to go at the same time at four years old. Another goal that we had for the building was inclusion between our preschool special education classrooms and our four year old classrooms. We had, as a matter of fact, a whole continuum of ways that inclusion could occur—by whole class, by groups, by individual children moving back and forth, or staying, and that kind of thing—and of course the building was a huge impediment to that, because the only classrooms that had toilets in their classrooms were on the main floor. Because preschool special education has younger children—two through four year olds—it was decided by Superintendent Dorothea Shannon that those would be the preschool special education classrooms. But we had wanted to mix them up more so there would be a preschool four year old room next to a preschool special education room. Just by proximity there would be more interaction and break down some of those barriers that there might be between special needs children and the four year old regular education children.

JT: I’m not really understanding about the long corridors and the distances that the children had to go. How is that any different from any other school like in for, you know, kindergartners going to Greenbriar, or Burnley Moran?

NG: Well, I think the plant of Greenbriar is very different. This type of building was similar of course to Venable and Clark. It’s not great even for the four year olds being in there now,
or the kindergarten children. But you have to realize for many of these children, this was
their first experience in an institution that was that large.

LS: Also, it was designed for high school students.

NG: Yes, it was designed for high school students. But usually best practice in a preschool
setting is to have doors opening to the outside so you can have water play and all those
kinds of things outside, right? Open your door, and all those messy events can happen out
there, but of course we didn’t have that even in the preschool special education
classrooms. They couldn’t go out.

JT: But there is a courtyard there that, didn’t they use…?

NG: Yes, there is a courtyard there that’s concrete and brick, which, except for winter makes it
very difficult to use, and then you have snow, and that was another obstacle. I had all
kinds of plans for that. And, they didn’t initially pan out because of the heat factor, even
plants didn’t grow unless you wanted to make it a desert. But we had a plan… what it
needed was some kind of a canopy, and of course that was out of budget range, and we
couldn’t get money for it.

LS: And that was one of my questions. You’ve got a lot of students, a big enrollment, and
you’ve probably put in requests to have the building upgraded in different regards, but
you probably watched it deteriorate instead. Were they ever able to give you any idea that
they would do repairs that you needed, or offer to fix the building…

NG: This was again an irony for me when I heard that, you know, the building didn’t meet
code and that’s why they were pulling the children out of it. Well, we had been there for
seven years. Didn’t you know that it didn’t meet code earlier, or is there something else
going on here, you know?

LS: Did you ask repeatedly for certain things?

NG: Well, actually, because it was at first under this Superintendent something that she asked
for, although she set very limited costs on it, a lot of the superficial things were done. Our
main concern, other than the toilets, which wasn’t changed, that obstacle was never
overcome, it was just lived with, was the playground had no equipment on it. It had like
four swings on it, and that’s all it had.

LS: So you added all that equipment that’s out there?

NG: Yes. We saved from our budgets, and we also made an appeal at a School Board meeting,
and a donor came forth to put the huge piece of equipment on there. The other pieces we
saved out of our money. We paid for the equipment out of our money because it was not
on the recreation department’s you know timeline and budget to do that. So we paid for
it, although they did come and maintain it.
LS: They did?

NG: Yeah. And inspect it if it didn’t meet their standards. But, another obstacle that we had was the courtyard. A substitute teacher we had suggested an army canopy. I mean camouflage. And I remember, I think it was Memorial Day actually, that I got my husband and my daughter over there with me, and I had ordered the canopy, and we had put it on strips, wood strips to stretch it out, and three-quarters of the courtyard we covered with the canopy. That created enough shade for us, but it was still light enough for us to have the wonderful murals that are in there done. That brought the community that was outside and around the school in. Joker’s Barber Shop, the Downtown Mall, the restaurant, the whole theme was to bring those things inside. We got an arts grant for that, and Jason and Greta McCloud did those in conjunction with the children after they visited those places. The children described what they saw, and Jason and Greta drew it for them and then brought back another copy for them to see if they agreed with it. So they were actually sharing their revision process in art. When they put the boards up around the courtyard, the children would come down—we had picnic tables down there—and the children would come down and have their lunches there and watch as Jason and Greta painted. And then I collected what I called prop boxes that would go out at each one of the things so that the children could use that area as almost like a career awareness. We brought in a lot of masks and literacy into it, as well as play things. We brought a piece of equipment for the infants and toddlers so they would have an “indoor” playground space to use as well. In the summertime, we also had preschool there. About half the school was there for the summer classrooms. We did Camp Jefferson, we had a “pond,” and fishing, and a tent, and camping and things like that out there. It became a really wonderful place. I hadn’t seen anything quite like it before. So here again is where something seemingly inappropriate for young children became a wonderful benefit.

LS: Sounds like you had a lot of parent participation as well?

NG: Actually, we had some very ded... a core group of very dedicated parents. This was at the time that, I can’t even think what the past terminology was, that “TANF”—welfare reform—came into being. A lot of the parents that could have come in had to go to work. Parent involvement dropped. Actually, when our four year old programs were first in some of the elementary schools, we would be out at 1:30 p.m. and we could do home visits. But, once welfare reform came in, the parents weren’t home, so the teachers were on contract time, and we went to a longer day. And, well, welfare reform heavily affected the parent involvement.

JT: Could you give us an idea of the student population? Where they came from, what they were like?

NG: Well, they followed, as you might expect, much along the lines of the composition of the Southside schools. To get our money, the children either had to be under Title I—educationally needy—and we had to screen them, developmentally, to find out where they were functioning. Or, they needed to be from low-income families, ESL families, families that had social service needs. Foster children. Those kinds of needs. But our
population, and I think this was born out in some research, because there is a higher number of low socioeconomic black families in Charlottesville than there are white families, well over 80 percent of our population was black and that created a very interesting dynamic, both within the school, and I think within the community. From people on the outside that would come in and see heavily black classrooms of children, it looked, it could look I think, like this was a return to the old segregated Jefferson. But in fact, there again, that was an opportunity for us to um, to make this a model school, to show that we could have this kind of a place, be put in a deteriorated building, and make it a place that was envied by many people in the community. In fact, I think that was one of the dynamics that occurred in the community when people started hearing what a wonderful preschool program we had. Then, all socio-economic levels wanted to have a piece of that. But there was no funding for that.

JT: How did the students get into the preschool?

NG: We did screening on them.

JT: But did they...?

NG: Apply?

JT: Yes, how did you market yourselves, how did you get the word out to the community?

NG: Well, we do things like put up flyers in laundry rooms, in housing projects; we work through the housing association to distribute flyers. We get notices put in the water bills, we advertise in the paper, we have posters around the schools. Right now we have an outdoor freestanding exhibit like they do for campaigns. Posters. Word of mouth. We actually go through the registration cards in the schools and pull up appropriately aged siblings. We don’t decide whether they are eligible or not by their age, we just send out postcards to all four year olds by age.

JT: What kind of response did you have, would you say?

NG: Another way is through referrals from the agencies in town; they could make referrals on families that they thought needed these services.

JT: What kind of response did you get? Did you feel that the amount of effort you put in to getting the word into the community returned a good number of referrals?

NG: Oh, yes. And it increased as a matter of fact.

LS: The word of mouth grew, and people knew about it?

NG: Yes. Each year. It’s really the kind of thing where the most powerful communication is word-of-mouth. With somebody’s child getting on a bus, you know, and someone saying, "Your child’s too young to go to school, why are they getting on the bus?"
JT: The children rode on school buses? Or were they special school buses?

NG: They had special school buses.

JT: The little ones?

NG: Yes. The two through four year olds. We had special… and that was the way we got inclusion right from the beginning, there was not a separate Special Ed bus and a separate four-year-old bus. So that started some of the inclusion we wanted. Going back to the physical plant, though, the building was not handicapped accessible. So, they had to correct that. And, actually, then there was a problem with fire; we needed another fire entrance once they closed off the hallway that went down to the downstairs gym. That we couldn’t use. We needed to put a ramp in near the pre-school Special Ed hallway at the end there for a handicap ramp to go down. They spent quite a bit of money on a lift, a handicap lift to go into the building, so that people could…

JT: Where is that located?

NG: That’s around at the doorway that’s closest to the maintenance side of the building, on the Fourth Street side. There was also, as I said, limited playground equipment. We got a donation, and we used our own money to buy equipment.

LS: You were seeing some investment, and I get a sense that your building was programmed, but may-be there was an impending sense of doom as the building continued to deteriorate?

NG: I actually thought the building wasn’t deteriorating. I mean I actually thought it was in the best condition possible. My husband is a contractor, and he says if you want a building to stay in the best condition, you have somebody in there.

LS: Right. But they weren’t painting the windows, they weren’t…

NG: They were doing some of that. But they were not consistently doing it. And we, I became known as quite a pain in the…

LS: That’s what I was wondering. Did you try and rectify the deficiencies?

NG: We were always down there [at the city school maintenance office, which was also housed in the building]. We actually got a relationship going with maintenance so that again, little things got done. But you know, we learned that, may-be we knew from the beginning, there was asbestos in there, but it wasn’t being released. We knew about the paint, but you know it wasn’t being released. So those were concerns, but it was really in the best condition it could possibly be. Now there were wonderful physical advantages to the building. As a matter of fact when there was talk before they decided to put us in the elementary schools, back into the elementary schools from whence we came, there were things we were very proud of. First of all, big rooms, with big windows and that natural
light, which is great for brain development, if not just happiness. It was a wonderful place to walk into in the morning when all the kids got off the buses. They would be looking at books, they'd be carrying on conversations with each other. It had a very joyous spirit. Those wonderful lit hallways. We had plants out under the windows. So the big classrooms, and the large windows, the space for a playground were wonderful. Plus, we had the tremendous advantage of a gym, a huge gym.

LS: So you could use that?

NG: Yes. That was for rainy days or if too many kids went out on the playground at once, one group would go there. Then, we had the blacktop area within the fence where we could have all of our wheel toys and things. This was unheard of. That alone, people were very envious about. When they were looking into building a preschool for us, in the designs the rooms were tiny, they had bathrooms in them, but the rooms were tiny. And you didn’t have the play space which really dictated your schedule so when you could go outside and things. This way, even though we did have 168 children, plus the 30 Even Start families, there were three spaces you could use for all of those classrooms, those thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen classrooms. There was storage space. Now that doesn’t mean much to people who don’t teach young children, but people who teach young children want, need, space to store things. We had the old locker rooms off the gym to use for storage. Everybody had a section that they could store things in. This was wonderful. Young children’s needs change frequently during the course of the year, and your program is based on, on you know, equipment and things. So you need to put that in there, especially when you have special needs children. And then, we had one of the great things that some of our more creative teachers loved. I created a recycling area that had big shelves with bins in them of all kinds of different collectible things. The teachers could come down to the room in the morning and collect things; they didn’t have to keep it all in their classrooms. They could use the classroom for classroom purposes, and not have it all stored up and looking ugly. There were some things that were fixed relatively easily because they were low cost. And there were some things that took more costs, like the lift. We also had to have a handicap bathroom put in, another handicap bathroom put in. Then there was the playground equipment and the school needed a new roof because of flooding that was happening.

LS: Did they actually put that on?

NG: Uh, huh.

LS: Oh! O.K.

JT: What was the temperature like in the building?

NG: It did not have regulated heat and things... Twice we had flooding in the hallways. Fortunately I was there at night and caught it so that everything wasn’t damaged in one wing where just a radiator had a little piece that cost $.05 that popped off that caused it. I got air conditioning units put in every room. The heat was usually not the problem, as
much as how hot it was. So all the rooms got air conditioners put in. Although they did
break down and we were knocking on the door constantly to let people know that you
hadn’t forgotten that we needed air conditioning in those rooms. Then we had other
problems that required creative solutions, such as the courtyard canopy thing, and the
room symbols for the long hallways to become more personal for the kids. And then
some were never solved like the toilet issue and the floors being on two separate floors so
we didn’t have proximity, but we overcame that with a lot of education. But probably as
much as the physical environment, what we really focused on our first two years was to
improve the attractiveness and the cultural climate. I felt a real sense of personal
responsibility to make this, because of its history, a building that we could be proud of,
not just for the children, but for the people that went there. We actually had staff
members who went there to school.

LS: Really?

NG: Yes. Or had family members that went there. And it always seemed to me, for me the
most powerful experience in this whole thing was how I got to know the black
community, and aspects of the black community better, and how having—it was kind of a
goal of mine—since we had so many black children, to have teams of black and white
teachers. For example, if you had a black teacher, then we’d have a white assistant in the
classroom. We actually didn’t call them assistants, we called them co-teachers. They
weren’t getting paid naturally as well as the teachers, and they came in with many
attitudes, beliefs, set roles from being in the elementary schools, and being in different
programs and different settings that they came into here. We inherited this staff so we had
to find common values and things that we all believed in. Because the staff was, on the
whole, very genuinely concerned about the progress of these children, and what made
good progress, and they were educated—a lot of the staff has masters degrees and
things—we mostly had to overcome the different backgrounds that came with the
teacher, those assistant roles, those Special Ed roles versus Regular Ed roles, those white
versus black backgrounds, teachers versus parents. And I say this as “versus,” it wasn’t
like that... it wasn’t like a battle, but these were subtle things that creep into an
educational environment and interfere with it as a learning community. And, so, they all
had to be dealt with. College versus a high school education of the staff... we worked
really hard on how you turn that around so that you create an environment that values
diversity and sets up the best environment for learning for preschool children.

LS: Do you feel like you had a better shot there than you do in some of these other schools
that have a much larger system, or different kind of hierarchy?

NG: Oh, absolutely. We’ve seen it already happen since they’ve been back in the schools.

LS: But the reason I ask is because we’ve now interviewed someone who taught at Lane High
School just as Burley was closed and the students were moving over, and they had no
training to prepare themselves for how these cultures were going to come together. And
then we talked to a man who ran a center at UVA who actually went out and did outreach
with the school systems. Both of them felt strongly that it’s communication, contact, and
the ability to respect people in different settings that help the cultures relate to each other better. It sounds like this school had that opportunity, and with kids at that very formative age that is was possible to promote much better relations.

NG: Well, absolutely. I was constantly reminding the teachers, particularly when conflicts would come up, as they do with any group of people that work together, “You’re a model for children.” A High Scope curriculum which we used in the four year old classrooms that the preschool Special Education classrooms hadn’t used prior to being over there. Then they started modifying it for the needs of the preschool Special Education children. One of the concepts is children being problem solvers. And resolving conflicts. Well, you can’t be running to me about a problem you have with your assistant and your teacher if you’re supposed to be models for the children. You know? And so that was always said. And the other thing that everybody knows about me, which always gets me in a lot of trouble, is that I am very open, I am very frank, and I believe in honest communication. I think there has been a history in Charlottesville of black people distrusting white people… and I say that even though I realize now better the echelons of race relations, and, even in the black community, the different perceptions of class. I have found, with the black staff members at Jefferson, that they know that when you say something, it’s the truth from where you are at that time, and you’re going to be honest about it, and you’re going to follow through with it. And there’s not going to be double-talk. I think there’s been too much double-talk and too much stuff that’s been swept under the rug in our community.

JT: What do you mean by double-talk?

NG: Double-talk, that you say one thing—like you want race relations to be better—and yet you don’t do those things that make race relations better. I think Jefferson is a good example. But, what I realized more through my own soul searching, was that you empower people by having them make decisions. Not just the teachers. Actually, that was one of the things that we were criticized for over there. People said that the school was run by teachers… Well, the school wasn’t run by teachers. It was run by myself and Ann. When there was an issue, we went to the teachers, we educated each other on it, and the assistants. They had equal say in things. We debated it, and we tried to reach consensus. On a few occasions, if we couldn’t reach consensus, we voted. But, what makes consensus possible is that you find out what the obstacles are, and when you remove the obstacles, consensus is possible. And so that’s what we did, that’s what our role was. Whatever gets in the way of something happening that you know to be best for the children, for the staff, it was our job, Ann’s and mine, to remove those obstacles. And such things as, and this is a chronic thing with teachers, the supplies they needed. The things they needed. If they ran out of laminating paper, there was more there. If they ran out of copy paper, there was more there. When they asked for something, it was there. And yet, we still had money left over to build playgrounds and build on our… we had a fleet of wheel toys that was just wonderful. When we divided up, we had at least six for each school.

JT: Could I ask a couple of questions?
NG: Uh, huh.

JT: Have you kept in touch with the students who were at the preschool? I mean, did you, before Jefferson School as a preschool closed, keep track or keep in touch on an informal basis with any of those children once they went to kindergarten?

NG: Oh, that’s interesting because there’s almost, because there was this physical difference. I mean this was one of the things that was said about Jefferson was that these children need to be in the home schools. Well, for over, easily over a third of these children, that wasn’t going to be in their home school the next year.

LS: Oh, really?

NG: No. We served very transient populations. Because of the poverty that many of them lived in, their job situations, their spousal relationships, it was a highly transient population so that wasn’t true. And how is that any different from when a parent can pay for a private preschool; they still have to make a transition. For keeping up with the children that went on, that was a real benefit to being back in the schools again, we knew that from the get-go, that we would see those children again. But what I realized this year, these couple of years since we’ve been back in the schools, is that we have a transition project, actually with research going on with the University of Virginia about the menu of transitional activities that you can do. Because we were in separate spaces, more of an effort was made to create the transition into the elementary schools that we would hope they would be going to. Now, they’re in the schools, so its like we don’t need to do a transition. Now we’re back to just transitioning, pretty much you have kindergarten registration and they go down and visit the classroom one day, when we had a whole plethora of activities, not only for the children, but for the parents and the teachers, and everything before. I’ve heard the same is true about the county’s Bright Starts program—they were in the schools and they were almost as isolated as if they were in another building. We have some of that isolation going on now. I heard that from a teacher just the other day. She’s thinking about moving into kindergarten because there’s more kindergarten teachers there, and there’s only the one preschool teacher there. And she doesn’t feel part of things. She said if it wasn’t for me mentoring her as a new teacher, she would not feel... the system has been great about allowing us to get together. It used to be, first year it was once every month, and now its, I think we had six or seven meetings this year. But it is hard for people to race out of their schools, get over to a meeting on time, and all that kind of thing. And then you know, if you don’t make it, or your co-teacher, your assistant, doesn’t make it, or vice versa, then I have to go around and be the conduit for the information, or send out a memo that nobody reads anyway...

JT: What would you like to see happen to the Jefferson School building?

NG: I’ve always wanted to see it be a lifelong learning institution. I would like to see Early Head Start come in there. I would like to see Head Start and the City School’s preschool program be in there together.
LS: Why there, why not in a new building? What do you think is the benefit of the school?

NG: Because I think in there, again, I’m very tied to the heritage of this building, and I think a significant, and may-be not the people in power, but a significant number of people support that building as being an educational institution, and they were very happy with the preschool being there. Again, coming out of that building would mean going into a new building with much smaller rooms. Much smaller...you know a lot of the things that I said were really benefits of being in that building.

LS: So it’s a combination of the qualities, the physical qualities, and the heritage?

NG: Uh, huh. Even though there are problems with it; of course I would want toilets in all the rooms for the kids, that’s the main thing, our motto in the beginning used to be “toilets are us.” They got so tired of hearing about it.

LS: Do you think that the parents and the students learned an appreciation for the heritage of the building by going there every day? And being part of that environment?

NG: Um...

LS: Do you think that came across?

JT: Did you teach about it?

NG: Well, we actually had a few artifacts and things there that were actually... have been passed on. But we had a teacher who made a wonderful display case of the history, and we had pictures throughout the school at different times that told about the history, and so, I’m not so sure that for the families that were there, it had that big an impact on them, but I can tell you being in one site like that for our families in that location was ideal. We had more parent involvement, I think there, because its closer to the neighborhoods that serve most of our families, not all of them, obviously, but there is a significant number that could walk there or get there easily. It just feels much more a part their community than any other... and I know part of the beliefs in terms of having Jefferson being a preschool center and not being a preschool center, had to do with making the schools the preschool center, but why is it after so long, that these families, a lot of these families don’t feel that the schools are the preschool...you know? Or the places that they want to be involved in? Because its not really in their neighborhood. You know? From where they live and where the school is, its not in their neighborhood as much as Jefferson is. So, I don’t know if there’s a kind of a subconsciousness that goes through the Afro-American community about that school or what. About the building. I do know that I feel like it’s got a soul and a spirit of its own...

LS: That’s what I’ve felt all along. That’s one of the reasons why it was appealing...

NG: And it’s strange, until you’re there, and until you... you know I didn’t know a lot about it. We went into it, but I didn’t know any of its history. And we all learned about it in the
building at the time. Because the staff had been there, too, we had stories about that building, and one of the things that we did to encourage diversity and understanding of one another is we would have regular staff development things where we’d bring in something that told about us... our interests, our backgrounds, and we had one staff member who told about riding on the trains that were segregated, and bringing... because they couldn’t eat in the dining car, they would bring their food...and the mother turned it into a wonderful experience for them because she had shoe boxes where they had baked chicken and they could make it like a picnic there, and realizing that this whole bittersweet kind of thing, making the best out of a bad situation in terms of it not being integrated and trying to make it at that time. And the same thing I think is true about Jefferson, there’s this kind of bittersweet thing about it. It was a building of segregation, put in as an opportunity for education on the one hand, but on the other hand it was segregated. And yet I am sure there were wonderful learning experiences in that building. So, you know, there’s all these kinds of Catch-22s in the whole thing and really a bittersweet double edged... I see that as a theme running through the history of that building, and for us being there, the good and the bad sides of it.

LS: That’s great.

JT: That’s great, thank you very much. That’s a great way to end. Great stories and wonderful information, thank you!

End of interview.
Nancy Gercke, May 21, 2004

(photo by Liz Sargent)
Interview Consent Form
Jefferson School Oral History Project
Preservation Piedmont, Charlottesville, Virginia

The Jefferson School Oral History Project is conducted by Preservation Piedmont as part of an ongoing program to support preservation of the Jefferson School.

The purpose of the interview is to collect the stories of those affiliated with Jefferson School in order to document and preserve the history of the site for the benefit of current Charlottesville residents and future generations. Material developed from the interview will be shared with the Charlottesville community through publication of a booklet, a video documentary of the interviews, and a conference.

Copies of the transcriptions and other materials derived from these interviews will be donated to the Albemarle County Historical Society, and The Carter G. Woodson Institute for African and African American Studies at the University of Virginia.

It is also hoped that a museum will be established at the Jefferson School where material gathered from this oral history project will provide a permanent exhibit interpreting the history of the Jefferson School and its role in the community.

In support of this program:

I, Nancy Gerecke (name)
of 1895 Pine Cone Circle, Charlottesville, VA (address)

herein relinquish and transfer to Preservation Piedmont for such historical and scholarly purposes as they see fit the following rights:

1) All legal title and literary property rights which I have or may be deemed to have in said work. 2) All my rights, title, and interest in copyright, which I have or may be deemed to have in said work, and more particularly the exclusive rights of reproduction, distribution, and preparation of derivative works, public performance, and display.

Interviewee: Nancy Gerecke Date: May 21, 2001
Interviewer: [Signature] Date: May 21, 2001
Interview with
William Gilmore

Interviewer: Lynn Carter
Date: August 31, 2002
Location: Omni Hotel
Charlottesville, Virginia

Transcribed: April 20, 2003
By: Liz Sargent

Proofed: June 2004
By: Jacky Taylor

This is an interview with someone who went to the Jefferson School; it is part of the Jefferson School Oral History Project. This is an interview with Mr. William Gilmore who lives in Pennsylvania who was a former student of the Jefferson School.

LC: Could you please state your full name, your current address, and your connection with the Jefferson School.

WG: My name is William Gilmore. I reside at 308 West Richardson Avenue, Langhorne, Pennsylvania. I finished Jefferson High School in 1948.

LC: Tell us the date and place where you were born.

WG: I was born in Nelson County. 1929.

LC: How many were in your family?

WG: Six.

LC: Six children?

WG: Yes. Six. Two of us went to Jefferson High School. I came here in my sophomore year, in high school, to Jefferson for two years.

LC: And you graduated from there.

WG: I graduated in 1949.

LC: How did you get to school in the morning? You were living in Charlottesville.

WG: Yes, I lived in Charlottesville and I walked to school.
LC: Can you describe the route you took and what you did along the way?

WG: I worked at the Albemarle Hotel around the corner from the school.

LC: Oh, I remember that!

WG: You remember that hotel?

LC: I remember going down there.

WG: I worked at the Albemarle Hotel the whole time I was in high school. If I wasn’t working there, I was working in the University of Virginia cafeteria. So I used to go to work early in the morning, and went to school from there.

LC: Aren’t you impressed with what Washington Park has become...

WG: I’m impressed with a lot of things. In fact, I’m impressed with the way the developers have transformed the area over the years. There have been tremendous changes; I just finished walking and driving around some of the areas where I used to ride my bike. Tremendous changes have been made.

LC: It has grown so much since you left...

WG: All of the district’s businesses that were definitely run by blacks have disappeared. But I can truly say that it seems as though there’s an improvement in the area itself as a whole. The old places and old stomping holes that we used to go in. It makes me... it’s much different. Much different.

LC: I was going to ask you if you went alone or with a group to school?

WG: I basically went by myself.

LC: You went by yourself because you were riding your bike...

WG: Most of the time. I was coming from work.

LC: None of you had cars at that time? Not many children had cars anyway!

WG: A friend of mine used his grandfather’s car. Sometimes he knew about it, and sometimes he didn’t.

LC: But you didn’t use it to go back and forth to school?

WG: No. By no means. I don’t think anyone had a car.

LC: What was the neighborhood like around the school?
WG: It was basically residential. A barbershop was across the street.

LC: Someone else mentioned that today.

WG: Oh. We used to go to Scott Dean's and get fruit.

LC: Was he next door to the barbershop?

WG: He was about the third or fourth door from the barbershop.

LC: There's still a barbershop...

WG: Yes.

LC: Oh, yeah.

WG: Bell Funeral Home is on the right hand side. Dean's was right there near the garage. We used to go down there and have hamburgers and hot dogs.

LC: What kinds of things did you all do during breaks in school. Oh, but you were working.

WG: Yes, I was working. However, I would come down on this very hill (Vinegar Hill) and play pool.

LC: Yes, Vinegar Hill.

WG: This was called Vinegar Hill. And the pool hall was here. And we used to play pool. We weren't supposed to! But we would shoot pool.

LC: Just as well. Was there a big parking lot around the school just as they have now? You know they used to have the City Market in that parking lot.

WG: No, not to my knowledge. There wasn't a parking lot there.

LC: Yes, I didn't remember that either. Because I've been here since 1942.

WG: We were surrounded by funeral homes.

LC: What was there another funeral home other than the one down there?

WG: There used to be... If I remember correctly it was across from Bell, Pryor Funeral Home.

LC: Oh. Well I don't know that one. It must have been before my time. Can you describe one of your classrooms or one of your homerooms? Do you remember what they were like?

WG: They were a basic type room. Basic seating.
LC: Did you have more than one class in a room? Or were you just...?

WG: Most of the time, if I can remember right. I think we had classes that had study periods. That class would go in and another would come out. A revolving type thing. I’m not sure if there was more than one, I don’t think there was more than one class at a time. I guess we would only have one class in it at a time. We would go in and out and go back to a homeroom, and then have a study period, like at 1:00 or 12:00 or whatever time. Then we would go. We didn’t have that much time to ourselves. We used to go from one class to another, and when you were done you went home.

LC: What was your favorite class.

WG: Well my major in college was biological sciences so I liked sciences, I liked chemistry along with English. And economics.

LC: Did you have enough equipment for a chemistry class?

WG: No, not enough. We had some Bunsen burners, test tubes. Along with the necessary testing equipment.

LC: Gosh. Have you seen the rooms that they go into now? They could be used professionally they have so much stuff. What was it like in the halls during the changeover? Was it noisy then?

WG: It was not.

LC: Very quiet. You must have had a good principal.

WG: Our principal didn’t care for the noise stuff. When you were in the hall you had a pass. You had to go up to the Principal’s office to get a pass, or somebody had to give you a pass; if they caught you in the hall you’d be in trouble.

LC: Did you have a homeroom?

WG: Yes.

LC: And did you have lockers for your books and personal belongings?

WG: No.

LC: So you just left them in your homeroom when you traveled around?

WG: No, you traveled with them.

LC: Ah. Where was the library?
The library was on the second floor. That was Mrs. Faulkner's, Mrs. Faulkner had the library, she was the librarian.

Do you feel they had a fair amount of books?

No.

Was it just a classroom that they converted to a library?

It was a small classroom where they had a place for borrowing the books and those for reference in the school.

Where did you have lunch? Did you carry it?

No, I ate at work, I used to eat at the hotel.

Of course, if you were working there...

I was one of the privileged few.

Yeah, you were lucky!

I always ate at the hotel.

Did they give you good food?

Whatever was on the menu.

Good, good. Did other people have to pay for their lunch? Or did they get it for free?

No I am sure that they paid for their lunch.

How about recess? Did they have recess? Probably not as part of high school.

You know, I don't remember whether we had recess or not. I think we had a physical education class with Mrs. Pleasant and Coach Smith.

It might have been gym class.

Sometimes.

Did you play any special sport?

No, I worked.

Well, you didn't have time!
LC: How did you get those jobs when you were so young?

WG: I acquired the jobs through friendly contacts.

LC: You weren’t very old to be living by yourself.

WG: No, I wasn’t. But I left home when I was 14. I got jobs. After I left Nelson County High School, I came down to Charlottesville and then I decided to go to school.

LC: You really must have been determined! You sure had a lot of things to overcome.

WG: I worked all the way through school, all the way through college.

LC: Where did you go to college?

WG: I went to the Agricultural and Technical College of Greensboro, North Carolina. During the sit-ins.

LC: During the sit-ins, oh boy! I remember those only too well. They had most courses there I guess.

WG: All the basic courses.

LC: College preparatory as well, that’s good?

WG: That’s one thing I can definitely say about Jefferson. They turned out some good students. There’s no question about that.

LC: So, Burley wasn’t an improvement then on that. Wasn’t an improvement in that way? They had more equipment I would imagine.

WG: Yes, the school was much better equipped. But other than that. I am not sure but I think a lot of the instructors basically transferred to Burley High.

LC: Yeah, well they probably did.

WG: My brother and my younger sister went to Burley.

LC: I remember when that was built. What was your favorite subject?

WG: As I said, I had some chemistry and also economics and some psych. That was my major.

LC: Did they ever teach any black history?
WG: Oh, yes. Black history was taught every day.

LC: Good! Do you remember Mr. Reaves?

WG: Yes!

LC: What was his first name? Was he Booker T. Reaves?

WG: Yes.

LC: That’s what I thought. I had just written that down because his wife would be a good contact if they are going to go on with this, because Mrs. Reaves was in the Girl Scouts with me.

WG: Was she really?

LC: That’s how I knew her.

WG: Hmm! I understand he died.

LC: Yeah, he died, but she’s still here. Did girls have any different classes from the boys?

WG: Yes, they had home economics. They took typing. A lot of guys took typing. I was in law enforcement and I... oftentimes I wished I had taken typing.

LC: I’ll tell you, all my children learned typing. It has been such a big help since we’ve gone into computers too.

WG: Sure. I don’t think anybody told you you couldn’t take it. At that time, it was not a fad for men to take typing or to take home economics or cooking classes or something like that. You got labeled.

LC: What happened if someone failed a class?

WG: What happened if someone failed a class? You had to take it over again.

LC: You had to take it over again?

WG: There was no question about that.

LC: They didn’t have summer school, though, did they?

WG: No.

LC: No, I didn’t think so. Did you know anyone who dropped out of school?
WG: No.

LC: Did you get report cards that were sent home? To your parents?

WG: Yes.

LC: But if you weren't living with your parents, who got yours.

WG: I was the sole keeper of my own report cards.

LC: Was there an honor roll or honor society at the school when you were there?

WG: Yes, there was.

LC: Who were some of the students who attended Jefferson School that you believe have been particularly successful in life?


LC: Oh, I know, I remember him well.

WG: There were quite a few people!

LC: And you!

WG: I didn't do too badly.

LC: No, you didn't! What do you remember most about your teachers, and did you have a favorite teacher?

WG: Quite frankly, I didn't have a favorite teacher. I liked them all. I think the librarian Mrs. Faulkner was one that I kind of looked up to because she gave me a lot of information that got me in college. But all the teachers at Jefferson were personable. They were willing to help you in the class or worked out of class. If they saw you on the street. Mrs. McDowell Douglas was a good example.

LC: That's what teachers should be I feel.

WG: They didn't just teach you and go home. They taught you every day.

LC: Now, Tell me again the name of the college that you went to?

WG: Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina.

LC: North Carolina. Whereabouts in North Carolina?
WG: Greensboro.

LC: Greensboro. That's right. What was your graduation ceremony like at Jefferson? Do you remember that?

WG: Well...

LC: Did they give out a lot of awards?

WG: It was basically... I suppose it was sort of... Those people who played basketball got special awards, and we had a valedictorian and they gave speeches at graduation. The Principal always gave out the diplomas. Someone was always roasted.

LC: At the graduation ceremony itself?

WG: It was a fun time.

LC: Did any of your classmates go back to teach at Jefferson School that you know of?

WG: Not to my knowledge.

LC: And this question. How did the curriculum and your school experiences prepare you for life beyond school?

WG: It helped me in many ways. One very specific way was to believe in myself. I think my instructors at Jefferson High School were the leading cause of that. They would always say, "There's nothing you can't do if you put your mind to it." I think that kind of gives you, at least it gave me, inspiration to do things that I probably would never have done. Because I was taught that not only in school, but at home, that if you want something you can get it. You pay the cost for getting it, whatever it is. And also it helped me to respect people. I'm almost appalled at what I see today, but we were taught both at school and at home that you respect people. You don't have to agree with them. But at least you respect them. If you did something or said something that was disrespectful to a senior person, you had a problem.

LC: A lot of people make me very conscious of my age because of the way they act. And then there are other people who are just so nice to you. Always carrying stuff for me and everything.

WG: It's amazing.

LC: Did you feel that you could talk to your teachers about teenage problems?

WG: Yes! Yes, I could have talked to them, but you know in the years that I was coming up, the teenage years, I can't basically say that I had teenage problems. I didn't know what a teenage problem was.
LC: Well you were working! You know that’s pretty important.

WG: I ran around a lot, but the problems weren’t something that I could pick out and say were problems. We really didn’t... well it was altogether different. There were certain things that you knew you weren’t going to do. Certain things that you did. That didn’t present all that many problems. Number 1, we had a certain time to be home. Even when I was working I had a certain time to go home. My mother and father always said “You be home at a certain time.” And heaven help you if you weren’t.

LC: But when you first came here and weren’t living with them, who were you living with?

WG: I lived with a family—Mr. and Mrs. Mauphen—who were my parents away from home.

LC: How old were your teachers.

WG: Most of my teachers were young.

LC: Were they mostly men or women?

WG: Most were women. There were may-be five or six men. And they were on the coaching staff.

LC: And did they teach too? They taught a class as well?

WG: Yes, physical education.

LC: What happened when you were sick? Was there a school nurse?

WG: No.

LC: So, what if you got sick?

WG: You went to see your doctor, whoever that was. You went home and your mother took you to the doctor.

LC: But they didn’t do anything at school about it.

WG: They would give you some aspirin or something. I don’t remember ever having a school nurse. Not paid by the school system.

LC: What types of extracurricular activities or programs were offered at Jefferson? Were there sports?

WG: We had all the sports, there was a band, there was a Glee Club, I was in that, there was also a course in drama, and we put on operettas.
LC: Do you remember any of them?

WG: The Belle of Barcelona.

LC: Oh, my gosh.

WG: I used to belong to the Glee Club. I also belonged to the Drama Class. So, that's the only one that comes to mind right now. There were several plays that we did. We used to do them all the time. We used to have I guess you would call it activity night. We used to put on shows. It was a very active school.

LC: Did parents help out in the school?

WG: Parents, oh, yes. Parents were always involved in the activities.

LC: What did they do?

WG: Well, they had what you would call booster clubs.

LC: Oh, yeah. I didn’t realize that they had started then.

WG: I don’t know what you would have called the booster clubs at that time. But they were similar to booster clubs. And they were always involved in the sports and activities... the basketball games, the football games.

LC: The people you lived with, then, supported this kind of thing?

WG: Yes.

LC: How did you find these people to live with?

WG: I have been lucky all my life with that.

LC: You were lucky.

WG: I have been a lucky person all my life. Most of the people in Charlottesville back at that time were of that type. They saw you trying to help yourself they would help you any way they could.

LC: They would help you... Good.

WG: They were always trying to help younger people. And younger people coming up at that time were much more acceptable.

LC: You were lucky to have somebody like that.
WG: If they didn’t attend to it, and they knew your parents, you’d wish they had because they would tell them.

LC: I don’t know how the teachers do it these days, with the discipline problems that they have.

WG: The teachers would write notes to your parents, and we took the notes home.

LC: And you gave the note to your parents.

WG: You better! [they laugh]

LC: How did Jefferson School serve the local African-American community beyond education? Before and after integration?

WG: Well, I wasn’t involved with that, I was out by that time. I’m sure they did at some point. But, I was living in Princeton by that time, in 1954

LC: Yeah, I was trying to think when the schools were closed. I think that must have been around 1957.

WG: Around 1956 or ’57 somewhere around that time. I was in Princeton at the time. I read a lot about it but how to tell you specifically how Jefferson worked into that problem, I wouldn’t want to guess.

LC: And you have already said that there were school activities held at the school after hours. Your club and things like that...

WG: Oh, yeah. A lot of things were going on after school. There was always something going on.

LC: Did they have student social clubs? Or like, you know, not really sorority or fraternity but...

WG: No, we had a lot of social clubs but I don’t think they were connected as a fraternity.

LC: Uh, huh. Who were your friends?

WG: [laughs] I had a bunch of friends.

LC: Mostly from the school? Or from where you worked?

WG: Well, they were from all around. I had some friends from school. The largest amount, I guess the biggest portion of my friends were the ones I worked with who also went to school.

LC: Ah, yes. How many of you were working at the Albemarle Hotel?
WG: About ten or twelve.

LC: Really?

WG: Oh, yes. Most other kids that I knew worked while they went to school. Cubbie Anderson worked, Baker worked downtown. Most of them are deceased. Bill Chapman who used to play football, there were a lot of guys working and going to school.

LC: How did you make it through college?

WG: I worked my way through college.

LC: Did you have some fellowships or scholarships?

WG: When I came out of the service I had the GI Bill. I went on that for a while. But I had, as I say I was very lucky. I used to work for Mr. Cooley, Mr. J. Cooley who ran the Albemarle Hotel. And that's how I got to Greensboro. He had a friend of his that ran this restaurant in Greensboro. So he asked me if I wanted to go to school. And I said I would love to go to school. He said “Well you can go to school.” I said “I don't have the money to go to school.” He said, “Well...we'll see what we can do about that.” So he called up Mr. Bliss and told him to give me a job. So I went down there and worked my way through college.

LC: Now Mr. Cooley was white, right?

WG: Oh, yeah.

LC: So he appreciated what you did.

WG: Oh, sure.

LC: Or he would never have helped you.

WG: No. He used to give me clothes and all kinds of stuff.

LC: He had the University restaurant too didn't he?

WG: Cafeteria.

LC: Cafeteria, I mean. We used to go there.

WG: I worked in there too.

LC: You did?
WG: Yeah. He also had the old Thomas Jefferson. Where the Fair Oak Institution was.

LC: You worked there, too?

WG: I used to be...

LC: I remember that.

WG: TJU.

LC: Yes!, yes. Did you all interact with other city schools?

WG: So far as football was concerned. Maggie Walker down in Richmond, Armstrong in Lynchburg.

LC: But not right in our own city because there was not another black school.

WG: There was no other black school. We were the only black school that was in the area. And we used to play them all here to play football. We had the best football team around.

LC: Good! Did you play?

WG: No.

LC: But you cheered them on.

WG: I used to help them though. I helped them a lot. I used to go down there and holler.

LC: Did you ever take field trips? Do you remember that?

WG: No.

LC: What do you think was the impact of having a segregated education? On students and teachers both?

WG: I am not sure that I... thought that was an appreciable amount of difference in the educational structure, when we were separate. Let me see if I can try and explain what I mean. I think that the instructors that we had were astute enough to teach on the same basic level that they would have had they been integrated. But I think the thing that was different was the patience and caring that the teachers had in the back schools that is not present in the integrated schools at this moment. Because they were more understanding of what was needed in teaching black education if there is such a thing. Because they knew where you were coming from and what you’d been through, what you had done. That is not to say by any means that integration is not just as good, just that it was more fine tuned when you had separate schools. Separate but equal, no. They were separate. But you got more hands-
on education than you had in the integrated schools. Now in the integrated schools, the best part about integrated... they have better equipment.

LC: Did you and your family ever discuss this at home? About integration and segregation?

WG: Sure. Sure. I think just about every black family in the world has talked about it, either in the negative way and a positive way. Many of us unfortunately didn’t know enough about it to really understand what it was all about, because we looked at from the standpoint of what it has not done. As opposed to what it could do. But, sure, there was a lot of discussion in my family.

LC: Did you know at the time that Prince Georges county closed their schools for five years.

WG: Yes. We had some programs down there, which were also educational programs for the economically disadvantaged. So I understand it was a real mess. During this period when Prince Georges closed their schools, I was working for Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), a program founded by Dr. Leon Sullivan.

LC: I think that is one of the worst things that has ever happened in our state.

WG: The state was set back in more ways than education.

LC: Did the teachers, did your own teachers ever discuss segregation?

WG: Not to any great degree.

LC: Because they were busy teaching.

WG: They didn’t have time to worry about segregation.

LC: How do you think that the closing of Jefferson School as a segregated educational institution affected the whole Charlottesville African-American community?

WG: Much of their heritage has been lost.

LC: Which church did you go to?

WG: Ebenezer Baptist Church.

LC: And that of course was near Mr. Bell’s Funeral Home, too.

WG: Sure. Right across the street.

LC: A group of Charlottesville residents are currently working to preserve the school and its educational role in the community. And that’s is why we have this oral history program. What are your thoughts on the future of Jefferson School? Have you heard about the
problems they have had because they don’t want it to be a school for various groups, now in fact they want to break up the Jefferson Preschool and have them go to different places. Have you heard about this?

WG: No.

LC: No. But it has been a preschool. And they are not going to let them do that anymore.

WG: When they had a preschool was it basically black? Not just for the neighborhood?

LC: I think it was for the neighborhood. Well, I guess we’ve finished most of the things we have to say. Have you got anything else you want to tell me? Because I would be glad to listen. Tell me what you do now?

WG: I’m retired. But I worked for the Department of Corrections for about twelve years.

LC: What did you do for them?

WG: I wrote briefs for the judges. I also wrote a lot of socio-economic briefs that helped them determine—the judges and others—whether they should or should not release prisoners.

LC: Did you have any legal training for this?

WG: Yes, I was trained in criminal justice and psychology along with a six week course in criminal personality. I was the Director of the regional office of the Opportunities Industrialization Center.

LC: Yes, I have heard of that. But not for a long time.

WG: They’ve got some operating now. But I worked at the national level. I went overseas. I went to Africa. Now I am retired and I’ve got my golf clubs.

LC: I was going to say, what did you do? You play golf... Have you played golf for a long time?

WG: About twenty years.

LC: You should be pretty good. Are you?

WG: I play in the ‘80s.

LC: [they both laugh] Well, that’s more than a lot of people can do. Well, do you have any other comments you would like to make?

WG: No. It is very heartwarming to me to know that someone wants to take off enough time and energy to try to preserve Jefferson High School. And I think it should be a historical pillar
for this town. And of the all things that we’ve done, the people who are basically pillars of this town would not have been had it not been for a school like Jefferson. Jefferson has put out some people that have contributed a lot not only to Charlottesville but a lot of people around the world. I think that it would be almost chaotic if they were to do away with that kind of history. I also think that Jefferson High School should be somewhere high up on an historical list and made, if not a museum, something in which people can come and see basically what one school, one school for the citizens of Charlottesville, and the only school that I know of when I was here that the Black citizens of this town could attend. And to destroy that I think is absolutely insane.

LC: And taught them the things that they needed to succeed in life, too.

WG: Had it not been there, I know we couldn’t go to Lane.

LC: No.

WG: We only had one school that we could go to. To take that out is almost like saying we are going to wipe out this history.

LC: I think they have thought about it. And that’s the reason why they want to be sure that it functions as a school. Well thank you very much Mr. Gilmore.

WG: I enjoyed it.

LC: So did I!

End of Interview.
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[Signature]

Interviewee Date 8/31/02

[Signature]

Interviewer Date 8/31/02
Interview with
Rudolph Goffney

Interviewer: Chana Ewing
Date: August 31, 2002
Location: Omni Hotel
Charlottesville, Virginia

Transcribed: June 4 and July 2, 2003
By: Liz Sargent

Proofed: June 2004
By: Jacky Taylor

CE: Could you state your full name?
RG: Rudolph E. Goffney

CE: O.K. Where are you originally from, and where do you live now?

CE: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania?
RG: Yes.

CE: O.K. And what street did you live on growing up in Charlottesville?
RG: Eleventh Street.

CE: Eleventh Street?
RG: Yes.

CE: And is that pretty close to Jefferson School?
RG: Well, not considering the area of Charlottesville, it’s not too close. But it’s not, in the broad sphere, too far away. When I consider the schools in Pennsylvania, which is where I spent most of my life, it’s not too far away.
CE: Did you walk to school every day?

RG: Yes.

CE: Did you have sisters and brothers who went to Jefferson?

RG: Yes, I did.

CE: When did they graduate?

RG: I can’t remember each year, but most of them, well all of them, before me except one brother who graduated with me. Most of them prior to my graduation. I graduated in 1941.

CE: And how did you like Jefferson? What are some of your fondest memories?

RG: Well, the camaraderie, the teachers... the teachers were very, very dedicated. The supplies and things were limited due to that time in the history of the United States. And the history of Virginia. And the history of Charlottesville. And the history of and mentality of the people. So all that has changed a good bit. Charlottesville was a very, very pleasant place at that time. It was a close knit community; all the African-Americans knew one another, they all attended the same school, there was only one school in Charlottesville for African-Americans at that time. One high school and one elementary school, and they were on the same lot.

CE: O.K.

RG: So, you moved from one to the other. And then there were several churches. The churches and the schools were basically the center of the community, the heart of the community. That’s where you saw people, that’s where you did things, and you interacted. And, as I said earlier, most people knew everybody else. It was pleasant. Remarkably pleasant for the times and the conditions.

CE: Uh, huh. So, how involved were your parents in the school?

RG: Well, there was no organized PTA at the time that I recall, but the teachers and the parents interacted socially, spiritually if they went to the same church, and civically. They participated in basically the same activities that went on, that pertained to the African-American or black—I’ll probably use black and African-American interchangeably—as I said earlier, it was a really close knit community. People knew each other, families knew each other, and they interacted together very, very well.

CE: O.K.
RG: So what are some of the after-school activities that would go on?

RG: Well, when you say after-school activities, I guess it is depending on what the situation was. Most kids who could get a job after school, got a job. Because it was during the Depression years, the Depression. And funds were limited. At that time, blacks—African Americans—were at the bottom of the economic pole. In a way, if you wanted to move up, you had to get a job, you had to do something to beat the rest. That was necessary. So most of the people who did that, most of the people who aspired to move up, had to do something differently. There were, as far as school activities, there was a band... they had a band program; they had acting, but not acting per se, but plays and that sort of thing you could rehearse for, and athletics, football, baseball, basketball, that sort of thing. And all of these things were after school. Probably after school, they were not done during the school day. If there was a football game or a basketball game or what not, then all of the community would participate in it because that was probably the only thing happening at that particular time. So it was a real wholesome time at that time in history.

CE: So, were you involved in sports, or did you work?

RG: I was involved in athletics, yes.

CE: O.K. Which sport?

RG: I played football and basketball.

CE: Oh, really! Did you continue that after high school?

RG: Well, after high school I worked for a short time, then I went into the military.

CE: O.K.

RG: And I was in the military from 1942 to 1946, the end of the Second World War.

CE: O.K.

RG: Then I went to Bluefield State College in West Virginia.

CE: O.K.

RG: And I was there for two years. And I played football there.

CE: O.K.

RG: And I played football in the military, too.

CE: Oh, you did. O.K.
RG: [laughs]

CE: So, are you still a big football fan and stuff? Right now?

RG: Yeah, well, everybody... you know in Philadelphia we have the Eagles! I have been in Philadelphia much longer than I was in Charlottesville. I've been in Philadelphia for sixty years. I only lived here for seventeen. So it's a big difference. So, yes, I'm interested in athletics. Not to the level that I was, as a younger person. Now it's so commercialized. It's really not the same... as a community project where you know everybody, you know their history, you know the community, you know the athletes... it's very different now than what it was then as far as football or any other sports goes.

CE: Definitely. Did you travel with your high school football team to other...?

RG: Yes, we traveled locally to Lynchburg, Roanoke, etc. because there was only one black high school in each...

CE: In each county?

RG: In each city at that time. Like in Philadelphia there are thirty or forty high schools so that they have in a league there. They didn't have that here. So they had it statewide; we traveled from city to city.

CE: Did you meet a lot of the other students there, and keep in contact with them?

RG: Well, we didn't... we met casually because you went and you came back the same day. You met and interacted, but people changed every year. If it was congenial or nice where you went, it was pleasant.

CE: And when you went to these other parts of the state. Where did you stay? Did you stay...

RG: We didn't stay. That's what I'm saying. We'd travel there and come back the same day. You rarely did an overnight thing. There were no facilities at that particular time unless someone had a boarding house or something. You couldn't stay in any hotels or anything like that. The laws of the state of Virginia wouldn't permit it. I think at that particular time in fact you couldn't even go to the restroom, you couldn't take a drink at the fountain, so it was very, very different then than it is now.

CE: Did you remember some of the classes that you took in high school? What was your favorite class?

RG: I think history was my favorite class. We took the basic English, history, mathematics, and not too many electives like you have today.

CE: So do you remember your history teacher?
RG: Yeah, Mrs. Heiskel. She left, well she was here when I left, but I think she ended up teaching at Virginia State College.

CE: Oh, O.K.

RG: My favorite teacher was my English teacher, Mrs. Sellers, Elnora Brown Sellers.

CE: Uh, huh.

RG: She was a very fine person... all the teachers were very fine people. But I think I felt a better relationship with her than with the other teachers.

CE: All your teachers were black?

RG: Yes.

CE: O.K.

RG: All the teachers, all the students.

CE: O.K.

RG: And it was two different worlds. There was the white world and the black world.

CE: O.K. Did those two worlds ever come into contact with each other? Like did you ever see any of the other students in the other high schools?

RG: One thing you have to realize is the city was fairly well integrated as far as living goes. People lived, white and black lived in the same neighborhood.

CE: Oh, they did! O.K.

RG: Yes. It wasn’t segregated that way, but at that particular time I can recall whites going to Venable or Lane or what have you. We would pass each other. I lived near Venable School. I lived on Eleventh Street, it was on Thirteenth Street. I had to come down to Fourth Street. And some of the white kids who lived there, down this way, had to go back up to Thirteenth Street. So you could see how it worked. You passed each other going to school. Sometimes you got to know each other, you made friends and you made enemies.

CE: O.K.

RG: And that happens today in school regardless of race or what have you... going to the same school... that’s the nature of humans and children. People don’t understand each other, and the situation is fostered by people who do understand.
CE: Do you remember the neighborhood around the school? Which businesses were there etc.?

RG: Yes, the number one thing I remember is that the gas house was right next to the school and the noxious odors and the gasoline, not gas but cooking gas, and that type of thing. There was no EPA or any pollution laws at that time so the fumes were just released into the air and the school was right next to it, or just about.

Right around the school itself there was a dentist—Dr. Jackson—a black dentist, and a funeral home that’s still there, some businesses owned by African Americans. There was a church next to the school. It’s still there, and then where the federal building is, up the street here, was named Vinegar Hill, for what reason I don’t know. But there were a few black businesses there and that was where... every city has a gathering place for their races—ethnic or otherwise—and so that’s where most of the blacks... Vinegar Hill goes from up here, this corner down to Preston Avenue, which is just as this street goes into where the mall is. Going down the street there.

CE: So would the business community open up its doors to the students?

RG: When it was convenient the businesses opened up on a segregated basis. In other words, there were restaurants or eating places where whites ate one place and there was a small segregated place for the blacks.

CE: And what about the black businesses? Did a lot of the black students work at these black businesses at Vinegar Hill?

RG: Well, at that time the black students weren’t working there because most of our people were trying to make a living. Things were a lot different then than they are now. There was no McDonald’s there were none of these places to work, they didn’t exist. This is pre... I kid my nieces and nephews, this is pre-television so you don’t know too many things. This is a different time in the history of the country than you’re experiencing now, which is a phenomenon that has happened since the Second World War. You’ve had the greatest change in the world there’d been for hundreds of years before. So a lot of things exist now that didn’t when I was in school. You were born later in the century, and it must be hard for you to comprehend what the situation was at the time.

CE: You said you went into the military and then you went to college... so what career did you enter into?

RG: I went into construction, building.

CE: How many years did you do that for?

RG: Well, believe it or not I’m still doing it. I own the business, and, since I haven’t retired myself, the young people that I have trained, people who’ve come up under me, I’m letting them run the business, and I’m just overseeing them more or less.
CE: And how do you think your experience at Jefferson prepared you for later life’s experiences with the military and all?

RG: I wouldn’t trade it for anything in the world. My wife, who’s not a Virginian—she’s a native Philadelphian—she taught in the system there for thirty years prior to her retirement, and so I’ve had a lot of experience with the education system in Pennsylvania and I think it’s terrific. But the preparation for life... I would not change it, what I got at Jefferson, for what they get there.

[The first side of the tape ended. It was flipped over, and the interview began again.]

RG: ...For the war we were scattered, we went to different parts of the country so it wasn’t easy to stay in touch, but there were a few that remained in touch, some I’ve come in contact with in later years. Others, a very few, that I remained in contact with from the very beginning are just... I think the last friend of mine that died had been in contact with me from first grade up until the time he died last year. He was buried here in Charlottesville last year, so that’s a long period, a long, long period of time. But, life’s been great.

CE: And, have you, have you all got together for many reunions, or is this your first reunion?

RG: No, they’ve been doing them now for about twenty years. I made some of them and missed some of them. But I try whenever I can to get here. It’s a tremendous thing to come. Sometimes you come and you see a person you haven’t seen for forty years, or fifty years. That’s just tremendous. It’s an experience that you have to have lived long enough to experience. You haven’t lived long enough to miss a person for fifty years! So, that’s a tremendous thing in itself.

CE: I notice from some of the other interviews that people have been talking about the teachers, and how they remember the teachers most of all. Have you heard from any of the teachers, or did you... after you graduated and stuff, did you hear about what they were doing?

RG: Well, some of the teachers, I think I stated earlier that one teacher, one history teacher, went to teach at a college. I think my favorite teacher, my English teacher, she went into New York’s school system, taught in New York City. And some of them I heard, I don’t remember making any direct contact with them, but I followed them by asking “Have you heard from this person or have you seen...” And they would say, “Yes,” so I was more or less advised about what a good many of them were doing.

CE: O.K. Was the school used as a community organizing place too, like community groups would get together at the school and meet?

RG: I can’t answer that directly. Community activity wasn’t... I mean, social activity was one thing. People met in the halls and different places. But if you speak of social life... or are speaking of activism...?
CE: Yeah.

RG: There was not as much activism then as there is now. I mean the desire was there. But there were restraints. You see, there were reprisals. If you acted, if there was something that you didn’t like, that you knew was oppressive, if you addressed it outright, then there were reprisals. From the establishment, I’d say. So it wasn’t too prevalent until after 1954, really. And then you got the Supreme Court ruling. Then people felt that they had some backing as to what they could do. And the things that they could say. Or the rights that they had. Prior to that, you didn’t have that. The courts were not behind you, nothing was behind you. And it was not a good time for activism, or for that type of thing.

CE: How conscious do you think you were, and the other students were, of not having good books? One woman mentioned that she didn’t even realize that there wasn’t really an auditorium, and those sorts of things.

RG: Oh. It was not a matter of good books. We had to buy them. Because when I was in school we had to buy them. The School Board did not provide books for students. And I don’t think it was on a white or black basis. Of course I didn’t have access to the conditions of whites. But we had to buy our books. So if you didn’t have money to buy your books, you didn’t have any books.

CE: Did you share with other students?

RG: Oh, we shared, yes.

CE: O.K.

RG: We shared with other students. What I am saying is that if you had homework or whatever to do, and you needed your books, you had to get together to do it. You didn’t, you weren’t presented with a set of books.

CE: So were there a lot of projects to do together with other students?

RG: A lot of what?

CE: A lot of projects? Did you work a lot with other students?

RG: You just... when you were assigned a project or something to do, you worked together with someone else. If you didn’t have the books that you needed for yourself, then you worked with other kids, that was a lot of fun.

CE: So would you say your school was strict?

RG: It was demanding, because the teachers were trying to prepare...they were telling you what the situation was and preparing you for a better life. So they were demanding. They
asked you to take advantage of what you had. To prepare yourself for the future. If you wanted to aspire for more.

CE: So you don’t remember too many people being class clowns or cutting up or anything?

RG: Um...

CE: No?

RG: I didn’t say that. Because I think that’s natural.

CE: O.K.!

RG: That has nothing to do with the times.

CE: O.K. [they laugh]

RG: You have class clowns now, you had class clowns 100 years ago. So, I can’t say that there’s a difference. I think, and here we’re talking about local schools, and see I’m from an urban school, and I don’t think in the urban schools that people take advantage of everything that’s offered. Some do, but a good many of them don’t. Like I said, I’m from a different time and a different place. It was very, very different for me because I realized that I needed to take advantage of everything that I was getting and I had strict priorities. I didn’t clown around. I guess I was somewhat a clown, but I wasn’t a big enough clown to injure my relationship with my parents to bring a “D” or a “C” home. I was not that kind of clown.

CE: So you did well in school?

RG: I think I did well, but didn’t work hard. I could have, but I think I did well anyway.

CE: O.K. So, what would you like to see done with the school now?

RG: Well, I think it’s the way I see the school. It’s the last monument in the City of Charlottesville that I see to a time as it was, with a segregated African American community. I mean the last physical mark. And so I would like to see it retained and made into a museum or someplace for the storage of knowledge, for the storage of the archives or what not, rather than just made into an amusement park or that type of thing. I would like to see it as a reminder to what was.

CE: One that you would be able to visit? Whenever you felt like it?
RG: Fortunately, to this date, I have the memories in my head. I mean I have many beautiful pictures of Charlottesville in my head. I was looking at some pictures today, and I can remember some of the people, some of the things that I saw in the pictures; I can remember the things, the experiences... And so I would like to see it as a monument to the people who come after me. Because I don’t think... I hope to be around a long time, but I know I won’t be around nearly as long as I would like. And no one else with the experiences will be around. So you’re going to need those things for the people who didn’t see, and you won’t have the people around to tell them what happened. So I would like to see it for that reason, and not just for blacks, African Americans, but for all people, because if all people don’t learn what happened, they’ll never know why or how to prevent it from happening again.

CE: So, when the school closed, do you remember what some of the...? I know you said that you sort of left and you went on to the military, but do think that people were angry at its closing, or don’t you know?

RG: I don’t know! I mean I don’t recall it closing. You see I was in the military at the time, and I didn’t know anybody, or was not in direct contact with anyone who was going there. And it was in the height of the battle for equal rights in education. And different cities in different states were doing different things to get around it, to avoid integration, and the schools were closing and reopening all over the country. So I don’t recall any particular emotion about it or didn’t know anything about it really. I understand that it closed so that they could integrate all the blacks into another segregated school. It didn’t close because of integration. It closed to prevent, it’s my understanding, to prevent integration.

CE: Oh, really! O.K.

RG: Because it closed prior to Brown vs. Board of Education. So it couldn’t have closed for integration. But at that time, what they were trying to do when they built the new school was to perpetuate separate but equal...

CE: O.K. So they were still trying to do separate but equal?

RG: Yes, as I said earlier, I can’t tell you just what I felt back then because I wasn’t there.

CE: You weren’t there?

RG: No.

CE: So, do you have any other comments you would like to make about Jefferson School and your experience there?

RG: Well, I think we’ve covered most of it. I mean, it’s more the memories of the people that I knew, which is a personal experience. The things that happen, you remember them at
different times. I loved it. And I don’t regret a minute that I went to Jefferson, and I would like to see it maintained as an archive, or museum.

CE: Well, thank you, thank you very much.

RG: You’re welcome.

CE: So are you going to stick around for the whole weekend of events?

RG: I’m leaving tomorrow!

CE: You are! So will you be able to go to prayers and the church service in the morning?

RG: Yes.

End of interview.
Rudolph Goffney, August 30, 2003
(above with Braxton Coles)

(photos by Alexandria Searls)
Interview Consent Form
Jefferson School Oral History Project
Preservation Piedmont, Charlottesville, Virginia

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It is also hoped that a museum will be established at the Jefferson School where material gathered from this oral history project will provide a permanent exhibit interpreting the history of the Jefferson School and its role in the community.

In support of this program:

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Interviewee: Rudolph Geffney ... Date: 8/31/02

Interviewer: Chana Ewing ... Date: 8/31/02
Interview with
Lyria Hailstork

Interviewer: Jacky Taylor, Liz Sargent
Date: December 17, 2003
Location: Jefferson-Madison Regional Library, Central Branch
Charlottesville, Virginia

Transcribed: May 4, 2004
By: Liz Sargent
Proofed: May 2004
By: Jacky Taylor

The tape begins with a discussion about the end product of the project—the availability of the transcripts at various publicly accessible repositories around the city, and the need for a consent form.

LH: I really do want my children to see it, or hear about it. [Jefferson School]

JT: I think this is one of the only ways because so much is gone. How can they ever know if so much of it is gone? If this is O.K. with you, just fill out your name and address, and sign it [consent form] there, and I will sign it there. Unfortunately, the batteries in my camera have run out.

LS: I am going to go buy some batteries while you guys get started, and then I’ll come back and take pictures and may-be ask some questions, hopefully not repetitive!

JT: I will try and stick pretty much to what we’ve prepared.

LH: Now this is Charlottesville? [city of address on consent form]

JT: Actually, not for everybody. We had some from out of town when we interviewed during the alumni reunion.

LH: It should have been really nice!

JT: It was wonderful, we had a great time! If it is O.K. with you, we have a set group of questions that we ask people so we can keep things straight. So, if you could please state your full name, your current address, and your connection to the Jefferson School...

LH: I’m Lyria Virginia Brown Hailstork, and I presently live at 101 Blackthorn Lane in Charlottesville. I went to Jefferson School as someone in early elementary. It was the first
school I attended, and I started in first or second grade. I didn’t go to kindergarten because I was already reading when I went to school. And I went to Jefferson School from my earliest years, and graduated from Jefferson School. So my relationship with Jefferson was through all of the grades...

JT: Through high school?

LH: Through high school.

JT: So, what year did you graduate, do you remember?

LH: Yes. I graduated in 1946. And I always remember that because I went straight to college from Jefferson School, and I graduated from college in 1950, which is a feat these days because it usually takes them longer than four years.

JT: That’s right! You did very well. Where did you go to college?

LH: I first went to Virginia State College, it was then, University now. After that I went to a number of different schools. But I did all of my masters’ work at Cornell University. Then I took classes at the University of Virginia, and all over, depending on what was important to me at the time.

JT: Could you tell us the date and place where you were born?

LH: I was born in the house at 230 Fifth Street, in Charlottesville. It was torn down to make room for the Recreation Center that was a part, a later part, of Jefferson School.

JT: I’ve got some maps here, and for some reason I was under the impression that this was your house! [points to the map] Here on Commerce Street?

LH: My house is...was 230 Fifth Street.

JT: So that is here! I think it’s on this map. I thought I saw it.

LH: Now, I know they had some maps in the... at the meeting. Community meeting. And I knew exactly that whole area.

JT: The map seems to be cut off. The map doesn’t seem to go to 250.

LH: 230.

JT: 230, I’m sorry.

LH: And you know, I know every single house on that street. And, where everybody lived.
JT: How wonderful. Well, that’s one of our questions. First of all, how many brothers and sisters do you have?

LH: There were four of us. I have a brother, who is still living, and I had another younger brother, who is deceased, and then I have a sister, had a sister, who was killed in an automobile accident in 1967. All of these dates are so imbedded in my mind. And then my mother adopted one other sister, so there were actually five of us. So of that group now there are three of us who remain.

JT: And you say all four of you were born in the same house?

LH: All four of the children, yes, were born in that house. And, as I read sociological studies and things like that, the sociologists are saying that children who are born and live in a house in which their parents live do better in school. That’s a study I read not too long ago. Because they don’t worry about moving, you know, as in apartments and things. I’m sure that’s just a plus. They feel stable.

JT: So your mother had lived in the house beforehand. For forty years?

LH: For forty…with her mother! I lived with an extended family. We were an intact family. Mother and father, grandmother and step-grandfather. So, it was a whole big family. It was a huge house actually.

JT: Can you describe the house?

LH: It was the last house on the street. 230. And it had a long front porch. Which I have on my house now, out of that memory. As you went in the house, to the left was the living room, and then stairs upstairs. Further down the hall was a bedroom, and right in the middle of the hall… it was an old house I guess, was the bathroom. And, you had to go through the bathroom to go to other rooms in the house. An old, oddly-made house.

JT: Was it brick?

LH: No. It was wood frame. And white, actually. My mother had awnings put on it. Actually, we had a sidewalk. Not all the houses on that street had a sidewalk. But we did. So you could walk down the street, and then when you got almost to the end, there was this house with the sidewalk.

JT: It was just in front of your house, but no one else’s?

LH: Yes. Because the city, at that time you had to…it was a cooperative venture. The homeowner paid a part, and then the city paid a part. I am not sure that’s done anymore. I don’t know. But it did help keep people from tracking mud, and all of that in. And we had a stone wall around the house, and hedges behind the stone wall. And the house, I would assume my grandmother bought it, with her husband. He died. My grandmother’s husband died just before my mother was born.
JT: You don’t remember the date? Can you tell me their names?

LH: Oh, yes. My grandfather was Nelson Bennett Tyler. And I digress because my son has just had a little girl, and he has named her Tyler. And, my mother’s name was Catherine Tyler Brown. She married Roosevelt Brown. And my step-grandfather was Henry Jackson. My grandmother did not remarry for about twelve years after her husband passed.

JT: What was her name before she married?

LH: Virginia Shelton Jackson. She was from Fluvanna County. There were a lot of Sheltons. And there still are a lot of Sheltons in Fluvanna County, and Louisa. Louisa and Fluvanna Counties.

JT: Do you know, did she move into Charlottesville with her first husband, into that house?

LH: They moved in, but it was, as I understand, a very small house. After he died, my grandmother worked for a while in Charlottesville while her daughter was young.

JT: Did she have other children at that point?

LH: No. She never had any more children. My mother was an only child. Which is why she said she wanted lots of children. Because it’s lonely she said. But there were five of us. But, no, my grandmother, as soon as she got someone to take care of my mother, she went away to work. She was a baker by trade, and she lived in White Sulphur Springs at one of the resorts there until she just about paid for the house. And then she came back to Charlottesville. Her mother took care of my mother, until, you know, during the time she was away.

JT: Did they live in the house then?

LH: Yes.

JT: Gosh, that’s amazing.

LH: And so that’s why the house is so old. Now in my memory, it sounds just beautiful and really nice, but I can imagine it was somewhat decrepit. At any rate, when my grandmother returned to Charlottesville full time to live, she began a boarding house, for which she used her training as a baker, because there were no black restaurants or eateries of any sort. And she generally catered to people—men particularly—who came in town to work and who needed somewhere to have meals. What I remember is making lunches. It seemed like we got up at 5:00 in the morning and made ten or fifteen lunches, because that was the way my parents earned their living... my grandmother earned her living. Eventually my mother took over the business, but not for a long time. My mother did days’ work and all sorts of things. Worked in the laundry, and all sorts of... my mother went to high school, but didn’t have a lot of formal training. Except that she met a man,
my father, who was interested in education, didn’t have any himself, but they both were passionate about education, which is why we all went to college. Now, my brother plays, did play, professional football. And he still works for the New York Giants.

JT: Wow! Was he at Jefferson School?

LH: Yes. Oh, yes.

JT: And he played for Jefferson?

LH: And he played for Jefferson School. And he and I talk, and we often say, “You know, you got to professional football, and Jefferson School didn’t even have a stadium. They didn’t even have anything! And they had the games in Washington Park.”

JT: Was it a Mr. Johnson who was the coach?

LH: No, Coach Smith. I don’t know a Johnson as a coach. That was either after my time, or before. If it was before my time, that’s a long time ago because I graduated in the ’40s.

JT: What was your brother’s name?

LH: Roosevelt Brown. And they called him ‘Rosie.’ My mother called him ‘Sonny.’ Of course when you are in New York, they change names and switch names, and so they called him ‘Rosie.’ But we still call him ‘Sonny.’ At any rate, he went to Morgan State College.

LS: Is that in West Virginia?

LH: No, in Baltimore. And my sister, when she was killed in the automobile accident, she had just finished her freshman year at Morgan. So, they both went to Morgan. My younger brother went to, the one who has died now, he went straight into the Navy. And I said we all went to college, but I don’t count the Navy, he went to the Navy. And, the daughter that my mother adopted went into a nursing program at the University. And she’s just retired.

JT: Did she work at the University after she graduated?

LH: Yes. Well, for a while. Yes, in the practical nursing program, which by that time was paired with Burley School.

JT: Really?

LH: Now, you have to fast forward because at some point I ended up teaching at Burley as well. I taught at Burley twelve years, then when I married, and I am kind of skipping here, when I married I went to Ithaca, which is where Cornell is, which is how I got there sort of in the first place. But, I was there a long time. From ’67 to ’94. And when I came
back to live here after I retired, everyone said “My mother says you taught her at Burley,” or “You taught my aunt, or you taught…” And I said, “I taught everybody!” And you know, actually, because of segregation, at one point, I did. Students, girls, who took Home Economics—because that’s what I taught—would have had either me or my co-teacher, one of us. I either taught every single girl—African-American girl—or my co-teacher did.

JT: Who was your co-teacher?

LH: Well, there were two. One was Henrietta Spots. She was there when I left.

JT: What years were you teaching there?

LH: I started in 1950… I was there twelve years, and I left in 1967, so if you subtract 12 from 1967, what is that? Is that 1955? Somewhere in there.

JT: Let’s see, when did desegregation occur in Charlottesville…?

LH: I was at Burley.

JT: And you just continued on at Burley? But some teachers went …?

LH: No. No. When desegregation occurred at Burley, I mean in the county… I had already made my plans to leave. So it had to be in the ‘60s, because my children... my husband and I were planning to make sure that they were educated in New York State. That was just our life plan. And so, we carried that out. My daughter started in second grade. We missed it just by a year. She went to Southfield School in Ithaca in 1967. In the fall of ‘67, second grade. And my son went to nursery school. So, he continued on through. And both of them went to college in New York State.

JT: Was your husband from New York State?

LH: Sort of. He had lived most of the time in New York State. But he lived in… I want to say Baltimore, for a very short time, but then he moved to, and his parents were from Elmira and Baltimore.

JT: Can I go back really briefly? You said your mother had gone to high school.

LH: Yes.

JT: Which high school did she go to?

LH: Jefferson! There were no other… that was it. The thing that distressed me most I think was the fact that the elementary school was torn down so fast.

JT: Can you tell us a little but about that? We are interested in how…?
LH: I just thought it was such a wonderful place. And I enjoyed elementary school more than high school. High school, didn’t mean a lot to me. I don’t know. But there was a lot of music and a lot of things going on. And I was talking to someone who went to Jefferson School Elementary School, and they said, you remember when Mrs. Taylor used to sit on the piano stool... on the bench. And she just played, it seemed to me, the most gorgeous music. And we sang and sang and sang. And, when we had assemblies...I didn’t think about it until I was much, much older, when we had assemblies, we came down and stood on the stairs. There was no... you didn’t have an auditorium, and we didn’t sit in the... you know, you didn’t sit on the stairs even. You stood on the stairs. And we never even thought anything about it. When that’s all you know, that’s all you know. You don’t know anything different.

JT: Can you describe the interior of the school, then? There were two floors?

LH: There were two floors at Jefferson. Because I remember a basement. And then you walked in, and there was the basement down, and then you go up to the first floor, and there was a second floor at the Jefferson Elementary School. And that’s the only reason, and I knew there was a second floor because there is a huge fire escape on the outside. And the whole thing was concrete. The whole playground, everything. Because we used to skate on it, on roller-skates. We used to roller skate there. Also, on the other side of the... they were building then, putting in the new Jefferson High School, wherever that is. Jefferson High School.

LS: [Shows her on the map]

LH: Yes. On this side, right down in here, was the library. And that’s where I used to... if I’m looking...no, I’m looking wrong... let’s see... because this is Commerce. So, I was looking, this is probably the library, and this is probably the entry. Going in here. And, somewhere here would have been that fire escape, you know the stairs on the side. If I am looking... Oh! That’s the high school, this is the graded school. Yes.

JT: So this is the...

LH: Whatever it is, the stairs...would have been...I call it the fire escape, was on that side.

JT: You know, when you went to school here, were these buildings still there?

LH: Yes! You say A.M.E. I thought it was a...Now, I’m calling it a holy and sanctified church. That’s what we used to call it.

JT: There was another one over here.

LH: Now, we’re talking Commerce Street.

LS: That church changed its name, too, to Wesley.
JT: Yes, because this is 1920. [shows Mrs. Hailstork a 1920 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of the neighborhood]

LH: Ah, that’s a little longer ago than I thought!

JT: But just to give you an idea, this was Wesley in 1920, then it became the A.M.E., and this is 1929.

LH: You see that’s before me. Commerce Street is the street that I liked a lot. Commerce Street was the street you could cut through and go to Main Street. And, down at Main Street you’d hit Preston coming...this has to be Preston. If this isn’t Preston, then...Fourth Street. This is looking wrong. See you’d cut through Commerce. Now, you’d go down Commerce to Preston. And you could cut through. And get to Preston quickly. And Preston ran across just like that. Now I see Williams Street. That was just a little nothing street there.

JT: This is dated 1891.

LH: Now on Commerce when you got to Preston Avenue there were some stores like Piggly Wiggly. There used to be a Piggly Wiggly there and a...

JT: Did the children from the school go to the Piggly Wiggly at lunchtime or after school?

LH: No. No. Well, actually it was too far. Now we went to Main Street, over from Main Street, let’s see... This is Commerce which goes all the way up to Bell’s Funeral Home. Bell’s faces Sixth Street, and then Main Street is there. And that’s where we went if we wanted to cut through to go to a store, to go to Main Street. And I’ll never forget the truant officer caught me one day.

JT: Was this at lunchtime, or after school?

LH: Well, just before lunch. People would go and bring things back to you. But I wanted to go and get my own things. So, I sneaked out from school one day and went to Main Street. Went up and bought whatever it was I wanted, and this lady said... well, I shouldn’t have even talked to her because I knew not to talk to strangers, but she said, “Come here little girl.” And of course, I didn’t want her to think I was afraid or anything. She wanted to know why I was not in school. And I was not in school because I was in there buying donuts or something from the store!

JT: Which store was that?

LH: There was a store called... it was a gas station called Scott Dean’s and it sold all sorts of little umm...donuts and potato chips and things like that that just seemed so forbidden.

JT: Was it run by African Americans?
LH: No. And later he actually around in front of the schools... but by the time I got back to school they had called the Principal. I was in so much trouble. First thing, I had never done anything like that before... I had given the lady a fake name. [laughter] That made it even worse... and I don’t even know how they traced... how they found out who it was. So I just never did that again.

LS: Who was your principal at that time?

LH: Owen J. Duncan. I’m sure you’ve heard his name before. He was always the Principal when I was there... Actually, continuity is something that’s important, you know, when kids are growing up... in families and in society.. He was the principal the whole time that I was in school, and when I left, I think he left maybe a year or two after that.

JT: Was he a popular principal? Did the students like him?

LH: I have no idea. School for me was like a blur or something. Even when I was there....

JT: So you don’t remember having any contact with the Principal?

LH: Any contact? No. I never got in trouble, never did anything... I did a lot of reading and things like that... and, as someone was telling me the other day, “You know your parents were so strict.” They were, they said what the law was in the house and that’s what it was. You didn’t do anything that ran afoul of my mother or father or anybody, you did what you were supposed to do and that’s it.

JT: So when you were growing up in that house you said initially your mother continued the boarding house that her mother had started. When did she stop doing that?

LH: She continued for many, many years, I always remembered my mother... she talked to us a lot and said what our goals were. She said in order for us to do thus and so, she would have to work and we would have to help run the boarding house. She told that to my brother, me, all of us. And you know, it was just a given, there was no argument about it... that was just what we were going to do. You know, I think now children would argue with their parents about things like that and maybe you couldn’t even find them to do so. But that was the obligation... and when I thought about how much money it took to run our family and how much money my mother needed to send us to college... she just never even thought anything about it but when the bills came due, we had the money. And I think that’s a thing that was so important for us. Even as I grew up, when it was time for us to do something, we had the time to do it, and we knew what our goals were, and we did it. And that was it. But we worked, and then she went out and got another job. We ran the boarding house, the children did, and there was no fooling around, we didn’t fool around ...

JT: How many borders did you have at one time?
LH: Oh it varied, from whoever was coming into town to work. They would point our house out. “This is Mrs. Jackson and she will have dinner, three meals…” Well, she never had the middle meal, she did lunches… We would do, ten, five, whatever, and my grandmother set a price and whatever the price was, that’s what people paid. And you know, they almost had to pay it because they either paid it or didn’t eat.

JT: Is that because, as you said earlier, there wasn’t anywhere else…?

LH: Oh there wasn’t anywhere… see African Americans didn’t have a café or restaurant or anywhere to eat. And she would maybe have two sittings. She had a big table, she had a dining room. Our house was huge, it had dining room in it. I’m trying to think, maybe five, seven, eight people at one time and probably two sittings, and then the family ate after that. So that was actually three meals, three sittings.

JT: One of the things we learned about Jefferson was that in the early days people came from the county. A few people had come in from the county to go to school and one gentleman that I interviewed the first year he walked to school every day and then he boarded in a house, I think it was on Main Street, though.

LH: You know I’ll bet he thought it was Main Street… we were one block...

JT: He said there was a Jewish family that lived next door?

LH: Oh, no.

JT: That wasn’t it then, no?

LH: No. We all walked everywhere back then. I’m thinking now, for the football games we walked to those from Fifth Street to Preston Avenue where the football field is. I was in the band so that never bothered me...

JT: So you walked down…?

LH: If I was going somewhere… to the football… Do you mean to the school or to the..?

JT: I meant to the football same.

LH: Well, I didn’t go to the football game because I played in the band, but when we had basketball practice, when they had basketball games, that was at the park too, and so we walked down. I walked up Fifth to Brown which is around the corner and down. My aunt lived on the corner. She owned the house on the corner that is now a part of the city yard. Her house was the lone holdout for many years. They didn’t take it until after she died.

JT: What was her name?
LH: Scott, Rebecca Scott. For a long time, her house was the only one there right there on that corner. And we walked down past her house, through the city yard, around Eighth Street, and we were almost there at the end, and then you’d hit Preston Avenue. And from there, you’d just walk up to Washington Park.

JT: Did those streets have sidewalks, or did you walk in the...?

LH: Some had sidewalks and some didn’t.

JT: What about trees?

LH: Yes, yes, it was fine... My brother, the younger one Frank, went to Washington Park playground, and he walked all the way up there every day.

JT: Really?

LH: He walked there to have day care.

JT: By himself?

LH: Oh yes. That’s because my mother wanted to be sure someone was caring for him.

JT: So there was somebody at Washington Park who...?

LH: Oh, yes. There was always someone there. But he walked up, went swimming, stayed there all day, and then walked back home. I don’t know about any other children, but I know for our family, you just did not get into trouble. You did what you were supposed to do, where and when you were supposed to do it.

LS: I think my children need to come to these interviews and hear these stories.

JT: You know one thing we’ve heard a lot about is how first of all some of the teachers lived in the neighborhood around the school. And so the children felt a lot of pressure from the parents of their friends and the teachers who always knew what they were doing where they were...?

LH: They did. Two teachers lived near us. Rebecca McGinness. I am sure you have her name. You see, you’d walk up Fifth Street and turn right to Brown, and she lived right in that corner on Brown. And she taught me. And then, Miss Wyatt—Miss Wyatt and Miss Coles. Two teachers, they were sisters and they lived in the same house. They lived right around the corner from us. And then across the street Mrs. Nannie Cox Jackson, the Jacksons. So we were all in a little area where everybody knew everybody and you just didn’t do anything untoward, that is, not in our circle. You just did not, because you knew you had to go home, and my mother didn’t play around.

JT: Did you go to church in the neighborhood?
LH: Ebenezer. And let’s see now. Ebenezer is Sixth... it’s not named, it’s just fronting on Sixth Street. I am looking here, I don’t see it. Now this has to be on it. [looks at map]

JT: It does depend on where the map was cut off.

LH: There it is, Ebenezer. Sixth Street. And the funeral home is somewhere over here. Oh, across the street, yes. O.K. Now, Ebenezer is here, Sixth Street.

JT: That’s still there, I believe, isn’t it?

LH: Oh, God yes. That’s the church to which I go, and I would like to think it’s been renovated, but I doubt it. [laughs]

JT: There was another church right here.

LH: Now, this is different. This is... You know there’s another church... Where’s Jefferson School on here? O.K. There’s a school there. There’s a school right down from Jefferson, and it’s there now, I mean a church. Jefferson School is on the corner... on the corner of Fifth and Commerce. So, now, let’s see, Commerce and... and this is the church. That’s still there. It was a funeral home, now it’s a church and its there now.

JT: It’s a frame church, isn’t it? Frame building? No? Isn’t it a wood building?

LH: Stucco, wood, ugly.

LS: It’s got a mixture of materials.

LH: Yeah. It’s ugly. You know it needs paint, and whatever they wrote on it, it’s not printed neatly. But it’s there.

JT: Do you know people who went to that church?

LH: No, I don’t. I just never knew anybody who went there. Because it wasn’t an active church. Now there’s another one. Yes. Automobile supply place... This looks like its not to scale. That one isn’t. I’m not sure who did it.

JT: It’s from 1929. It’s an insurance map.

LH: Oh, I see. But now, yes, this makes sense. This is the school, and here is the church.

JT: So what do you remember about activities at the school? After hours? Were there community activities?

LH: Yes. There was a play. The teachers... there was a drama group that the teachers were in, and they presented plays. May-be one a semester, so two a year or so.

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LS: Together with the students?

LH: No. By themselves. Teachers... and I’m not going to say it was all teachers, but a drama group of adults and teachers.

JT: Did you know any parents who were in it?

LH: Several, but not well. My parents wouldn’t have been in it, because they were always busy. Always busy doing something.

JT: What did your father do?

LH: My father worked on the railroad. He worked for Southern Railroad. For a long time. He came in to town on Fridays and he left on Sundays, and came back during the week. And then towards the end, the railroad system was changing. They were laying people off, and you’d have to have what he used to call pulls. I guess it was unionized or something. They would send him a sheet of all of these people who had less experience than he, and he could, you know, take their jobs... and they would... it was wherever he wanted to be until he got to the point that it took him farther and farther away from home. And of course he had to ride the train to get back, but he just didn’t want to be away from home quite that much. And so eventually he went to work, I should say back to work. He went to work for the city. Water department.

JT: How old were you when he did that, do you remember?

LH: Oh, I was a young adult by then. I was in college when he was still on the railroad. So he worked on the railroad for many, many years. A long time.

JT: Had he been a student at Jefferson School as well?

LH: Oh, no. He was from South Carolina. This man who he knew who worked on the railroad with him said, “You know I know this really nice girl in Charlottesville. And I want you to come and meet her.” Really nice, is the way they used to say it. So he met my mother and they courted for some time, and then they married. And my father continued to work on the railroad. One of my favorite things that we used to do was he would get passes and take us to South Carolina twice a year—Christmas and during the summer—to meet his family. He was really big about knowing who was kin to whom. Actually, we just went down this last summer. My children and I. And went to... just to, you know, go down and meet our relatives. We’ve done that for years. But he was from South Carolina, Anderson.

JT: Why did they not... when he met your mother, why didn’t they go back to South Carolina?

LH: Because my grandmother had a house, and she had everything all set. Plus, he had a job that was not dependent on location. He could ride the train to wherever. And, actually,
riding to Charlottesville was easier... I used to know all the stops on the Southern railroad that he worked on. And he enjoyed it.

LS: So, was he on the Southern Crescent line? That goes down south.

LH: My father worked on the railroad. He was, what do you call it? The man that fixes the rails.

JT: Do you call it an engineer?

LH: No, it was nothing glamorous. It was hard labor. He was a laborer on the railroad.

LS: How did he get to Charlottesville? There's only one line that goes...

LH: Now! But...

LS: Back then there were more?

LH: Oh you know the railroads were a very popular form of transportation at that time. Especially during the war and all of that. Oh my goodness, yes.

JT: Can you tell us a little bit about the war and how it might have affected your family?

LH: My mother worked in a war plant then. Someone told her that they were making lots of money in the war plants. So she went to Elkton, Maryland. And she got a job working... making ammunition. And, my grandmother took care of us, grandmother and grandfather. Things didn't really change for us because my grandmother was home and she just did whatever it was that she usually did, except that she told us that if we did not behave, our mother would have to come home from Elkton, Maryland, and take care of us. And we did not want that! [laughs] Because our mother would send us... each time, each of us would have a box of... dresses, shoes, and delights and things that we liked. And, um, so that was just very enjoyable. Now, my father didn't like it. He had to go all the way to Washington, or wherever it was... he would have to come to Charlottesville, and bring her whatever it was that she wanted, and then he would go to Elkton. And, he thought that was just too much. Eventually, my mother came to stay home because he just thought she should be home. But, by then the war was almost over.

LS: How long did she do that?

LH: Maybe a couple of years. Two or three years.

JT: And who did she stay with? Did she board somewhere?

LH: There was a dormitory. And I think they had lots of women. You know they... that was a huge effort and a lot of people. They stayed in a dormitory because I remember when she
came, she had all of these things that people had signed, you know autograph books. I think it was a life that she liked. You know, she was kind of free, independent, and my grandmother took care of us. I didn't think that was...I really didn't think it was all that bad, except the war was, you know, there was...there were so many things, everything was rationed, and you couldn't have shoes. Maybe one pair of shoes. As I think about it. There was... somebody would come by and say, “You can get chocolate bars today, and I don't like them but I bought them anyway.” You know, there was always something. And then people would buy that, and then they would sell it for I don't know how much. But things were rationed. A lot of things were rationed. In the boardinghouse, they would have to give my grandmother, I remember that, their ration coupons. Because she had to have enough to... it wasn't a whole lot that she bought, but the people would have to, if they had ration coupons... I don't know how accurate my memory is on that. But that happened such a long time ago.

JT: Were there other women on your street who went to work where your mother had gone, to the factory?

LH: Not that I know of. I don't remember.

JT: Do you remember friends that you might have had on the street, and where they lived?

LH: The people who were friendly to my mother on the street were the people that we went to church with. And there were other people who lived in the houses...You know as I think about it, many of the people who lived on the street with us all went to church, all went to the same church. We all did. There was just that little strip. 221, 223, and a house in the back, 227, 229. All of those houses... all of us went to the same church. And then across the street, we were 230. And then next to us the people did not go to the same church that we went to. They went to Zion Union, which is down there. Across Fourth. We were talking about Fourth Street the other day. We were talking about that church that just set right up on the street. And, I guess it was urban renewal that was coming along, and I think the city planners thought that urban renewal was improving sections. Some of the houses were decrepit. I am not sure that things were improved. I don't know. I know that on Main Street a lot of people used to stand out, usually men, would stand out on Main Street. They just kind of congregated. And now I think people who would have congregated on Main Street now go to McDonald's or somewhere like that. I don't know where they go. I have no idea. But I am not sure it's for the better.

LS: It seems like a whole community just...

LH: It's a whole culture that... because I knew every single person. I knew everybody who lived all around in that little circle. And it wasn't a little circle. Well, I knew everybody who went to Jefferson. And, after that you don't know people. Well, that's what happens when you don't know people, and people who are new who come in, and you don't know whether they are people who should be here or not, or whether they shouldn't be. But, that's just because the community changes.
JT: Did a lot of people move away when they started clearing away the houses? Did they move out of Charlottesville, do you know?

LH: I don't know. I actually don't. My plans were so different because they were dependent on my husband and what we were doing with our children, and they were at the age that we needed to move, I had bought a house here in Charlottesville on Ridge Street, but that wasn't working because we needed to have an intact family. And, so, those plans got changed because of our family situation. But, now whether other people moved or not, I don't know. But I do know this, that when I was teaching at Burley School, a lot of people from Prince Edward County and, what's the county? They hired those teachers, when if someone left or they were moving out, then the County just took them in. A lot of the teachers from Prince... because if you remember Prince Edward County just shut down. And so a lot of the teachers there came to Albemarle County.

JT: Did the students come here too?

LH: I don't know about the students. I don't remember any students coming. You see Prince Edward County shut down before we began to integrate here in Charlottesville. It may have been what, two years or so?

JT: How did you feel about the new white high school?

LH: I'll tell you this. The county began integrated teachers meetings early, I mean before integration came. We began to meet with the white teachers, with the staff, but I was still teaching at Burley, and one of the things that my other co-teachers and I found out was that while we were limited in books and materials, at Albemarle High School they had multiple copies of things we could only get one copy of or two. And I knew that was wrong. And, I would have wanted to integrate just to have the same materials.

JT: You don't think there was any way that could have changed without integrating?

LH: I don't think it would have. I just don't think it would have. But now we did meet, I want to say about two years, with all of the teachers. Now that's the county, because you see Jackson P. Burley was governed more by the county than the city. I'm not sure about the city involvement in Burley. Actually, my contract said it was the joint committee for control of Jackson P. Burley High School. Instead of saying Albemarle County School, it was the joint committee for control. I had worked in the county at one point. I've been all over I guess. I taught three years in Albemarle County at Esmont School. And then I went to Fluvanna County and taught one year. My degree was in vocational home economics. And, after I taught in Fluvanna County, I transferred to Charlottesville. And that's how I happened to come to Burley. From the moment I graduated from Virginia State, I began taking courses. So, it meant that I had additional courses in elementary education, and secondary, so it made it easier for me to find a job.

JT: Did your siblings stay in Charlottesville? Or did they move away?
LH: My brother was hired right out of college to play football.

JT: The New York Giants?

LH: Oh, yes. The New York Giants. My sister went to college for one year, and then she was killed that summer. And then my other sister, when she finished, she went to be a nurse at the University of Virginia. And she was there for, I want to say three or four years, I can’t remember how long she was there. She had some marital problems, and so, she left her husband. And stayed away for five years.

JT: Out of Charlottesville?

LH: Out of Charlottesville. She went right to work in Englewood, New Jersey, in the hospital there. And she visited my brother who was in New York at that time.

JT: This was your adopted sister?

LH: Yes.

JT: Can you tell me a little bit about that? Someone else we interviewed, their family also adopted a child, which I thought was interesting.

LH: She was just a child whose mother was not kind to her.

JT: Really. From Charlottesville?

LH: Oh, yes. From Charlottesville. And her mother said she didn’t want to take care of her. My mother said, “I’ll take care of her.” You know, an extended family at that time, well, there were already four of us, and I don’t think it made much difference at that point.

JT: How old was she when she became part of your family?

LH: Three.

JT: And how old were you?

LH: Well, let’s see. I was probably seven or eight.

JT: Did you like having a little sister?

LH: Oh, yes. Oh!, we all did. It just didn’t make any difference to us I don’t think.

JT: Sounds like you had a lovely big...

LH: We just had a big family and of course if the word came down from my grandmother and grandfather and mother and father, that was it. We just never thought anything about it. I
mean you know, we didn’t argue. I told my children may-be I didn’t question going to college and what I should do, but perhaps may-be I should have, I don’t know. And, sometimes you talk too much about things. I don’t know. That’s an unanswered question I think. But, ah, and yet our parents talked to us and talked, I guess indoctrinated us.

JT: About the importance of education?

LH: About the importance of education, and what you are going to do.

JT: You obviously have very strong connections to the house that you grew up in and the neighborhood that you lived in, how do you feel about what should happen to the Jefferson School building? I think you’ve been to all the meetings…

LH: I have gone to the meetings, and I wrote, I applied to serve on the committee (Task Force), and was not chosen. Um, but one of the reasons that I gave in my application was that, one of the things that I would not like for the community to lose is the sense of history and culture that was very rich. And I see it going, and I used to, and I may have used the analogy of that old Jefferson Elementary School. Nobody even knows anything about it. I would like to see a museum or a library or something that protects the heritage and the culture that was here. In some way. And I know there are people with all kinds of books and memorabilia, and everything all around that could be used or found so that people could find that. I think its because my son is an historian that I feel very close to material, and having some idea from the past. And I am so sad when I see so many things just get washed away.

JT: Thank you so much for your time!

End of interview.
Lyria Hailstork, December 17, 2003

(photos by Liz Sargent)
Interview Consent Form
Jefferson School Oral History Project
Preservation Piedmont, Charlottesville, Virginia

The Jefferson School Oral History Project is conducted by Preservation Piedmont as part of an ongoing program to support preservation of the Jefferson School.

The purpose of the interview is to collect the stories of those affiliated with Jefferson School in order to document and preserve the history of the site for the benefit of current Charlottesville residents and future generations. Material developed from the interview will be shared with the Charlottesville community through publication of a booklet, a video documentary of the interviews, and a conference.

Copies of the transcriptions and other materials derived from these interviews will be donated to the Albemarle County Historical Society, and The Carter G. Woodson Institute for African and African American Studies at the University of Virginia.

It is also hoped that a museum will be established at the Jefferson School where material gathered from this oral history project will provide a permanent exhibit interpreting the history of the Jefferson School and its role in the community.

In support of this program:

Lydia Brown Stahlknecht
101 Blackthorn Lane, Charlottesville, VA

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Interviewee: Lydia Brown Stahlknecht
Date: 12/17/03

Interviewer: Jacqueline Taylor
Date: 12/17/03
Interview with Mary Inge

Interviewer: Helena Devereaux
Date: August 31, 2002
Location: Omni Hotel
Charlottesville, Virginia

Transcribed: May 2004
By: Liz Sargent

HD: O.K. Now, why don’t we start? The first thing is we want to get your name, and your address, your current address.

MI: Mary Inge, 36 Sargent Road, Freehold, New Jersey.

HD: O.K. And what is your connection with Jefferson School? Or what was your connection?

MI: I attended Jefferson School.

HD: Attended?

MI: From the third grade up.

HD: Really?

MI: Yes, graduated.

HD: Alright. Can you tell us the date and the place that you were born?

MI: I was born at home, you know, we didn’t get into the hospitals.

HD: Uh, huh.

MI: And I was born at home; Dr. Johnson delivered me.

HD: Um, hmm. And the date?

MI: April 21, ’34.

HD: And that was here in Charlottesville?

MI: In Charlottesville, uh, huh.
HD: How many were in your family when you were growing up?

MI: Actually, there were six of us, but my father had two families because his first wife died, and left two children, and he married my mother, who gave him four children, so that made six altogether.

HD: So he had six children?

MI: Six, but we were not all in the same house at the same time, you understand?

HD: I see.

MI: The other two were much older being from a previous marriage. And they sometimes stayed with their grandparents, grandmother.

HD: If we think about the four of you, how many brothers and how many sisters were there?

MI: Three brothers and me.

HD: And you, O.K. Now did they go to Jefferson School? Your brothers?

MI: Yes.

HD: And then what about the two from your father’s first marriage?

MI: Yes.

HD: They also went to Jefferson School?

MI: Yes. That was the school!

HD: Yes, yes.

MI: We didn’t have any others.

HD: The next question says what years and grades did you attend at Jefferson?

MI: All of them. From third grade because the thing was my half-sister’s aunt had a little kindergarten class that she taught. Kindergarten, first, and second grade. In her home. It was called Mrs. Liza’s School. Me being a relative, I went there for first and second grades, and I only went to public school at third grade, because I was born in April, because of my age. So my mother put me there at Mrs. Liza’s School, and I went there for a couple of years before I went to public school.

HD: How many children were there at Mrs. Liza’s School?
MI: Oh, I'd say six or eight may-be. Looking way back, looking way back! And I imagine we were all on different levels, you know? But I remember that.

HD: Um, hmm.

MI: It was like in her dining room or something, and she was disabled. She walked, but she had to lift up her feet to walk. Mrs. Eudora Liza was her name. And she was my sister’s aunt.

HD: She was a relative?

MI: Yes. See my sister was my half sister by marriage, you understand?

HD: I understand. Yes. The next question they have here asks how did you get to school in the morning? They are thinking about Jefferson School, so when you started at Jefferson, how did you get to school?

MI: Probably when I was very young, may-be my mother or father walked with me, or took me in a car. But as I got old enough to walk it, I walked it, except on bad days or if my dad was coming out in that direction, he would give me a ride down. But most often you walked, and all over town, you walked.

HD: Yes!

MI: If you wanted to go downtown to shop, you walked.

HD: Yup. So there was no school bus? And you walked?

MI: No school bus, and public transportation. You know we had to sit on the back, and if you did it was money, too.

HD: Yes. When you walked, did you walk by yourself, or did you go with a group of other kids?

MI: Probably walked with a group, a few people. I remember in my later years, there was a girl that lived on Charlton Avenue who would come around and we would walk down together.

HD: And where did you live at that time?

MI: Over on Rose Hill Drive.

HD: Over on Rose Hill Drive, uh, huh. So that’s not a very long distance.

MI: No, not very long, but we passed Lane to get to Jefferson!
HD: Yes! [laughs]

MI: Oddly enough.

HD: Yes. And then did you meet other children along the way?

MI: Sometimes, sometimes. Yeah.

HD: Did you or any of your friends drive a car to school?

MI: No!

HD: [laughs]

MI: Absolutely not. Absolutely not!

HD: Did you know any high school children who had a car?

MI: Not that I knew of.

HD: Can you describe the neighborhood around the school? Were there businesses nearby, businesses like a soda shop that had business for the high school kids?

MI: Well, we weren’t really allowed to go over there, I don’t think. I’ve forgotten the name of the store, but there was one right across the street. We used to sneak over, or leave, you know, after school and go over and get something. But, they had a cafeteria in the school, and that’s where you ate your lunch. Or you brought your own, but they served lunches there. But we didn’t have...we were not allowed to go out and have lunch and come back. That was not the thing, no!

HD: And did you stop at any businesses on your way home from school to get a snack?

MI: This is what I’m trying to tell you, across the street from the school was a little shop. I can’t think of the name of the store now, but I am sure the rest of these folks could tell you the name of it.

HD: Was that on Commerce Street, you know when you come out the front door of Lane School there on...

MI: Not Lane!

HD: I don’t mean Lane, I mean Jefferson. Then you’re on Commerce. And the business you’re talking about, was that also on Commerce Street?

MI: Is that Commerce? I thought that was Fourth!
HD: Well Fourth Street is, um, goes down...

MI: Yeah, O.K., I know where you mean. This one going… Dr. Jackson’s, the dentist’s office was there, along there. And I forget what it was called, but there was one little shop there, where we used to go, and sometimes we would go out and go up on Main Street and there was a drug store there that would serve you, you know? Not serve you, but you could buy and walk away with it, you could not stay with it.

HD: So, sometimes you would make a stop?

MI: Right, right. And then of course Inge’s Store was right up at the corner. His grandfather’s store was right up at the corner, but I didn’t go up there very often, because once school was over, I headed down Fourth Street and went home.

HD: Going the other way?

MI: Um, hmm. And then my mother had a little store, up on Rose Hill. Corner of Rose Hill and Dale Street. Should be Dale Avenue.

HD: What kind?

MI: A little grocery store.

HD: A grocery store, ah.

MI: It was a little, a smaller complex, a little store here, and my father had what was his real estate office, you know, next to it. It wasn’t anything elaborate, it was just there.

HD: O.K.! What was the school property like when you were there? Was there a big parking lot beside the school the way there is now?

MI: No. Not that I can recall. I don’t recall one because I never had a car to drive. You know what I am trying to say? And if I got dropped off, I just got dropped off in front of the school, and that’s it, you know.

HD: Yes. Was there a field there, or was there grass?

MI: It was a play yard, a playground, you know. I remember playing gym there, if you want to call it gym, you know? Mrs. Pleasants was our gym teacher, and we would play baseball or basketball, whatever. Not basketball, but baseball, and football, or touch, whatever we played outside, kickball. It was… I don’t think it was grass.

HD: But it was a dirt, a level dirt playground area?

MI: Um, hmm.
HD: Can you describe one of your classrooms, or one of your homerooms at Jefferson?

MI: Small. Windows. Nothing. I don't remember having lockers or anything like that in there. Not in the room. I think we had lockers somewhere, because I remember I had a locker with a friend. And we were sharing like one key or something, and she said, "I don't have it, I lost my key." And I said "Well I'm going to be there," and that was the day I ended up with a toothache and wasn't there. And she couldn't get in the locker... So we did have some kind of locker. Don't remember exactly. It was a long time ago.

HD: Yeah. Sure. Now, you say that you remember... when you started Jefferson School, did you start in the old Jefferson School?

MI: Yes. Where they didn't have an auditorium, and we stood for the programs.

HD: And I've heard that sometimes you'd stand on the steps outside.

MI: Yes. And inside when they had programs. It was in this configuration, and you just... in your class with your teacher, you just stood there. There were no seats that I recall. We stood up for the morning exercises, or whatever.

HD: How long?

MI: I don't know. You know. Time?

HD: I know. Our memories of time are probably not very reliable.

MI: When you are young like that, you can stand forever. You know? Not like now. After a half-hour or so, you're like... this is hurting.

HD: Yes. When did you change from the old Jefferson School, going over to the present building. That we call Jefferson High School?

MI: I think it was fifth grade.

HD: Um, hmm.

MI: Because I remember being with Miss Peachy Johnson. I think it was fifth. I think, I'm not sure.

HD: And then you were in that larger building from fifth grade up through graduating at the end of eleventh grade.

MI: Right, exactly.

HD: What do remember about the classrooms there at Jefferson, at the building we call Jefferson High School?
MI: Now that’s where we had the lockers! I hope you didn’t think I was talking about, I hope I wasn’t supposed to be talking about the other school! In high school, I don’t remember too much about the rooms. They weren’t… nothing stood out great about them. Good, outstanding. Like now you have nice desks and things like that. I do remember them having inkwells and old desks, and some of my friends when I had hair, they’d stuff it down in those inkwells, where there used to be inkwells. And some of the desks were attached, and bolted down as I recall.

HD: What about the auditorium area?

MI: Very much like it is today.

HD: Is it? Was it?

MI: Yes.

HD: Uh, huh.

MI: Yes. And the seats were not…they were moveable, you know. I can’t think of the, they were not stationary, you could move them around.

HD: So they had folding, folding…

MI: Chairs or whatever. And you moved them around, and on Friday afternoon after the game, they had a little dance and they would move them back. And you were dancing on the floor. And then when they had programs, you would put all the seats back out there, and I was in the band and we would play on that stage. And it seems like it was huge back then. And now it looks like you could take three giant steps and walk across it. You know, its dwarfed it with age.

HD: Yes! The room they call the auditorium now must have been a multi-purpose room back then? At that time?

MI: Yes. Yes it was.

HD: Can you describe your favorite or most vivid memory of being in one of the classrooms?

MI: No, not really. I think, we had a…we didn’t have a really nice science room, all the real good stuff in it, you know? All the microscopes and stuff like that. But I do remember Mr. Paige teaching science, and I remember that classroom—it was on the lower level—it was, it was… I don’t remember too much about it except that it was on the lower level. The windows were out on the… when you walked in they were on the far end. That’s about as much as I can remember.

HD: Uh, huh. Did you change rooms for every subject?
MI: Yes, I think so. Not every, but I think so. We changed a lot. We went from... I think you had a homeroom, and then you went to your classes.

HD: What was it like in the halls during...?

MI: Wasn’t bad because we didn’t have that many people. You know it wasn’t like now! When you go to a school and you see all these hundreds and hundreds of people moving about. You know, so it wasn’t really very difficult to move from one place to another, I didn’t think.

HD: Was it noisy?

MI: I don’t recall it being noisy, but I’m sure we did our share! Of talking and whatever, because it was a very warm setting, you know, we kind of, home, family like.

HD: Did you know everybody in the school?

MI: Oh, absolutely! Just about. We were all there together. It wasn’t like we had two or three different high schools, or different schools around.

HD: Where was the library?

MI: Where was it? It was on the second floor as I recall, and down the hall from the auditorium. I can’t remember her name, she was the librarian. She went to Hampton also.

HD: Was the same person there for quite a while?

MI: Oh, yes. Of course she was there for a very long time. I think she was there when I went there, and she was there when I left, and for many years after.

HD: You mentioned a few minutes ago that there was a cafeteria at the high school. And here there are a couple of questions. Did you bring lunch to school with you, or did you eat lunch that was served in the cafeteria.

MI: I usually ate lunch that was served.

HD: Did you have to pay for lunch?

MI: Absolutely. It wasn’t very much, but you had to pay. And for the meal that they were serving for that day, you had to go down in the morning and say that you were going to buy it, you know, put in an order.

HD: Where was recess held? And who monitored recess?

MI: I don’t recall having, being monitored as such, you know! We were outside on that, in that same area outside where I guess the parking lot is now. And we just sort of sat
around, and we didn’t have any equipment there at the time, to play or do anything with. We sort of just went out there after we’d eat for a few minutes when the weather was good.

HD: And then you just, you made up your own activities, your own games?

MI: Yeah, probably, yes. I don’t remember doing much more than sitting around talking to my friends.

HD: A lot of talking, yeah. What courses were offered?

MI: Well, we had about average courses I think. Math, science, English. They didn’t call it social studies... they may have called it social studies, I’m not sure. I don’t remember. Health and gym. Let me think what else, health, gym, math, music, that’s about it. They had band after hours, after school hours. They never had band during the day I don’t think. I don’t recall having band during the day.

HD: Did they have some required classes, and then some electives?

MI: I suppose they did, I suppose we did! But I can’t remember, I don’t remember whether we had you know just the standard fare, or whether could elect to take certain things. I don’t recall.

HD: What was your favorite subject?

MI: Music.

HD: Music?


HD: What did you play?

MI: Flute.

HD: You did!

MI: I played clarinet, and then finally got a flute, and the band director offered it to me to play, "You want to try it?" And I said, "Yeah, I want to try it." So that’s how I got into playing flute. And so when I went to Hampton, I majored in music.

HD: Really?

MI: Yes. Uh, huh.

HD: When they had history classes, was black history included in the history class?
MI: Not really. Not really. Not from the textbook point of view. You know some of the teachers were interested in telling us things about our history, and I remember one lady came and was teaching and was so appalled that we didn't know "Lift Every Voice and Sing." And she was just absolutely appalled! She would say, "How can you not know this? You know, because it is known as the Negro national anthem."

HD: Yes.

MI: Some people still sing it, you know, and it is still know as the Negro national anthem. But um...

HD: And did she teach it to you?

MI: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. And then we had some that would make us learn things that my husband was so surprised at. I knew "Invictus." We learned poems and things, I don't recall being told why you had to know it, it was just something they wanted you to learn, and you learned and you spoke it, and you know, you had to recite it. [laughs]

HD: Yup, a lot of teachers liked to do that as an exercise, as a memory exercise.

MI: Yes.

HD: And as an exercise for pronunciation and things like that. Did girls have any different classes from boys?

MI: I don't recall having any.

HD: How about health?

MI: Health. Yeah, that's what I'm thinking. I don't recall, I don't recall them being separate. I don't recall them being separate...may-be they were.

HD: What happened if someone failed a class?

MI: They repeated it I think.

HD: Was there summer school?

MI: You know, I didn't attend, I don't recall. I'm sure there must have been.

HD: But you didn't have to go?

MI: No, I never went so I don't recall.

HD: Do you know anyone who dropped out of school?
MI: Uh, huh.

HD: Do you remember why they dropped out?

MI: Various reasons.

HD: Probably.

MI: Various reasons, but I don’t remember. Sometimes pregnancy or something like that may-be. Some of them dropped out you know, more near the end of high school. Or they dropped out to go home and work or that kind of thing. Or just working, not finding high school a success. Or they wanted to do something else.

HD: Did you get report cards that were sent home to your parents? Were your report cards sent home to your parents?

MI: No, we took them home, as I recall.

HD: Was there an honor roll?

MI: Yes. You know when we graduated they had the top of the class, valedictorian.

HD: Who were some of the students who went to Jefferson who you think have been particularly successful in their lives?

MI: Oh. Well, you look around this morning, Charlie Rogers is, was, we were all in the band together. He really did very well with his music, and he still does play and sing and participate. You know, use his skills, and it kind of brought tears to my eyes this morning to be able to just get up and sing. Isn’t that nice?

HD: That is nice.

MI: It was so wonderful, it really was. And I guess there are a lot of people who have done very well, and I think basically many of us have done well, but not, you know, any one person stands out that I can recall, when you put me on the spot! But people, a lot of them tend to have done well, you know, have made… have gone to college, and retired from good jobs in business and the educational field.

HD: That speaks well for the school.

MI: Yes. There’s a certain amount of warmth. Love can do a lot of things. We were loved. We were loved. And we didn’t have a whole lot, but the people who worked with us, the teachers and the atmosphere was of love. You grow automatically.

HD: Did you go to another school or college after Jefferson.
MI: Uh, huh. I went to school after Jefferson. Yeah.

HD: You went...

MI: Hampton University.

HD: To Hampton.

MI: Hampton University, uh, huh. They were calling it Hampton Institute when I went. Back in the day.

HD: And what did your friends do after graduating?

MI: Some of them went to work, some of them took beauty culture or something like this, and got into that field. A lot of them went to school. They didn’t all finish, but they went off and got a few years of college education. And some of them, as I said, stayed and worked here in the community. Many of them worked at the University hospital. Up at the University or in the hospital itself. Or in town, or at some of the frat houses where they worked, you know, as cooks or gophers... I don’t know what they called them, you know. Some of them just got married, and their husbands supported them, or whatever. I am talking about ladies now... the girls. The guys had jobs here in town. There weren’t that many, you know.

HD: Now here are a couple of other questions? Did any classmates return to teach at Jefferson School?

MI: Yes. It wasn’t Jefferson then, you know, it was Burley.

HD: Oh, yes.

MI: Yes, I do recall because I had just, my daughter was a baby and I came back to live with my mother and father, because he was in the Army, and I preferred living here than living in New Jersey with his parents. So I moved back here with the baby. And Bessie Henderson was working in the school system here. She went to Virginia State and we were classmates. And Lois Porter, I don’t know her new name, but this was her maiden name. Maiden names I’m giving, Bessie and Lois Porter. And I know those two right off that went to school and came back and taught in the schools here.

HD: And taught at Jefferson, or at Burley? At Burley?

MI: I am sure there are others, but right now those two come right off the top of my head. Now I am not sure whether Charlie Rogers ever taught here in Charlottesville or not. I am not sure of that. But he was in music.

HD: This question sounds like a fairly large-scale question. How did the school curriculum, and your school experiences at Jefferson, prepare you for life after school?
MI: Hmm. We didn’t have as much as may-be we should have had. That is to say, we, you’re saying for when I got out of school?

HD: Yes.

MI: I think I was may-be not as well prepared as may-be coming out of another school, perhaps, you know. But as I said, we were always told that we could do, and shown how we could do, and encouraged to do. So you went off thinking you could do. So, if you think you can, you know, “I think I can,” you know that little story about the little train. [laugh] I think I can?

HD: Yeah.

MI: So that’s the crux of that. But, the curriculum, I think, it wasn’t up to snuff, you know what I mean? But we had the basics. We had algebra, and that kind of thing, but we didn’t have an outstanding curriculum.

HD: But you did have the basics?

MI: Yes we did. We did have the basics. And we had that extra push from the folks who knew we needed it. We had French, and English and stuff like that. And you could opt to take French, but you didn’t have to take French.

HD: Uh, huh.

MI: You had asked about…

HD: Electives?

MI: Electives! Yes. [laughs]

HD: So that was one of them?

MI: Yes. Because you didn’t have to take it.

HD: What do you remember most about the teachers? You’ve mentioned a number of different things about the teachers, you mentioned that they were very supportive and that they gave you this feeling that you could do things. What else do you remember…what do you remember most about the teachers?

MI: Well. What do I remember most about the teachers? They were interested in us. And they wanted…they had been out, and they knew what we needed to know to get out into the world and to do, and they knew that we needed to be prepared and they were trying their best to prepare us to get out and do whatever we wanted or thought we could do. They encouraged us to do that, you know? I remember the band director was always talking about matriculating at this place and that place. And I thought to myself “Yes, right!” As
I look on it now, there is no way in the world that I could have gone to some of the places he talked about, you know, but he gave you the feeling that hey, the sky’s the limit. Just try, may-be you can, may-be you can. Juilliard School of Music for me? Come now. But he spoke about it, you know, he spoke about it. You know what I mean? He spoke about it. And a lot of them came from the historically black schools, like Hampton and Virginia Union and Virginia State. You know. Howard and all of them. We knew we had a nice rich heritage there. Somewhere to go and something to do.

HD: Oh, yes.

MI: That kind of thing.

HD: So you heard about other possibilities?

MI: Oh, yes. We knew we didn’t have to just stay here in Charlottesville and go work for somebody. That there were other things, higher grounds. Other things that could be had. And the salaries for the teachers were so low. You know what I mean? They weren’t living lavishly, but we knew they were moving up. Sadie Gohana came back to teach here too.

HD: Oh?

MI: Yes. I think she was interviewed some years ago. She taught here in the school system here. I am sure there are many, many more, but I just don’t remember them. See, when I graduated from college, I graduated right in front of him. And I was married to him at the time, and I moved to Jersey. That was it. So. Not only have I been gone for the 47 years I’ve been married to him, I was gone for four years for college, you know?

HD: They have some questions about the teachers. Did you have a favorite teacher?

MI: Um, hmm!

HD: Who was that?

MI: I would think it was Mr. Page. He taught band. And he was, you know, he was very aggressive. When we were in the band, he had great ideas about doing things. You see these formations on the fields now, he was doing that back then! That was 50-some years ago! He had us marching in those spirals that came back out, and working at night. He dreamed up the idea of putting a light on the hats, and cutting the stadium lights out, and having the band march in these formations, and it was like breathtaking I’m sure. But I was one little soul walking around, so I could never see it. But I would imagine that it must have been quite a thing for the parents to see—“My child is down there! In that formation! And of course we had the little band parades, and whatever. He really was trying to...he saw ahead of what we were doing. He dreamed.

HD: That must have been exciting.
MI: Yes. He dreamed. And shared the dream with us. Yeah.

HD: Did you feel you could talk to the teachers about teenage questions, teenage issues?

MI: No. I didn’t. I think back then you didn’t talk to your mother about it! It was… everything was hush-hush. We didn’t talk about that.

HD: So you would talk to friends at school.

MI: Yes. The health teacher would tell you a few things, and give you a little booklet on becoming a lady. And they would say, you know, even, you’re too young to know, but back then you would never hear the commercials now for Tampax and sanitary napkins and the like. The closest thing you came to was a Kotex commercial in a, not a commercial but an ad in a magazine. Something like Life magazine. May-be. Or Ladies’ Home Journal or something like that.

HD: Yeah. I do remember that. [laughs]

MI: Back then, oh no, oh no. You would never... That was taboo, you didn’t talk about anything like that.

HD: Were your teachers mostly men or mostly women?

MI: Mostly women as I recall.

HD: Do you remember how old they were approximately?

MI: Some of them were right out of college! Yes. Because Mrs. Bryant, the one that’s here now? Mrs. Florence Bryant? Florence, I think she was Florence… I forget her maiden name, but anyway, when she first came, I am sure she was fresh out of college. Yeah. And there was a Washington, a Mrs. Washington—or Miss Washington that came along with her. I don’t know where they graduated from, but you know some of them were young!

HD: Was there very much turnover among the teachers?

MI: No... I don’t think so. And by the way, yes, we did have other things like typing, see it’s coming back to me now. I remember typing. I was not encouraged to take typing, because they said you may go to college, so you can’t take typing. But that was such a bad thing to do, because once you got into college you needed the typing to type your papers. Wasn’t that ridiculous? They figured, well, you would type, you were going to go downtown and get a job as a clerk or a secretary, or something. Right?

HD: Yes.
MI: And you really needed it when you went to college to do your papers, your term papers and things.

HD: Yeah.

MI: Backwards. That wasn't a smart move.

HD: Was there...the next question asks what happened when you were sick? Was there a school nurse there?

MI: I don't recall a school nurse. You went to the main office and the secretary deemed whether you were going home or not. You know? I think that’s the way it worked. And I remember Zelda Hawkins was her name. And you’d go in there sick, and Zelda would call home and say you were on your way. If you had a phone at home. Otherwise, if you were sick, nobody took you home! I can remember getting sick and having to walk back home. Uh, huh. And if you didn't have anybody home to come get you, you walked it. Can you imagine that? Except, when I guess, if you were just out and couldn’t make it at all...somebody had to wait.

HD: Yeah. I remember things like that. Because it was the same in the school I went to. What kinds of extra curricular activities were offered at Jefferson School? Do you remember any extra curricular activities? You mentioned band...

MI: Band, yeah band. And they had basketball, football for the guys. I’m not sure about baseball or anything like that. But basketball, football, and there was a ladies’ basketball team. Let’s see... I’m trying to think. Extra curricular? I can’t think of anything else. See, I guess because I was involved in the band. Cheerleading. You know that kind of thing. Yeah, they had cheerleaders.

HD: Did you play a sport?

MI: No.

HD: O.K. Were parents involved in any of the extra curricular activities?

MI: Um, hmm. Oh yes! Yes. My mother traveled a lot with the band, because she believed in going. Charlie’s mother—Charlie Rogers—the one that sang this morning. I don’t know if you were there this morning?

HD: I wasn’t.

MI: Charlie’s mother—Mrs. Rogers—traveled a lot with us. Lelia Edlow—Lelia Brown I think she is now—her mother traveled a lot with the band. A parent was involved in whatever activities were going on.

HD: Now, where did the band go? You’re talking about traveling with the band?
MI: Oh, yeah, with the football team. We’d go… they’d play in Danville or something like that. We might go to play. That’s about it. Every spring we went to Virginia State to participate in a band… sort of a playoff… and you had to play certain tunes. You had to have something in this line, you know… like a march, you had to have a march or…I’m trying to think of something… like the William Tell Overture. I remember that because I had that solo! But we would compete with other bands throughout the state at Virginia State. But, this was all black.

HD: How did Jefferson do?

MI: We won a lot!

HD: You did.

MI: Yes, yes we did. We got excellent reviews. At that time. We did very well. I don’t remember if we got anything like trophies, or anything like that. I don’t recall. Isn’t that weird? That part I don’t remember. But I do remember playing. You would get up early in the morning, and take this bus and go.

HD: Well, it sounds like fun!

MI: It was. Oh yes. But I didn’t know any different. You see?

HD: Were there any community functions at the school after hours?

MI: Yes, oh yes.

HD: What kinds of community things?

MI: Mostly like dances for the children, for us. An occasional graduate may come back to sing. I can’t think of the young lady’s name now, she’s older than I am. But, some people would come back, and they would have may-be a concert there or something in the auditorium. But nothing extravagant.

HD: And then everybody from the neighborhood would come? Could come?

MI: Yes.

HD: Were there student social clubs?

MI: Student social clubs? Yes, there was the French Club; if you took French you could join the French Club. They had other clubs, yes. Yes they did. And they had advisers.

HD: So there would be teachers who were teacher advisers?

MI: Yes.
HD: Who were some of your friends? What were the names of some of your friends?

MI: Lillian Murray, Joan Cary, Margaret Smith who’s here now from Denver, Colorado. And I get to see her every other year because of this. Joe Johnson, Tom Inge, Linwood Chisholm, Marjorie Barber. We had the same last name, but we are not related! Polly Collins. Can’t think of any more right now. But I’m thinking as they used to call the roll.

HD: Well that’s quite a few. Did you have friends from other neighborhoods? Besides your neighborhood?

MI: You know, we weren’t a neighborhood. This was it, this was it. The people from Fifth Street went to Jefferson just like I came from Rose Hill and went to Jefferson. So we all met there. That was the deal because we all had to go to that one school. There was no, you know...

HD: Did you have contact with other city schools? Did you and your friends from Jefferson have contact with students from other schools in the city?

MI: In the city? In this city? No! No, not really. Because this was the school. We didn’t have but one school. It wasn’t like we had two high schools in the city of Charlottesville for the blacks. So consequently we may have known students at Maggie Walker High School in Richmond, but we didn’t have another school to know of here, except may-be somebody up in Crozet or somewhere where they had a little school, you know a small school up there or something. But from what I can recall, this was it. May-be some of the country schools out there. I’ve forgotten their names... like the Albemarle Training School?

HD: Oh, yes.

MI: Yes. So may-be somebody might have known them, but that was out in the county. That was a county school. We didn’t have any more in the city.

HD: Did you ever take field trips? You did mention going with the...

MI: Yes, yes, with the band. And I think the chorus took trips. The football team went places, and the basketball team went places. Yeah.

HD: How did you get there when you took field trips?

MI: We had a bus.

HD: You had a bus.

MI: Um, hmm.

HD: Complete with a television on it...?
MI: Oh, absolutely. Oh, absolutely, and a bathroom in the back. Yeah. Oh, yes.

HD: And did you meet kids from other schools when you went on these field trips? Did you have a chance to...?

MI: Yes. We got to meet other people, other children. Yes.

HD: What impact do you feel that the segregated education had on students?

MI: It limited your... we didn’t have, we were not exposed to as much simply because we were like a separate entity. Although we were not exposed to all of it, we had people who had been exposed to some of it, who came as teachers and advisers to us, and were trying to tell us we should go out there. [tape ends]...

[second tape]

MI: ... but encouraged to do more, see and do more.

HD: So, you think that in his high school, in your husband’s high school in New Jersey, he was not encouraged as much as you were here at Jefferson?

MI: I don’t think so, from what he has told me through the years. No, I don’t think so. See, whereas I had all black teachers, and they had been to college, and they had been out in the world, to some extent, more than the students that they had there. So they were telling us to, “Do,” “Go,” you know “Explore. If you can at all go to college, go. This is the way to get out, to get an education. And to get a better job than to do something else like work for somebody in domestic work, or work at the hospital as an orderly, or that kind of thing.” They wanted you to, they encouraged you to, get an education. And as I said, that was our warmth, and caring. You see it downstairs when you go in, everybody says “hello” with warmth. There’s a warmth. I mean when I went to his high school reunion. No, no, not like that.

HD: It wasn’t the same?

MI: No, no. And you have to drag him to his high school reunion. But you never have to drag him here. He loves it here. He comes every time, he comes every time, because he likes it. He has fond memories of Charlottesville. His grandparents, and his uncle, and that store, and coming in the summer. And being here with his cousins.

HD: Oh, that’s interesting! Those are really interesting comments. I’ve lost track here of exactly where we are.

MI: You were asking about the impact of...

HD: Yeah, here we are, oh, O.K. that’s right. O.K. Did you and your family discuss issues like this—segregation, segregated education—did you discuss issues like that at home?
MI: Not really, because it was... just, it was. You know what I am saying, it was. But I do remember my father taking us into the country when they said there were going to be disturbances in town. I remember that as a young girl. And he would pack—it was my mother and me. The boys he would leave in town. But he took me. We were going to the country with my father, to stay there until, you know, late in the evening, and then he'd drive back. Yup.

HD: How did the Second World War affect you and your family?

MI: Well my brother went into the Army. And the sad thing was he had a college education, and he came back and he wanted, you know, to work in his field. He was an accountant. He had done work as an accountant. And, when he came back, there was no such thing for him. He went down to Standard Drugs. I don’t know if Standard Drugs is still in town?

HD: It is, but it’s a CVS.

MI: Yeah, O.K. That’s what I mean. It isn’t there as Standard Drug. It has a new name. And he worked there until, he just, you know, he just wasn’t the same. You know? It was so ridiculous to have a college education and to be working in a Standard Drug.

HD: What was he doing for them?

MI: I am thinking that he was probably a stock boy or something. I am not even thinking that he was a clerk. I don’t even think that he was a clerk! I don’t even think he was a clerk. And it was kind of sad. He figured he could go to the Army and serve this country, and then to come back and not be able to pursue his profession in this town... But that was universal. And I mean it wasn’t that it was just my brother.

HD: And not just this town...

MI: No. No.

HD: The next question says “Did you attend Jefferson during the desegregation/integration period?”

MI: No.

HD: What do you remember from this time? Were you in Charlottesville then?

MI: No. Actually, when that started I think I was working. I was in East Orange. That area. Because I remember coming home one summer the year that, I think, King did that speech? Was it spring or something? It was warm I remember.

HD: It was April, I think.
April? Yes, you’re right! Yes. It was warm weather. Well, it was relatively warm I think. Because I think my husband came... and he went to Washington, but my daughter was a baby, and I stayed home. I stayed home, meaning at my mom’s, and at the store where my mother...

And did your mother talk to you about what was happening at the school, or what was happening here in Charlottesville at the time of the integration of the schools?

No... Not really. No. My friends did. You know, I know, my friend who just left my room (at the reunion) finished at Burley, and that was the new high school. But I don’t know anybody that really went to, I don’t know, did they ever go to Lane? They didn’t integrate Lane did they?

Yes, they did.

They did? I don’t know anybody who went to Lane that I... offhand.

We have a couple of more questions here. Which church did you attend?

Ebenezer Baptist. Reverend McFerrer. He was out of Virginia Union.

And, were you a regular, was your family a regular church-going family?

Yes. Oh, yes. My father was a... I’m not sure if he was a trustee, or something. He stood, he pretty much... we went every Sunday. Yeah. Oh, yeah. We went every Sunday, and he used to give the choir a picnic up in Lewis Mountain Lodge, up in that area, where the Skyline Drive is...

Um, hmm.

Yeah, so he used to work with the church. I was brought up in the church. Sunday School, the whole nine yards. And, if you didn’t go to church, you didn’t do anything else. And the only other thing to do here in Charlottesville was go to the movies on Sundays after church. But you could only go to the movies if you went to church... you went to Sunday School and church.

Um, hmm.

And we were recalling on the bus as they took us around the city today, that we used to go from... Ebenezer is across the street from Bell’s Funeral Home?

We would leave Sunday school, and go over and look at the bodies at Bell’s. And Mr. Bell was so gracious, he knew we were nothing but children coming in there and being
curious. But he would always stand very stately, and let us go through, and whatnot. Can you imagine? Can you imagine? [laughs]

HD: Heavens.

MI: Can you imagine? It sounds crazy, but we did it. And I was reminding one of the ladies on the bus today, of how we used to do that.

HD: Um, hmm. How did the closing of Jefferson School as a segregated school, affect the Charlottesville black community… the African-American community in Charlottesville?

MI: I would think… I was not here, but if I were here, it would be like closing any other historical spot. I mean it is the school. That is it. You know? And that was the last of the predominantly black, all black, schools here in Charlottesville. That’s it. And that’s where we went. Everybody, you know. And, I think it should be around. It shouldn’t be… it’s like saying you want to get rid of… It’s one of a kind.

HD: Yeah. The last question, I think this is the last, yes it is the last question [laugh], the last question says…

MI: I am sure you are going to edit all the little extras out of here!

HD: We’ll just type up… we’ll just type it up. But, you probably know that there is a group of people here in Charlottesville who are working to preserve the school—Jefferson School—and to preserve an educational role for the school, and that’s one of the reasons we are working on the oral history, this oral history project. What are your thoughts about the future of the building? What does it mean to you?

MI: It’s important, because I attended school there. You know? A vested interest, you know? That is my high school. That is my school, you know, even now when I am asked to be on boards, and to apply for things, they want to know “What did you do, where did you come from, give me your background.” Well, what do I say? I attended Jefferson School in Charlottesville, Virginia. I’m a graduate of Jefferson High School, and to think it is no more, you know, not even a building left there! I think it would be kind of sad. Very sad, you know. I live in Freehold now. And there’s the Court Street School where the blacks went to school there. You would think in New Jersey that they weren’t segregated, but they did have an all black school there. And they are working to keep that alive, too.

HD: Are they?

MI: Yes, they are. And I think we should keep Jefferson alive. I think it’s very important. Just like we go up and see where Thomas Jefferson lived, we go see the rotunda, we should go over and see Jefferson High School—Jefferson School. Yes.

HD: Well, how do you think it could be used in the future?
MI: Well, now. It could be a community center, perhaps. With some of the rooms being used as offices perhaps to help other people, or help people in the community may-be, or to offer, I don't know classes to people who are illiterate. I don't know! But to be used. It could be used for something. It could house... I don't have anything in particular in mind, but to keep it open it has to be used to live. You know what I mean? You can't close it up and expect it to survive. Not in the sense of living, you know, but to keep a house closed down, it just tends to go to waste. You know that? May-be use it for young ladies who want to go back to school after they have had children. You know, or have some little nursery in there for them to bring their babies while they finish school, or that kind of... I don't know what they have here in town anymore because I don't live here.

HD: Um, hmm.

MI: But, have some good things to help the community, particularly the black community, since it was an all black school. But I'm not saying there should just be blacks there. I think it should be there so people can go and see it anyway. Just see it. Here it stands, you know. Just a little bit of... and may-be some of the old books and old desks and things, may-be they could have like a museum in some of it, and may-be... I don't know. I think there are a lot of things you could do in the building. You could use that building to let people see where we went to school. What is was like, as opposed to you see in the schoolrooms now, with all the banks of computers and the whole nine yards, all the audio, you know? I don't ever recall having too many movies or things like that, you know? And no computers of course, nothing like that.

HD: The teacher had a lot of work to do.

MI: Oh, yes. And I don't know how they managed. I don't know how they managed. To give us things, you know, if you had to have copies of things... Now you press the button and you get twenty copies.

HD: Yes.

MI: Back then I can remember when they had those jells, and you laid it on the jell and then had to... Remember that?

HD: Um, hmm.

MI: But I think it would be nice if they could save some of it, just so people can see it. And then use some of it, because I think it has to be used. It has to be open, and you know, people in and out of it. So that it won't... You know? If you just leave something closed up, it doesn't serve any purpose.

HD: Well, thank you very much!

MI: I don't know if I've been a help, or...
HD: Oh, yes...

MI: At least you’ve heard somebody, another view of it.

HD: I just thought of one thing, I’m not sure that we got on the tape, the year you graduated?

MI: 1950.

HD: 1950. O.K. Well I think that’s the last thing we need to cover. Thank you very much.

MI: Oh, you’re welcome.

End of interview.
Interview Consent Form
Jefferson School Oral History Project
Preservation Piedmont, Charlottesville, Virginia

The Jefferson School Oral History Project is conducted by Preservation Piedmont as part of an ongoing program to support preservation of the Jefferson School.

The purpose of the interview is to collect the stories of those affiliated with Jefferson School in order to document and preserve the history of the site for the benefit of current Charlottesville residents and future generations. Material developed from the interview will be shared with the Charlottesville community through publication of a booklet, a video documentary of the interviews, and a conference.

Copies of the transcriptions and other materials derived from these interviews will be donated to the Albemarle County Historical Society, and The Carter G. Woodson Institute for African and African American Studies at the University of Virginia.

It is also hoped that a museum will be established at the Jefferson School where material gathered from this oral history project will provide a permanent exhibit interpreting the history of the Jefferson School and its role in the community.

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Interviewee ........................................... Date .....8/31/02...........

Interviewer........................................... Date .....8/31/02...........
My name is Theodore R. Inge, Jr., son of Theodore Inge who was born here in Charlottesville in 1901. And my father was the son of George Pinkney Inge who was the proprietor of Inge's Grocery, 333 West Main Street. I was born and reared in East Orange, New Jersey.

EH: I'm Elizabeth Howard by way of I.D. and this is August 31, 2002. And, by way of introduction, I'm working on a film about Rebecca McGinness so I was interested in her as well.

TI: McGinness? Yes.

EH: Did you ever know her?

TI: Well, I used to come down here just about every other summer. It was like an exchange of children. My uncle would send my cousins up to Jersey one year, and then I would come down, and my sister would come down, to Charlottesville and spend time. When they came up to New Jersey they would probably go to camp or something like that. And that's what transpired. And I used to spend a lot of time here, and I used to also work in my grandfather's store a lot.

EH: Where did you live in New Jersey?

TI: East Orange. I was born and reared in East Orange.

EH: Do you still live in that area?
TI: Yes, I now live in Freehold Township, New Jersey, which is probably about forty-five miles south of East Orange.

EH: This project is somewhat focused on Jefferson School.

TI: Yes.

EH: So, do you have memories or associations with the school that you can share?

TI: Well, when I used to come down here, I used to have an attitude because when they showed me that Jefferson was a high school I couldn’t believe it. It was so diminutive, so small, it was nothing compared with the high school that I attended. I attended a Group IV School in New Jersey called East Orange High School, and we were super academically as well as on the athletic fields. We were big time. And when I used to come down here and see this little school, I’d say “How in the world do these kids make it?” You know? I just felt like I had so much above these kids, it’s not funny. But the thing that I found about Jefferson High School was the fact that they were very well nourished by the administrative staff as well as their teachers. You know, to be working under a handicap in a segregated type of system, I think they did outstanding work. And I still have a lot of allegiance to this area because of the fact that I felt that they achieved so much with so little; I sometimes feel much more accepted here than I did at my own school in East Orange.

My father did not have the opportunity to attend Jefferson High School because there was no high school for people of color at the time. My father was born in 1901. He left the area after a primary education and was schooled in St. Louis, Missouri—Sumner High School—and he matriculated from there to University of Minnesota which he attended for eight years, four of which were undergraduate work, and then he did his medical work at University of Minnesota.

EH: A doctor, physician?

TI: He was an M.D., yes.

EH: Can you describe the [Jefferson] school as you remember it to me? Or did you go in it?

TI: I used to go into the classrooms to see... I’d make comparisons between what was presented to them, and compared it to what I had been presented in a so-called superior type of surrounding. But, as I said previously, I just felt that they had a lot more going because they took advantage of the situation. They were much more interested in the well-being of the children, as opposed to being in a larger school, a so-called integrated type of system. I just felt they got a lot more out of it.

EH: Can you give me an example or a story of how you felt that was true that the more hands-on...?
TI: Because if there was a problem, they made sure that these kids were aware of the necessity of a high school education. O.K? Whereas in New Jersey, we took it for granted that we were going to achieve, you know. But, the thing is, they were not necessarily interested in counseling us towards college prep courses in New Jersey, whereas here they said “This is one way out; this is one way of achieving your aims and your goals and aspirations and what have you.” Whereas up there, in many instances there was denial. They did not want you to matriculate in college prep courses. They certainly wanted you on the football field, on the track, and what have you. But when it came to associating with people other than yourself or your kind, that just didn’t happen. I almost felt like when I was in East Orange, New Jersey, it was like it was Mississippi up north. That’s how I felt about it.

EH: And what can you...can you explain that? Was there a sort of natural segregation?

TI: Ah, it was a natural... it was a selective segregation. They wanted you to know that basically you’re not going to mingle, you had separate canteens. We had Club Martinez (blacks), and Club Utopia (whites) they called them. And they closed the swimming pool rather than have blacks and whites swimming together. My father was instrumental in at least attempting to see that you could compete, you know, in the swimming pool. We had this Olympic size pool. I’ve only seen that pool once. They always used to hide the pool and use it to basically store football equipment and things of that sort. I wasn’t even aware of the fact that there was a swimming pool there until I saw it one day, and lo-and-behold it was there. You know? I think my father was very fortunate in that he was able to go to St. Louis to get an education. And he went to a very fine school. I have seen work that he had done in terms of preparation for school subject matter, and it was excellent. Latin, genetics, all types of things. As a matter of fact, he entered a fraternity called Omega Psi Phi, of which I am a member, in 1921, at University of Minnesota. O.K.? Omega Psi Phi was founded in 1911. Alright, so that’s ten years after the founding of the fraternity. And I joined Omega Psi Phi because my father joined after one of the counselors [Greer from Sumner H.S.] on the staff there wrote the history of Omega Psi Phi and my father was very much influenced by going into the fraternity. Thus their reason for founding that chapter for the fraternity at the University of Minnesota. Roy Wilkens and two of my father’s brothers, Hutch Inge and Fred Inge, also attended the University of Minnesota, and they founded the chapter there.

EH: Do you remember how old you were when you first went to Jefferson School to visit? What the circumstances might have been?

TI: I must have probably been somewhere around fourteen years old, something like that.

EH: And you were visiting here for the first time?

TI: No, I wasn’t visiting for the first time. You see the only reason that I went over there was because my cousins were in school at the time. O.K.? That might have been earlier because I think at one time there was Jefferson Elementary [EH suggests Graded] Graded School. I know I had gone over then also.
EH: So you went with your cousins?

TI: Yes.

EH: You actually went to the classes with them?

TI: Yes.

EH: Can you describe a class, or remember any specific class or teacher?

TI: I remember a teacher who taught math. I can’t think of his name.

EH: The man?

TI: Yes. I can’t think of his name. My aunt taught over at Jefferson.

EH: And who was that?

TI: Her name was Gertrude Inge. She taught there. And she died up in Philadelphia at the age of around 95 years old.

EH: Do you remember her talking about the school? Any of her recollections?

TI: Oh, yes.

EH: What were some of those?

TI: Well the fact that she really cared for the kids a lot. A lot of the students who attended the school often talk about Gertrude Inge, and the fine job that she had done. As a matter of fact, there was a woman that I talked to since I have been here at this particular reunion. She indicated that my aunt had basically taken her under the wing and shown her the ropes and things. And that she had never forgotten her. I said, “Well you know she passed away in Philadelphia, and she had retired from the system here, and she moved north and not too far from where I live, and she retired from a second job, which was at the Philadelphia Ship Yard.”

EH: Who was the lady here, do you remember, who had been the student? Do you know who it would have been?

TI: Was it Barnett? I think her name was Barnett.

EH: Well, when she took her under her wing, what was that? Was she saying you should go to college, you’re bright…?

TI: Oh, no. She was in a teaching capacity. O.K.? What she basically did was lead her through, give her praises, tell her what to expect. Helped her. I remember Mr. Duncan
also. Because... the Duncans... Mr. Duncan was the Principal of Jefferson High School, and they lived maybe about a block from Anderson Street. I used to go to 815 Anderson Street, which was where my uncle had a home. And that’s where I stayed. And I knew all of the Duncans, Bee Duncan, the whole family.

EH: Can you describe the Principal? What kind of Principal was he?

TI: Well, he took care of business. You know? I guess he was really ahead of his time as a principal. And I know that when my grandfather first came here from Danville, Virginia, that he went as a teacher for a while until he established his store in 1891. That was Inge’s Grocery, and it was in existence for a goodly number of years until probably the ‘70s.

EH: It was quite a landmark!

TI: It was a landmark. And to me it still is a landmark. Every time I go by there all I can think about is how my grandmother used to ring that bell, you know, for dinner. I’d run downstairs and we’d have dinner. I have a lot of fond memories about 333 West Main Street.

EH: I still recall Inge’s Store instead of the Awful Arthur’s. [they laugh] Well, back to Mr. Duncan. Do you remember anything that he said or did, or just physically describe him? What did he look like?

TI: Mr. Duncan... my recollection was that he didn’t have very much hair on his head. Even in his younger years he didn’t. I remember his wife nursing one of those children that they had. I’m trying to think of how many children they had. They had something like four or five children. And, like I said, they used to live very close to Anderson Street. And, I remember him being kind of authoritative. You know? I guess that’s probably out of necessity because of the fact that he was a principal. And I guess he carried it over. But I guess in his off hours, he was just like any other man.

EH: Well, you know in those days, they could do more corporal punishment. Do you think people were afraid to go to the office?

TI: I know that the people did not want to go to the office. Let’s just put it like that. That’s what my recollection is.

EH: I interviewed Mrs. McGinness. She said the boys particularly were scared to go to the office. I wonder if this was Mr. Duncan she was talking about?

TI: I think probably what they were talking about was Mr. Duncan. Because he would kind of lay into you. From what I understand.

EH: Do you remember athletics at the school? Did your cousins...were they involved in athletics?
TI: My cousin was. He was kind of big, but he couldn’t play any ball. I shouldn’t say this on camera but he was not a football player. [laughs] He really wasn’t.

EH: But you were talking about in New Jersey versus here. What sort of athletic teams were there here, do you remember?

TI: I’ll tell you. I used to come down here. I thought I could play some basketball. You know? Outside they used to have some courts in the middle of the school. You know on the outside? Like a playground type of thing? And I remember playing ball against Roosevelt Brown. Remember Roosevelt Brown? He played with the Giants? He went to Morgan State? I was just playing one on one against him. You know? Just to see where he was coming from. I shot very well, then.

EH: Was that here?

TI: Oh, right here in Charlottesville.

EH: What was he doing here?

TI: Because he is a graduate of Jefferson. Did you know that?

EH: No.

TI: Yes. See, he was a graduate of Jefferson High School.

EH: Really?

TI: Yes.

EH: Well, tell us a little bit about him.

TI: From the New York Giants. Are you familiar with them?

EH: Not really. I’m not a...

TI: He was all-Pro. Roosevelt Brown attended Morgan State in Baltimore. And he was a good ball player. Right now he has had some physical difficulties with his legs and things of that sort, but Roosevelt Brown was a very fine ball player.

EH: When was this?

TI: Oh, boy, this goes way back.

EH: Just generally, what era...?

TI: This goes back probably to the ‘50s.
EH: [whispers] That's not that far.

TI: Well, yes, it's... to the '50s. That's what my recollection was. And he had a sculptured body. I'm telling you, he was sculptured. He had this small waist, and a V shape. He just, he was very well sculpted.

EH: So this was after he'd gone and came back, and was doing a pick-up game or something?

TI: Yes. We were just playing out there. That's what my recollection is. Anyway, the Jefferson School bands and what have you were very competitive. You know, it's too bad that a lot of people in the City did not have the opportunity to see the band. You know? Mr. Paige and what have you? I still can't remember that darn math teacher. But I was impressed with him.

EH: Why? What impressed you about him?

TI: The fact that he was able to get through to some of these kids in terms of what I call abstract thinking. Like algebra and things of that sort. I know when I was taking algebra in East Orange they just gave me an abstract and didn't teach it properly. And I was just turned off by it. You know? So, basically what you have to do is you have to show the kids that this is really not very complex, you know? It's very simple as long as you take the right track. You know? It's nothing to be afraid of. I always said the most complex subject matter can be learned as long as you have somebody who's willing to teach it. And anybody of average intelligence can learn the most complex of theory, including physics, calculus, or anything! You know? If the teacher or the instructor is aware of what the subject matter is and knows it well, and how to present it properly, anybody of normal intelligence should be able to learn it.

EH: This is like in tenth grade? I'm thinking that's when I took algebra.

TI: I took it in the ninth grade.

EH: You were smarter than I am!

TI: No, I had CP (college prep) courses, but still, you know, trig and things of that sort? And we didn't have calculus at the time. But we did have plain geometry, solid geometry, things of that sort. I just had it on the tip of my tongue... but I can't think of his name!

EH: But he was just very patient...

TI: Very patient!

EH: And made it accessible and so forth...

TI: And I remember the French teacher, too that used to live on Anderson Street. But I can't think of her name! [Mrs. Byers] I'm getting up there too, you know!
HD: Yes! [laughs]

MI: Oddly enough.

HD: Yes. And then did you meet other children along the way?

MI: Sometimes, sometimes. Yeah.

HD: Did you or any of your friends drive a car to school?

MI: No!

HD: [laughs]

MI: Absolutely not. Absolutely not!

HD: Did you know any high school children who had a car?

MI: Not that I knew of.

HD: Can you describe the neighborhood around the school? Were there businesses nearby, businesses like a soda shop that had business for the high school kids?

MI: Well, we weren’t really allowed to go over there, I don’t think. I’ve forgotten the name of the store, but there was one right across the street. We used to sneak over, or leave, you know, after school and go over and get something. But, they had a cafeteria in the school, and that’s where you ate your lunch. Or you brought your own, but they served lunches there. But we didn’t have...we were not allowed to go out and have lunch and come back. That was not the thing, no!

HD: And did you stop at any businesses on your way home from school to get a snack?

MI: This is what I’m trying to tell you, across the street from the school was a little shop. I can’t think of the name of the store now, but I am sure the rest of these folks could tell you the name of it.

HD: Was that on Commerce Street, you know when you come out the front door of Lane School there on...

MI: Not Lane!

HD: I don’t mean Lane, I mean Jefferson. Then you’re on Commerce. And the business you’re talking about, was that also on Commerce Street?

MI: Is that Commerce? I thought that was Fourth!
HD: Well Fourth Street is, um, goes down...

MI: Yeah, O.K., I know where you mean. This one going... Dr. Jackson's, the dentist's office was there, along there. And I forget what it was called, but there was one little shop there, where we used to go, and sometimes we would go out and go up on Main Street and there was a drug store there that would serve you, you know? Not serve you, but you could buy and walk away with it, you could not stay with it.

HD: So, sometimes you would make a stop?

MI: Right, right. And then of course Inge's Store was right up at the corner. His grandfather's store was right up at the corner, but I didn't go up there very often, because once school was over, I headed down Fourth Street and went home.

HD: Going the other way?

MI: Um, hmm. And then my mother had a little store, up on Rose Hill. Corner of Rose Hill and Dale Street. Should be Dale Avenue.

HD: What kind?

MI: A little grocery store.

HD: A grocery store, ah.

MI: It was a little, a smaller complex, a little store here, and my father had what was his real estate office, you know, next to it. It wasn't anything elaborate, it was just there.

HD: O.K.! What was the school property like when you were there? Was there a big parking lot beside the school the way there is now?

MI: No. Not that I can recall. I don't recall one because I never had a car to drive. You know what I am trying to say? And if I got dropped off, I just got dropped off in front of the school, and that's it, you know.

HD: Yes. Was there a field there, or was there grass?

MI: It was a play yard, a playground, you know. I remember playing gym there, if you want to call it gym, you know? Mrs. Pleasants was our gym teacher, and we would play baseball or basketball, whatever. Not basketball, but baseball, and football, or touch, whatever we played outside, kickball. It was... I don't think it was grass.

HD: But it was a dirt, a level dirt playground area?

MI: Um, hmm.
HD: Can you describe one of your classrooms, or one of your homerooms at Jefferson?

MI: Small. Windows. Nothing. I don’t remember having lockers or anything like that in there. Not in the room. I think we had lockers somewhere, because I remember I had a locker with a friend. And we were sharing like one key or something, and she said, “I don’t have it, I lost my key.” And I said “Well I’m going to be there,” and that was the day I ended up with a toothache and wasn’t there. And she couldn’t get in the locker... So we did have some kind of locker. Don’t remember exactly. It was a long time ago.

HD: Yeah. Sure. Now, you say that you remember... when you started Jefferson School, did you start in the old Jefferson School?

MI: Yes. Where they didn’t have an auditorium, and we stood for the programs.

HD: And I’ve heard that sometimes you’d stand on the steps outside.

MI: Yes. And inside when they had programs. It was in this configuration, and you just...in your class with your teacher, you just stood there. There were no seats that I recall. We stood up for the morning exercises, or whatever.

HD: How long?

MI: I don’t know. You know. Time?

HD: I know. Our memories of time are probably not very reliable.

MI: When you are young like that, you can stand forever. You know? Not like now. After a half-hour or so, you’re like... this is hurting.

HD: Yes. When did you change from the old Jefferson School, going over to the present building. That we call Jefferson High School?

MI: I think it was fifth grade.

HD: Um, hmm.

MI: Because I remember being with Miss Peachy Johnson. I think it was fifth. I think, I’m not sure.

HD: And then you were in that larger building from fifth grade up through graduating at the end of eleventh grade.

MI: Right, exactly.

HD: What do remember about the classrooms there at Jefferson, at the building we call Jefferson High School?
MI: Now that’s where we had the lockers! I hope you didn’t think I was talking about, I hope I wasn’t supposed to be talking about the other school! In high school, I don’t remember too much about the rooms. They weren’t… nothing stood out great about them. Good, outstanding. Like now you have nice desks and things like that. I do remember them having inkwells and old desks, and some of my friends when I had hair, they’d stuff it down in those inkwells, where there used to be inkwells. And some of the desks were attached, and bolted down as I recall.

HD: What about the auditorium area?

MI: Very much like it is today.

HD: Is it? Was it?

MI: Yes.

HD: Uh, huh.

MI: Yes. And the seats were not…they were moveable, you know. I can’t think of the, they were not stationary, you could move them around.

HD: So they had folding, folding…

MI: Chairs or whatever. And you moved them around, and on Friday afternoon after the game, they had a little dance and they would move them back. And you were dancing on the floor. And then when they had programs, you would put all the seats back out there, and I was in the band and we would play on that stage. And it seems like it was huge back then. And now it looks like you could take three giant steps and walk across it. You know, I mean, its dwarfed it with age.

HD: Yes! The room they call the auditorium now must have been a multi-purpose room back then? At that time?

MI: Yes. Yes it was.

HD: Can you describe your favorite or most vivid memory of being in one of the classrooms?

MI: No, not really. I think, we had a…we didn’t have a really nice science room, all the real good stuff in it, you know? All the microscopes and stuff like that. But I do remember Mr. Paige teaching science, and I remember that classroom—it was on the lower level—it was, it was… I don’t remember too much about it except that it was on the lower level. The windows were out on the… when you walked in they were on the far end. That’s about as much as I can remember.

HD: Uh, huh. Did you change rooms for every subject?
MI: Yes, I think so. Not every, but I think so. We changed a lot. We went from... I think you had a homeroom, and then you went to your classes.

HD: What was it like in the halls during...?

MI: Wasn't bad because we didn't have that many people. You know it wasn't like now! When you go to a school and you see all these hundreds and hundreds of people moving about. You know, so it wasn't really very difficult to move from one place to another, I didn't think.

HD: Was it noisy?

MI: I don't recall it being noisy, but I'm sure we did our share! Of talking and whatever, because it was a very warm setting, you know, we kind of, home, family like.

HD: Did you know everybody in the school?

MI: Oh, absolutely! Just about. We were all there together. It wasn't like we had two or three different high schools, or different schools around.

HD: Where was the library?

MI: Where was it? It was on the second floor as I recall, and down the hall from the auditorium. I can't remember her name, she was the librarian. She went to Hampton also.

HD: Was the same person there for quite a while?

MI: Oh, yes. Of course she was there for a very long time. I think she was there when I went there, and she was there when I left, and for many years after.

HD: You mentioned a few minutes ago that there was a cafeteria at the high school. And here there are a couple of questions. Did you bring lunch to school with you, or did you eat lunch that was served in the cafeteria.

MI: I usually ate lunch that was served.

HD: Did you have to pay for lunch?

MI: Absolutely. It wasn't very much, but you had to pay. And for the meal that they were serving for that day, you had to go down in the morning and say that you were going to buy it, you know, put in an order.

HD: Where was recess held? And who monitored recess?

MI: I don't recall having, being monitored as such, you know! We were outside on that, in that same area outside where I guess the parking lot is now. And we just sort of sat
around, and we didn’t have any equipment there at the time, to play or do anything with. We sort of just went out there after we’d eat for a few minutes when the weather was good.

HD: And then you just, you made up your own activities, your own games?

MI: Yeah, probably, yes. I don’t remember doing much more than sitting around talking to my friends.

HD: A lot of talking, yeah. What courses were offered?

MI: Well, we had about average courses I think. Math, science, English. They didn’t call it social studies... they may have called it social studies, I’m not sure. I don’t remember. Health and gym. Let me think what else, health, gym, math, music, that’s about it. They had band after hours, after school hours. They never had band during the day I don’t think. I don’t recall having band during the day.

HD: Did they have some required classes, and then some electives?

MI: I suppose they did, I suppose we did! But I can’t remember, I don’t remember whether we had you know just the standard fare, or whether could elect to take certain things. I don’t recall.

HD: What was your favorite subject?

MI: Music.

HD: Music?


HD: What did you play?

MI: Flute.

HD: You did!

MI: I played clarinet, and then finally got a flute, and the band director offered it to me to play, “You want to try it?” And I said, “Yeah, I want to try it.” So that’s how I got into playing flute. And so when I went to Hampton, I majored in music.

HD: Really?

MI: Yes. Uh, huh.

HD: When they had history classes, was black history included in the history class?
MI: Not really. Not really. Not from the textbook point of view. You know some of the teachers were interested in telling us things about our history, and I remember one lady came and was teaching and was so appalled that we didn’t know “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” And she was just absolutely appalled! She would say, “How can you not know this? You know, because it is known as the Negro national anthem.”

HD: Yes.

MI: Some people still sing it, you know, and it is still know as the Negro national anthem. But um…

HD: And did she teach it to you?

MI: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. And then we had some that would make us learn things that my husband was so surprised at. I knew “Invictus.” We learned poems and things, I don’t recall being told why you had to know it, it was just something they wanted you to learn, and you learned and you spoke it, and you know, you had to recite it. [laughs]

HD: Yup, a lot of teachers liked to do that as an exercise, as a memory exercise.

MI: Yes.

HD: And as an exercise for pronunciation and things like that. Did girls have any different classes from boys?

MI: I don’t recall having any.

HD: How about health?

MI: Health. Yeah, that’s what I’m thinking. I don’t recall, I don’t recall them being separate. I don’t recall them being separate…may-be they were.

HD: What happened if someone failed a class?

MI: They repeated it I think.

HD: Was there summer school?

MI: You know, I didn’t attend, I don’t recall. I’m sure there must have been.

HD: But you didn’t have to go?

MI: No, I never went so I don’t recall.

HD: Do you know anyone who dropped out of school?
MI: Uh, huh.

HD: Do you remember why they dropped out?

MI: Various reasons.

HD: Probably.

MI: Various reasons, but I don’t remember. Sometimes pregnancy or something like that may-be. Some of them dropped out you know, more near the end of high school. Or they dropped out to go home and work or that kind of thing. Or just working, not finding high school a success. Or they wanted to do something else.

HD: Did you get report cards that were sent home to your parents? Were your report cards sent home to your parents?

MI: No, we took them home, as I recall.

HD: Was there an honor roll?

MI: Yes. You know when we graduated they had the top of the class, valedictorian.

HD: Who were some of the students who went to Jefferson who you think have been particularly successful in their lives?

MI: Oh. Well, you look around this morning, Charlie Rogers is, was, we were all in the band together. He really did very well with his music, and he still does play and sing and participate. You know, use his skills, and it kind of brought tears to my eyes this morning to be able to just get up and sing. Isn’t that nice?

HD: That is nice.

MI: It was so wonderful, it really was. And I guess there are a lot of people who have done very well, and I think basically many of us have done well, but not, you know, any one person stands out that I can recall, when you put me on the spot! But people, a lot of them tend to have done well, you know, have made... have gone to college, and retired from good jobs in business and the educational field.

HD: That speaks well for the school.

MI: Yes. There’s a certain amount of warmth. Love can do a lot of things. We were loved. We were loved. And we didn’t have a whole lot, but the people who worked with us, the teachers and the atmosphere was of love. You grow automatically.

HD: Did you go to another school or college after Jefferson.
MI: Uh, huh. I went to school after Jefferson. Yeah.

HD: You went...

MI: Hampton University.

HD: To Hampton.

MI: Hampton University, uh, huh. They were calling it Hampton Institute when I went. Back in the day.

HD: And what did your friends do after graduating?

MI: Some of them went to work, some of them took beauty culture or something like this, and got into that field. A lot of them went to school. They didn’t all finish, but they went off and got a few years of college education. And some of them, as I said, stayed and worked here in the community. Many of them worked at the University hospital. Up at the University or in the hospital itself. Or in town, or at some of the frat houses where they worked, you know, as cooks or gophers... I don’t know what they called them, you know. Some of them just got married, and their husbands supported them, or whatever. I am talking about ladies now... the girls. The guys had jobs here in town. There weren’t that many, you know.

HD: Now here are a couple of other questions? Did any classmates return to teach at Jefferson School?

MI: Yes. It wasn’t Jefferson then, you know, it was Burley.

HD: Oh, yes.

MI: Yes, I do recall because I had just, my daughter was a baby and I came back to live with my mother and father, because he was in the Army, and I preferred living here than living in New Jersey with his parents. So I moved back here with the baby. And Bessie Henderson was working in the school system here. She went to Virginia State and we were classmates. And Lois Porter, I don’t know her new name, but this was her maiden name. Maiden names I’m giving, Bessie and Lois Porter. And I know those two right off that went to school and came back and taught in the schools here.

HD: And taught at Jefferson, or at Burley? At Burley?

MI: I am sure there are others, but right now those two come right off the top of my head. Now I am not sure whether Charlie Rogers ever taught here in Charlottesville or not. I am not sure of that. But he was in music.

HD: This question sounds like a fairly large-scale question. How did the school curriculum, and your school experiences at Jefferson, prepare you for life after school?
MI: Hmm. We didn’t have as much as may-be we should have had. That is to say, we, you’re saying for when I got out of school?

HD: Yes.

MI: I think I was may-be not as well prepared as may-be coming out of another school, perhaps, you know. But as I said, we were always told that we could do, and shown how we could do, and encouraged to do. So you went off thinking you could do. So, if you think you can, you know, “I think I can,” you know that little story about the little train. [laugh] I think I can?

HD: Yeah.

MI: So that’s the crux of that. But, the curriculum, I think, it wasn’t up to snuff, you know what I mean? But we had the basics. We had algebra, and that kind of thing, but we didn’t have an outstanding curriculum.

HD: But you did have the basics?

MI: Yes we did. We did have the basics. And we had that extra push from the folks who knew we needed it. We had French, and English and stuff like that. And you could opt to take French, but you didn’t have to take French.

HD: Uh, huh.

MI: You had asked about...

HD: Electives?

MI: Electives! Yes. [laughs]

HD: So that was one of them?

MI: Yes. Because you didn’t have to take it.

HD: What do you remember most about the teachers? You’ve mentioned a number of different things about the teachers, you mentioned that they were very supportive and that they gave you this feeling that you could do things. What else do you remember...what do you remember most about the teachers?

MI: Well. What do I remember most about the teachers? They were interested in us. And they wanted... they had been out, and they knew what we needed to know to get out into the world and to do, and they knew that we needed to be prepared and they were trying their best to prepare us to get out and do whatever we wanted or thought we could do. They encouraged us to do that, you know? I remember the band director was always talking about matriculating at this place and that place. And I thought to myself “Yes, right!” As
I look on it now, there is no way in the world that I could have gone to some of the places he talked about, you know, but he gave you the feeling that hey, the sky’s the limit. Just try, may-be you can, may-be you can. Juilliard School of Music for me? Come now. But he spoke about it, you know, he spoke about it. You know what I mean? He spoke about it. And a lot of them came from the historically black schools, like Hampton and Virginia Union and Virginia State. You know. Howard and all of them. We knew we had a nice rich heritage there. Somewhere to go and something to do.

HD: Oh, yes.

MI: That kind of thing.

HD: So you heard about other possibilities?

MI: Oh, yes. We knew we didn’t have to just stay here in Charlottesville and go work for somebody. That there were other things, higher grounds. Other things that could be had. And the salaries for the teachers were so low. You know what I mean? They weren’t living lavishly, but we knew they were moving up. Sadie Gohana came back to teach here too.

HD: Oh?

MI: Yes. I think she was interviewed some years ago. She taught here in the school system here. I am sure there are many, many more, but I just don’t remember them. See, when I graduated from college, I graduated right in front of him. And I was married to him at the time, and I moved to Jersey. That was it. So. Not only have I been gone for the 47 years I’ve been married to him, I was gone for four years for college, you know?

HD: They have some questions about the teachers. Did you have a favorite teacher?

MI: Um, hmm!

HD: Who was that?

MI: I would think it was Mr. Page. He taught band. And he was, you know, he was very aggressive. When we were in the band, he had great ideas about doing things. You see these formations on the fields now, he was doing that back then! That was 50-some years ago! He had us marching in those spirals that came back out, and working at night. He dreamed up the idea of putting a light on the hats, and cutting the stadium lights out, and having the band march in these formations, and it was like breathtaking I’m sure. But I was one little soul walking around, so I could never see it. But I would imagine that it must have been quite a thing for the parents to see—“My child is down there! In that formation! And of course we had the little band parades, and whatever. He really was trying to…he saw ahead of what we were doing. He dreamed.

HD: That must have been exciting.
MI: Yes. He dreamed. And shared the dream with us. Yeah.

HD: Did you feel you could talk to the teachers about teenage questions, teenage issues?

MI: No. I didn’t. I think back then you didn’t talk to your mother about it! It was... everything was hush-hush. We didn’t talk about that.

HD: So you would talk to friends at school.

MI: Yes. The health teacher would tell you a few things, and give you a little booklet on becoming a lady. And they would say, you know, even, you’re too young to know, but back then you would never hear the commercials now for Tampax and sanitary napkins and the like. The closest thing you came to was a Kotex commercial in a, not a commercial but an ad in a magazine. Something like *Life* magazine. Maybe. Or *Ladies’ Home Journal* or something like that.

HD: Yeah. I do remember that. [laughs]

MI: Back then, oh no, oh no. You would never... That was taboo, you didn’t talk about anything like that.

HD: Were your teachers mostly men or mostly women?

MI: Mostly women as I recall.

HD: Do you remember how old they were approximately?

MI: Some of them were right out of college! Yes. Because Mrs. Bryant, the one that’s here now? Mrs. Florence Bryant? Florence, I think she was Florence... I forget her maiden name, but anyway, when she first came, I am sure she was fresh out of college. Yeah. And there was a Washington, a Mrs. Washington—or Miss Washington that came along with her. I don’t know where they graduated from, but you know some of them were young!

HD: Was there very much turnover among the teachers?

MI: No... I don’t think so. And by the way, yes, we did have other things like typing, see it’s coming back to me now. I remember typing. I was not encouraged to take typing, because they said you may go to college, so you can’t take typing. But that was such a bad thing to do, because once you got into college you needed the typing to type your papers. Wasn’t that ridiculous? They figured, well, you would type, you were going to go downtown and get a job as a clerk or a secretary, or something. Right?

HD: Yes.
MI: And you really needed it when you went to college to do your papers, your term papers and things.

HD: Yeah.

MI: Backwards. That wasn't a smart move.

HD: Was there...the next question asks what happened when you were sick? Was there a school nurse there?

MI: I don't recall a school nurse. You went to the main office and the secretary deemed whether you were going home or not. You know? I think that's the way it worked. And I remember Zelda Hawkins was her name. And you'd go in there sick, and Zelda would call home and say you were on your way. If you had a phone at home. Otherwise, if you were sick, nobody took you home! I can remember getting sick and having to walk back home. Uh, huh. And if you didn't have anybody home to come get you, you walked it. Can you imagine that? Except, when I guess, if you were just out and couldn't make it at all...somebody had to wait.

HD: Yeah. I remember things like that. Because it was the same in the school I went to. What kinds of extra curricular activities were offered at Jefferson School? Do you remember any extra curricular activities? You mentioned band...

MI: Band, yeah band. And they had basketball, football for the guys. I'm not sure about baseball or anything like that. But basketball, football, and there was a ladies' basketball team. Let's see... I'm trying to think. Extra curricular? I can't think of anything else. See, I guess because I was involved in the band. Cheerleading. You know that kind of thing. Yeah, they had cheerleaders.

HD: Did you play a sport?

MI: No.

HD: O.K. Were parents involved in any of the extra curricular activities?

MI: Um, hmm. Oh yes! Yes. My mother traveled a lot with the band, because she believed in going. Charlie's mother—Charlie Rogers—the one that sang this morning. I don't know if you were there this morning?

HD: I wasn't.

MI: Charlie's mother—Mrs. Rogers—traveled a lot with us. Lelia Edlow—Lelia Brown I think she is now—her mother traveled a lot with the band. A parent was involved in whatever activities were going on.

HD: Now, where did the band go? You're talking about traveling with the band?
MI: Oh, yeah, with the football team. We’d go... they’d play in Danville or something like that. We might go to play. That’s about it. Every spring we went to Virginia State to participate in a band... sort of a playoff... and you had to play certain tunes. You had to have something in this line, you know... like a march, you had to have a march or... I’m trying to think of something... like the William Tell Overture. I remember that because I had that solo! But we would compete with other bands throughout the state at Virginia State. But, this was all black.

HD: How did Jefferson do?

MI: We won a lot!

HD: You did.

MI: Yes, yes we did. We got excellent reviews. At that time. We did very well. I don’t remember if we got anything like trophies, or anything like that. I don’t recall. Isn’t that weird? That part I don’t remember. But I do remember playing. You would get up early in the morning, and take this bus and go.

HD: Well, it sounds like fun!

MI: It was. Oh yes. But I didn’t know any different. You see?

HD: Were there any community functions at the school after hours?

MI: Yes, oh yes.

HD: What kinds of community things?

MI: Mostly like dances for the children, for us. An occasional graduate may come back to sing. I can’t think of the young lady’s name now, she’s older than I am. But, some people would come back, and they would have may-be a concert there or something in the auditorium. But nothing extravagant.

HD: And then everybody from the neighborhood would come? Could come?

MI: Yes.

HD: Were there student social clubs?

MI: Student social clubs? Yes, there was the French Club; if you took French you could join the French Club. They had other clubs, yes. Yes they did. And they had advisers.

HD: So there would be teachers who were teacher advisers?

MI: Yes.
HD: Who were some of your friends? What were the names of some of your friends?

MI: Lillian Murray, Joan Cary, Margaret Smith who’s here now from Denver, Colorado. And I get to see her every other year because of this. Joe Johnson, Tom Inge, Linwood Chisholm, Marjorie Barber. We had the same last name, but we are not related! Polly Collins. Can’t think of any more right now. But I’m thinking as they used to call the roll.

HD: Well that’s quite a few. Did you have friends from other neighborhoods? Besides your neighborhood?

MI: You know, we weren’t a neighborhood. This was it, this was it. The people from Fifth Street went to Jefferson just like I came from Rose Hill and went to Jefferson. So we all met there. That was the deal because we all had to go to that one school. There was no, you know...

HD: Did you have contact with other city schools? Did you and your friends from Jefferson have contact with students from other schools in the city?

MI: In the city? In this city? No! No, not really. Because this was the school. We didn’t have but one school. It wasn’t like we had two high schools in the city of Charlottesville for the blacks. So consequently we may have known students at Maggie Walker High School in Richmond, but we didn’t have another school to know of here, except may-be somebody up in Crozet or somewhere where they had a little school, you know a small school up there or something. But from what I can recall, this was it. May-be some of the country schools out there. I’ve forgotten their names... like the Albemarle Training School?

HD: Oh, yes.

MI: Yes. So may-be somebody might have known them, but that was out in the county. That was a county school. We didn’t have any more in the city.

HD: Did you ever take field trips? You did mention going with the...

MI: Yes, yes, with the band. And I think the chorus took trips. The football team went places, and the basketball team went places. Yeah.

HD: How did you get there when you took field trips?

MI: We had a bus.

HD: You had a bus.

MI: Um, hmm.

HD: Complete with a television on it...?
MI: Oh, absolutely. Oh, absolutely, and a bathroom in the back. Yeah. Oh, yes.

HD: And did you meet kids from other schools when you went on these field trips? Did you have a chance to...?

MI: Yes. We got to meet other people, other children. Yes.

HD: What impact do you feel that the segregated education had on students?

MI: It limited your... we didn’t have, we were not exposed to as much simply because we were like a separate entity. Although we were not exposed to all of it, we had people who had been exposed to some of it, who came as teachers and advisers to us, and were trying to tell us we should go out there. [tape ends]...

[second tape]

MI: ... but encouraged to do more, see and do more.

HD: So, you think that in his high school, in your husband’s high school in New Jersey, he was not encouraged as much as you were here at Jefferson?

MI: I don’t think so, from what he has told me through the years. No, I don’t think so. See, whereas I had all black teachers, and they had been to college, and they had been out in the world, to some extent, more than the students that they had there. So they were telling us to, “Do,” “Go,” you know “Explore. If you can at all go to college, go. This is the way to get out, to get an education. And to get a better job than to do something else like work for somebody in domestic work, or work at the hospital as an orderly, or that kind of thing.” They wanted you to, they encouraged you to, get an education. And as I said, that was our warmth, and caring. You see it downstairs when you go in, everybody says “hello” with warmth. There’s a warmth. I mean when I went to his high school reunion. No, no, not like that.

HD: It wasn’t the same?

MI: No, no. And you have to drag him to his high school reunion. But you never have to drag him here. He loves it here. He comes every time, he comes every time, because he likes it. He has fond memories of Charlottesville. His grandparents, and his uncle, and that store, and coming in the summer. And being here with his cousins.

HD: Oh, that’s interesting! Those are really interesting comments. I’ve lost track here of exactly where we are.

MI: You were asking about the impact of...

HD: Yeah, here we are, oh, O.K. that’s right. O.K. Did you and your family discuss issues like this—segregation, segregated education—did you discuss issues like that at home?
MI: Not really, because it was... just, it was. You know what I am saying, it was. But I do remember my father taking us into the country when they said there were going to be disturbances in town. I remember that as a young girl. And he would pack—it was my mother and me. The boys he would leave in town. But he took me. We were going to the country with my father, to stay there until, you know, late in the evening, and then he'd drive back. Yup.

HD: How did the Second World War affect you and your family?

MI: Well my brother went into the Army. And the sad thing was he had a college education, and he came back and he wanted, you know, to work in his field. He was an accountant. He had done work as an accountant. And, when he came back, there was no such thing for him. He went down to Standard Drugs. I don't know if Standard Drugs is still in town?

HD: It is, but it's a CVS.

MI: Yeah, O.K. That's what I mean. It isn't there as Standard Drug. It has a new name. And he worked there until, he just, you know, he just wasn't the same. You know? It was so ridiculous to have a college education and to be working in a Standard Drug.

HD: What was he doing for them?

MI: I am thinking that he was probably a stock boy or something. I am not even thinking that he was a clerk. I don't even think that he was a clerk! I don't even think he was a clerk. And it was kind of sad. He figured he could go to the Army and serve this country, and then to come back and not be able to pursue his profession in this town... But that was universal. And I mean it wasn't that it was just my brother.

HD: And not just this town...

MI: No. No.

HD: The next question says "Did you attend Jefferson during the desegregation/integration period?"

MI: No.

HD: What do you remember from this time? Were you in Charlottesville then?

MI: No. Actually, when that started I think I was working. I was in East Orange. That area. Because I remember coming home one summer the year that, I think, King did that speech? Was it spring or something? It was warm I remember.

HD: It was April, I think.
MI: April? Yes, you’re right! Yes. It was warm weather. Well, it was relatively warm I think. Because I think my husband came… and he went to Washington, but my daughter was a baby, and I stayed home. I stayed home, meaning at my mom’s, and at the store where my mother…

HD: And did your mother talk to you about what was happening at the school, or what was happening here in Charlottesville at the time of the integration of the schools?

MI: No… Not really. No. My friends did. You know, I know, my friend who just left my room (at the reunion) finished at Burley, and that was the new high school. But I don’t know anybody that really went to, I don’t know, did they ever go to Lane? They didn’t integrate Lane did they?

HD: Yes, they did.

MI: They did? I don’t know anybody who went to Lane that I… offhand.

HD: We have a couple of more questions here. Which church did you attend?

MI: Ebenezer Baptist. Reverend McFerrer. He was out of Virginia Union.

HD: And, were you a regular, was your family a regular church-going family?

MI: Yes. Oh, yes. My father was a… I’m not sure if he was a trustee, or something. He stood, he pretty much… we went every Sunday. Yeah. Oh, yeah. We went every Sunday, and he used to give the choir a picnic up in Lewis Mountain Lodge, up in that area, where the Skyline Drive is…

HD: Um, hmm.

MI: Yeah, so he used to work with the church. I was brought up in the church. Sunday School, the whole nine yards. And, if you didn’t go to church, you didn’t do anything else. And the only other thing to do here in Charlottesville was go to the movies on Sundays after church. But you could only go to the movies if you went to church… you went to Sunday School and church.

HD: Um, hmm.

MI: And we were recalling on the bus as they took us around the city today, that we used to go from… Ebenezer is across the street from Bell’s Funeral Home?

HD: Um, hmm…

MI: We would leave Sunday school, and go over and look at the bodies at Bell’s. And Mr. Bell was so gracious, he knew we were nothing but children coming in there and being
curious. But he would always stand very stately, and let us go through, and whatnot. Can you imagine? Can you imagine? [laughs]

HD: Heavens.

MI: Can you imagine? It sounds crazy, but we did it. And I was reminding one of the ladies on the bus today, of how we used to do that.

HD: Um, hmm. How did the closing of Jefferson School as a segregated school, affect the Charlottesville black community... the African-American community in Charlottesville?

MI: I would think... I was not here, but if I were here, it would be like closing any other historical spot. I mean it is the school. That is it. You know? And that was the last of the predominantly black, all black, schools here in Charlottesville. That’s it. And that’s where we went. Everybody, you know. And, I think it should be around. It shouldn’t be... it’s like saying you want to get rid of... It’s one of a kind.

HD: Yeah. The last question, I think this is the last, yes it is the last question [laugh], the last question says...

MI: I am sure you are going to edit all the little extras out of here!

HD: We’ll just type up... we’ll just type it up. But, you probably know that there is a group of people here in Charlottesville who are working to preserve the school—Jefferson School—and to preserve an educational role for the school, and that’s one of the reasons we are working on the oral history, this oral history project. What are your thoughts about the future of the building? What does it mean to you?

MI: It’s important, because I attended school there. You know? A vested interest, you know? That is my high school. That is my school, you know, even now when I am asked to be on boards, and to apply for things, they want to know “What did you do, where did you come from, give me your background.” Well, what do I say? I attended Jefferson School in Charlottesville, Virginia. I’m a graduate of Jefferson High School, and to think it is no more, you know, not even a building left there! I think it would be kind of sad. Very sad, you know. I live in Freehold now. And there’s the Court Street School where the blacks went to school there. You would think in New Jersey that they weren’t segregated, but they did have an all black school there. And they are working to keep that alive, too.

HD: Are they?

MI: Yes, they are. And I think we should keep Jefferson alive. I think it’s very important. Just like we go up and see where Thomas Jefferson lived, we go see the rotunda, we should go over and see Jefferson High School—Jefferson School. Yes.

HD: Well, how do you think it could be used in the future?
MI: Well, now. It could be a community center, perhaps. With some of the rooms being used as offices perhaps to help other people, or help people in the community may-be, or to offer, I don’t know classes to people who are illiterate. I don’t know! But to be used. It could be used for something. It could house... I don’t have anything in particular in mind, but to keep it open it has to be used to live. You know what I mean? You can’t close it up and expect it to survive. Not in the sense of living, you know, but to keep a house closed down, it just tends to go to waste. You know that? May-be use it for young ladies who want to go back to school after they have had children. You know, or have some little nursery in there for them to bring their babies while they finish school, or that kind of... I don’t know what they have here in town anymore because I don’t live here.

HD: Um, hmm.

MI: But, have some good things to help the community, particularly the black community, since it was an all black school. But I’m not saying there should just be blacks there. I think it should be there so people can go and see it anyway. Just see it. Here it stands, you know. Just a little bit of... and may-be some of the old books and old desks and things, may-be they could have like a museum in some of it, and may-be... I don’t know. I think there are a lot of things you could do in the building. You could use that building to let people see where we went to school. What is was like, as opposed to you see in the schoolrooms now, with all the banks of computers and the whole nine yards, all the audio, you know? I don’t ever recall having too many movies or things like that, you know? And no computers of course, nothing like that.

HD: The teacher had a lot of work to do.

MI: Oh, yes. And I don’t know how they managed. I don’t know how they managed. To give us things, you know, if you had to have copies of things... Now you press the button and you get twenty copies.

HD: Yes.

MI: Back then I can remember when they had those jells, and you laid it on the jell and then had to... Remember that?

HD: Um, hmm.

MI: But I think it would be nice if they could save some of it, just so people can see it. And then use some of it, because I think it has to be used. It has to be open, and you know, people in and out of it. So that it won’t... You know? If you just leave something closed up, it doesn’t serve any purpose.

HD: Well, thank you very much!

MI: I don’t know if I’ve been a help, or...
HD: Oh, yes...

MI: At least you've heard somebody, another view of it.

HD: I just thought of one thing, I'm not sure that we got on the tape, the year you graduated?

MI: 1950.

HD: 1950. O.K. Well I think that's the last thing we need to cover. Thank you very much.

MI: Oh, you're welcome.

End of interview.
Interview Consent Form
Jefferson School Oral History Project
Preservation Piedmont, Charlottesville, Virginia

The Jefferson School Oral History Project is conducted by Preservation Piedmont as part of an ongoing program to support preservation of the Jefferson School.

The purpose of the interview is to collect the stories of those affiliated with Jefferson School in order to document and preserve the history of the site for the benefit of current Charlottesville residents and future generations. Material developed from the interview will be shared with the Charlottesville community through publication of a booklet, a video documentary of the interviews, and a conference.

Copies of the transcriptions and other materials derived from these interviews will be donated to the Albemarle County Historical Society, and The Carter G. Woodson Institute for African and African American Studies at the University of Virginia.

It is also hoped that a museum will be established at the Jefferson School where material gathered from this oral history project will provide a permanent exhibit interpreting the history of the Jefferson School and its role in the community.

In support of this program:

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Interviewee: ____________________________ Date: 8/31/02

Interviewer: ____________________________ Date: 8/31/02

(name)
(address)
Interview with
Theodore R. Inge, Jr.

Interviewer: Elizabeth Howard
Date: August 31, 2002
Location: Omni Hotel
Charlottesville, Virginia

Transcribed: May 16, 2003
By: Liz Sargent

Proofed: June 27, 2004
By: Jacky Taylor

[This transcript has been reviewed by Mr. Inge, who has corrected some of the spelling, and grammar. Additional notes provided by Mr. Inge are included in brackets.]

TI: My name is Theodore R. Inge, Jr., son of Theodore Inge who was born here in Charlottesville in 1901. And my father was the son of George Pinkney Inge who was the proprietor of Inge’s Grocery, 333 West Main Street. I was born and reared in East Orange, New Jersey.

EH: I’m Elizabeth Howard by way of I.D. and this is August 31, 2002. And, by way of introduction, I’m working on a film about Rebecca McGinness so I was interested in her as well.

TI: McGinness? Yes.

EH: Did you ever know her?

TI: Well, I used to come down here just about every other summer. It was like an exchange of children. My uncle would send my cousins up to Jersey one year, and then I would come down, and my sister would come down, to Charlottesville and spend time. When they came up to New Jersey they would probably go to camp or something like that. And that’s what transpired. And I used to spend a lot of time here, and I used to also work in my grandfather’s store a lot.

EH: Where did you live in New Jersey?

TI: East Orange. I was born and reared in East Orange.

EH: Do you still live in that area?
TI: Yes, I now live in Freehold Township, New Jersey, which is probably about forty-five miles south of East Orange.

EH: This project is somewhat focused on Jefferson School.

TI: Yes.

EH: So, do you have memories or associations with the school that you can share?

TI: Well, when I used to come down here, I used to have an attitude because when they showed me that Jefferson was a high school I couldn't believe it. It was so diminutive, so small, it was nothing compared with the high school that I attended. I attended a Group IV School in New Jersey called East Orange High School, and we were super academically as well as on the athletic fields. We were big time. And when I used to come down here and see this little school, I'd say "How in the world do these kids make it?" You know? I just felt like I had so much above these kids, it's not funny. But the thing that I found about Jefferson High School was the fact that they were very well nourished by the administrative staff as well as their teachers. You know, to be working under a handicap in a segregated type of system, I think they did outstanding work. And I still have a lot of allegiance to this area because of the fact that I felt that they achieved so much with so little; I sometimes feel much more accepted here than I did at my own school in East Orange.

My father did not have the opportunity to attend Jefferson High School because there was no high school for people of color at the time. My father was born in 1901. He left the area after a primary education and was schooled in St. Louis, Missouri—Sumner High School—and he matriculated from there to University of Minnesota which he attended for eight years, four of which were undergraduate work, and then he did his medical work at University of Minnesota.

EH: A doctor, physician?

TI: He was an M.D., yes.

EH: Can you describe the [Jefferson] school as you remember it to me? Or did you go in it?

TI: I used to go into the classrooms to see... I'd make comparisons between what was presented to them, and compared it to what I had been presented in a so-called superior type of surrounding. But, as I said previously, I just felt that they had a lot more going because they took advantage of the situation. They were much more interested in the well-being of the children, as opposed to being in a larger school, a so-called integrated type of system. I just felt they got a lot more out of it.

EH: Can you give me an example or a story of how you felt that was true that the more hands-on...?
TI: Because if there was a problem, they made sure that these kids were aware of the necessity of a high school education. O.K.? Whereas in New Jersey, we took it for granted that we were going to achieve, you know. But, the thing is, they were not necessarily interested in counseling us towards college prep courses in New Jersey, whereas here they said “This is one way out; this is one way of achieving your aims and your goals and aspirations and what have you.” Whereas up there, in many instances there was denial. They did not want you to matriculate in college prep courses. They certainly wanted you on the football field, on the track, and what have you. But when it came to associating with people other than yourself or your kind, that just didn’t happen. I almost felt like when I was in East Orange, New Jersey, it was like it was Mississippi up north. That’s how I felt about it.

EH: And what can you...can you explain that? Was there was a sort of natural segregation?

TI: Ah, it was a natural... it was a selective segregation. They wanted you to know that basically you’re not going to mingle, you had separate canteens. We had Club Martinez (blacks), and Club Utopia (whites) they called them. And they closed the swimming pool rather than have blacks and whites swimming together. My father was instrumental in at least attempting to see that you could compete, you know, in the swimming pool. We had this Olympic size pool. I’ve only seen that pool once. They always used to hide the pool and use it to basically store football equipment and things of that sort. I wasn’t even aware of the fact that there was a swimming pool there until I saw it one day, and lo-and-behold it was there. You know? I think my father was very fortunate in that he was able to go to St. Louis to get an education. And he went to a very fine school. I have seen work that he had done in terms of preparation for school subject matter, and it was excellent. Latin, genetics, all types of things. As a matter of fact, he entered a fraternity called Omega Psi Phi, of which I am a member, in 1921, at University of Minnesota. O.K.? Omega Psi Phi was founded in 1911. Alright, so that’s ten years after the founding of the fraternity. And I joined Omega Psi Phi because my father joined after one of the counselors [Greer from Sumner H.S.] on the staff there wrote the history of Omega Psi Phi and my father was very much influenced by going into the fraternity. Thus their reason for founding that chapter for the fraternity at the University of Minnesota. Roy Wilkens and two of my father’s brothers, Hutch Inge and Fred Inge, also attended the University of Minnesota, and they founded the chapter there.

EH: Do you remember how old you were when you first went to Jefferson School to visit? What the circumstances might have been?

TI: I must have probably been somewhere around fourteen years old, something like that.

EH: And you were visiting here for the first time?

TI: No, I wasn’t visiting for the first time. You see the only reason that I went over there was because my cousins were in school at the time. O.K.? That might have been earlier because I think at one time there was Jefferson Elementary [EH suggests Graded] Graded School. I know I had gone over there also.
EH: So you went with your cousins?
TI: Yes.

EH: You actually went to the classes with them?
TI: Yes.

EH: Can you describe a class, or remember any specific class or teacher?
TI: I remember a teacher who taught math. I can't think of his name.

EH: The man?
TI: Yes. I can't think of his name. My aunt taught over at Jefferson.

EH: And who was that?
TI: Her name was Gertrude Inge. She taught there. And she died up in Philadelphia at the age of around 95 years old.

EH: Do you remember her talking about the school? Any of her recollections?
TI: Oh, yes.

EH: What were some of those?
TI: Well the fact that she really cared for the kids a lot. A lot of the students who attended the school often talk about Gertrude Inge, and the fine job that she had done. As a matter of fact, there was a woman that I talked to since I have been here at this particular reunion. She indicated that my aunt had basically taken her under the wing and shown her the ropes and things. And that she had never forgotten her. I said, "Well you know she passed away in Philadelphia, and she had retired from the system here, and she moved north and not too far from where I live, and she retired from a second job, which was at the Philadelphia Ship Yard."

EH: Who was the lady here, do you remember, who had been the student? Do you know who it would have been?
TI: Was it Barnett? I think her name was Barnett.

EH: Well, when she took her under her wing, what was that? Was she saying you should go to college, you're bright...?
TI: Oh, no. She was in a teaching capacity. O.K.? What she basically did was lead her through, give her praises, tell her what to expect. Helped her. I remember Mr. Duncan
also. Because... the Duncans... Mr. Duncan was the Principal of Jefferson High School, and they lived maybe about a block from Anderson Street. I used to go to 815 Anderson Street, which was where my uncle had a home. And that's where I stayed. And I knew all of the Duncans, Bee Duncan, the whole family.

EH: Can you describe the Principal? What kind of Principal was he?

TI: Well, he took care of business. You know? I guess he was really ahead of his time as a principal. And I know that when my grandfather first came here from Danville, Virginia, that he went as a teacher for a while until he established his store in 1891. That was Inge's Grocery, and it was in existence for a goodly number of years until probably the '70s.

EH: It was quite a landmark!

TI: It was a landmark. And to me it still is a landmark. Every time I go by there all I can think about is how my grandmother used to ring that bell, you know, for dinner. I'd run downstairs and we'd have dinner. I have a lot of fond memories about 333 West Main Street.

EH: I still recall Inge's Store instead of the Awful Arthur's. [they laugh] Well, back to Mr. Duncan. Do you remember anything that he said or did, or just physically describe him? What did he look like?

TI: Mr. Duncan... my recollection was that he didn't have very much hair on his head. Even in his younger years he didn't. I remember his wife nursing one of those children that they had. I'm trying to think of how many children they had. They had something like four or five children. And, like I said, they used to live very close to Anderson Street. And, I remember him being kind of authoritative. You know? I guess that's probably out of necessity because of the fact that he was a principal. And I guess he carried it over. But I guess in his off hours, he was just like any other man.

EH: Well, you know in those days, they could do more corporal punishment. Do you think people were afraid to go to the office?

TI: I know that the people did not want to go to the office. Let's just put it like that. That's what my recollection is.

EH: I interviewed Mrs. McGinness. She said the boys particularly were scared to go to the office. I wonder if this was Mr. Duncan she was talking about?

TI: I think probably what they were talking about was Mr. Duncan. Because he would kind of lay into you. From what I understand.

EH: Do you remember athletics at the school? Did your cousins...were they involved in athletics?
TI: My cousin was. He was kind of big, but he couldn’t play any ball. I shouldn’t say this on camera but he was not a football player. [laughs] He really wasn’t.

EH: But you were talking about in New Jersey versus here. What sort of athletic teams were there here, do you remember?

TI: I’ll tell you. I used to come down here. I thought I could play some basketball. You know? Outside they used to have some courts in the middle of the school. You know on the outside? Like a playground type of thing? And I remember playing ball against Roosevelt Brown. Remember Roosevelt Brown? He played with the Giants? He went to Morgan State? I was just playing one on one against him. You know? Just to see where he was coming from. I shot very well, then.

EH: Was that here?

TI: Oh, right here in Charlottesville.

EH: What was he doing here?

TI: Because he is a graduate of Jefferson. Did you know that?

EH: No.

TI: Yes. See, he was a graduate of Jefferson High School.

EH: Really?

TI: Yes.

EH: Well, tell us a little bit about him.

TI: From the New York Giants. Are you familiar with them?

EH: Not really. I’m not a…

TI: He was all-Pro. Roosevelt Brown attended Morgan State in Baltimore. And he was a good ball player. Right now he has had some physical difficulties with his legs and things of that sort, but Roosevelt Brown was a very fine ball player.

EH: When was this?

TI: Oh, boy, this goes way back.

EH: Just generally, what era…?

TI: This goes back probably to the ‘50s.
EH: [whispers] That’s not that far.

TI: Well, yes, it’s... to the ’50s. That’s what my recollection was. And he had a sculptured body. I’m telling you, he was sculptured. He had this small waist, and a V shape. He just, he was very well sculpted.

EH: So this was after he’d gone and came back, and was doing a pick-up game or something?

TI: Yes. We were just playing out there. That’s what my recollection is. Anyway, the Jefferson School bands and what have you were very competitive. You know, it’s too bad that a lot of people in the City did not have the opportunity to see the band. You know? Mr. Paige and what have you? I still can’t remember that darn math teacher. But I was impressed with him.

EH: Why? What impressed you about him?

TI: The fact that he was able to get through to some of these kids in terms of what I call abstract thinking. Like algebra and things of that sort. I know when I was taking algebra in East Orange they just gave me an abstract and didn’t teach it properly. And I was just turned off by it. You know? So, basically what you have to do is you have to show the kids that this is really not very complex, you know? It’s very simple as long as you take the right track. You know? It’s nothing to be afraid of. I always said the most complex subject matter can be learned as long as you have somebody who’s willing to teach it. And anybody of average intelligence can learn the most complex of theory, including physics, calculus, or anything! You know? If the teacher or the instructor is aware of what the subject matter is and knows it well, and how to present it properly, anybody of normal intelligence should be able to learn it.

EH: This is like in tenth grade? I’m thinking that’s when I took algebra.

TI: I took it in the ninth grade.

EH: You were smarter than I am!

TI: No, I had CP (college prep) courses, but still, you know, trig and things of that sort? And we didn’t have calculus at the time. But we did have plain geometry, solid geometry, things of that sort. I just had it on the tip of my tongue... but I can’t think of his name!

EH: But he was just very patient...

TI: Very patient!

EH: And made it accessible and so forth...

TI: And I remember the French teacher, too that used to live on Anderson Street. But I can’t think of her name! [Mrs. Byers] I’m getting up there too, you know!
EH: And that was...

TI: She was very good. She was a very good teacher. She died maybe four years ago, but I can’t think of her name.

EH: Again, she was good because…?

TI: She was very good because she was patient. Plus she knew the language. She was very efficient. She was exceedingly efficient. And that’s something else, too. I found out that because it was a segregated type of system, it did not mean that you received an inferior education. O.K.? Now the whole legal aspect of the thing was separate but equal. But it never was equal. It was quite naturally separate. As a matter of fact when we were on the bus ride today, I said, and “Wasn’t that Lane High School over there?” And they said “Yes.” And I said “And you’re going to tell me that that compared in terms of the physical structure with Jefferson High School? No way!” But I dare say that they didn’t… that they were no more nurtured than the students at Jefferson. The students at Jefferson definitely had a leg up in terms of having people who thought highly of them. And I think that’s very important. If you can tell a student that you can do something, they’ll do it. You know? If you tell them that they have the capabilities and the ability to perform, they are going to be able to do it. And they are going to strive that much stronger to achieve.

EH: Can you give me an example of how that played out with your friends or somebody talking about that or even seeing it through, perhaps, in helping them keep going, or…?

TI: Well, I had a friend, we called him “Bootney” his name is Monroe. He attended Hampton, and I attended Hampton. He wound up becoming head of the Architecture Department at Southern University. So those things do happen. Plus, Bootney is a very good tennis player. He was CIAA tennis champ, he wound up being seeded in the ATA, which is the American Tennis Association, and what have you.

EH: And he had gone to Jefferson?

TI: Yes!

EH: And what was his name again?

TI: Bootney Monroe. We called him Bootney Monroe.

EH: And he was a friend of your cousin’s? Or you knew him when you visited?

TI: I knew him, yes. Chuck Chisholm. He wound up in New York. He was a draftsman. He was also at Hampton with me. He has since come back here. But there’s a few people, you know? Mr. Duncan’s daughter. She attended… she now lives up in the Maryland area. And I don’t know if she has a doctorate or not, but I think she does.
EH: What was the class size, in comparison to what you had in New Jersey?

TI: Well, my senior class was something like 350 people. I’ll tell you, they have a combined number of people who come to the reunions of Jefferson High School that don’t even exceed 300. You know? I think the most I’ve ever seen here is 100.

EH: So when you went into the math class or the French class, how many students would be in a room? Compared with what you were used to?

TI: Well, we had so many different classes. And so many different types of maths!

EH: But I mean did it feel smaller to you?

TI: Oh, yes. The classes were definitely smaller because quite naturally you had a smaller population, school population. Like I said, Group Four from New Jersey is numerically...

EH: A top school system?

TI: Yes. That’s why they call it Group Four. Because it’s a large school. You know? So the classes are large. And you did have an abundance of courses to select from, including many languages. As well as math and sciences. They were very well-equipped also. The labs and everything were well-equipped. I don’t recall the labs being as well-equipped down here. I do recall the fact that they had that stage and that auditorium which I thought was just sub-standard. But I still think that the students got a lot out of it because of the preparation it required. If they had a skit to put on they still had to prepare for it just like anybody would at a larger school. That’s the only way I can look at it. I think they squeezed the most out of what they had.

EH: In the smaller class size, were there any teacher aides, or did they get more individual attention?

TI: I think they had more teacher aid. They had lots of attention from the teachers. But I don’t remember there being any teacher’s aides in there. Whereas in the larger schools they do have teacher’s aides. Although in my school they didn’t at the time. But I know that since then most of the large schools have teacher’s aides, and everything especially in classes such as physics. I know that in the larger schools like in the Newark area, that’s up there in New Jersey, they have aides.

EH: But you don’t remember that at Jefferson?

TI: I don’t remember that at Jefferson.

EH: But somehow... Was there order in the classroom? What was the tone in the classroom?
TI: It was order. I think it was pretty much demanded, that’s my recollection. It was expected of you to be there to learn, and therefore you had to concentrate and put forth maximal effort. You know? And that fosters a learning environment.

EH: Was it fun there at all? What was fun?

TI: They had fun. I know they had fun. I know they had fun in the band when they practiced, and things of that sort. I know that Mr. Paige used to come up with these very fine ideas where you had lights on helmets and things such as that. And I do know too that whenever they did establish football at Jefferson High School they had the hand-me-downs from Lane High School, or from UVA; I know that they didn’t have first-hand equipment. You know? It was hand-me-downs.

EH: And how did your friends feel about that?

TI: Well, they made the most of what they had. O.K.? You do with what you have. I don’t think it was fair. I think that limits you in terms of your ability to want to perform. I would think it would built up hostility. If it were me, I would have been very hostile. And I know I told a high school teacher of mine, I said “You know I think I want to go down South because I’m really not living up to my potential here.” He said, “Now, Teddy Inge, you can’t go down South. There’s no way in the world because you don’t have the attitude for that.” I was thinking about going to Rock Castle, which is a military academy down here to get some discipline, I felt that I was undisciplined. I felt that I was in an environment in New Jersey that wasn’t conducive to learning, and I was getting caught up in that hassle, you know. So, I....

EH: Sounds too much of a free for all...

TI: Well, not necessarily a free for all, but just... we had so much more exposure. Here you didn’t have those exposures. Obviously the parents were more protective, plus the people in the school system were very protective. You know? They wanted these kids to perform because they realized that was their way of achieving and getting out of certain cycles. I’ve always thought about what some of these people could have realized if they had the benefit of a secondary education. Because up to 1930 what kind of livelihood could they earn? What could they achieve in life? If you don’t have a secondary education what are you going to do? The feeling was that it wasn’t necessary to educate people of color. You know I’d be hot. I’d be upset about the whole thing.

EH: What about your cousins and your friends. Were they angry, or what was their attitude?

TI: Well, they kind of went along with the program. I didn’t. I really didn’t. Although I was an outsider, I was very reluctant to even say anything to them. I was going to say something at the breakfast this morning. I was going to say... in the past I’ve said things. Because I always used to say how many Theodore R. Inges were there who could have been physicians, who could have been politicians, who could have been attorneys? You know? How many of them were overlooked? How many were by-passed? How many of
them never achieved their goals as a result of the system that was based on subservience and what have you? You know? You don’t have very much high self-esteem when you are told that you’re not expected to perform, you shouldn’t be goal oriented, don’t worry about it, you know? Your pie in the sky will come later. Well I don’t believe that. The pie in the sky doesn’t come until you make it. Until you achieve.

EH: What do you think the role of the school was in that community? I mean was Jefferson looked to as sort of a beacon in this regard?

TI: Oh, absolutely. Can you imagine a child who goes to high school for the first time. First time they’ve ever had the opportunity to go to a high school? I’m sure that those that graduated in that first class of Jefferson were just ingratiated with the fact that they had gone to high school. I remember my grandfather went to Hampton. And he really didn’t know how to read or any of that stuff. You know? It was founded by General Armstrong, Union Army. And he—I saw a letter—I was privy to a letter that I read in California when I went out to one of my uncle’s funerals, and he had written his brother and told him that he had seen so many things, and he had learned so much since he’d been at Hampton. Well, Hampton has really come a long way since, I mean, because now they have a doctoral program, and nuclear physics, and things of that sort, I mean we are big time. You know? We can compete with anybody. And that’s the truth. So, it’s almost like saying, I have done, I can do, I am capable of doing, and that builds up my self-esteem. And also is passed on to the siblings. To younger people. That you can achieve if given the opportunity. You have to have the shot, you have to have the opportunity. If you don’t have the opportunity, you are never going to achieve anything. And I think that’s what part of the game was anyway. Even during the slavery period, we weren’t supposed to read books or any of that sort. You know? Keep them ignorant. Don’t let them speak a language. Don’t feed them properly, don’t nourish them. That type of mentality, that type of attitude. And that hurts me. That hurts me, and if it hurts me, it should hurt them because they really lived it more so than I did. I thought that I had the opportunities up there, but when I really found out what was going on, that I was being rejected primarily because of the fact that I was of color and that type of thing... It hurts. And even with all that my father achieved when he finally finished medical school, and went up to Jersey, there were a lot of hospitals that didn’t want to give him opportunities. You know. And he was a smart man. He was appointed to West Point out of Missouri, which is unheard of, but if he had gone to West Point, you know what would have happened to him? Don’t you? He would have received the silent treatment. So he made the smart move and went into medicine.

EH: What type of doctor was he? What did he practice?

TI: He practiced obstetrics, GP and was a surgeon. That type of thing. And he was asked to teach at the University of Minnesota, but he didn’t want to do that.

EH: Did he talk about Jefferson? Or...

TI: Well, he was very glad it took place. Like I said he didn’t go to Jefferson.
EH: But he went to the Graded School?

TI: He probably did, but I don’t remember him talking about it. I had an aunt who taught there. Her name was um... oh, gee, she was the sister of my grandmother. My aunt Julia. She taught there. She taught my father, as a matter of fact. And she said that he didn’t have to study. He was the only one who didn’t have to study. She said he didn’t have to study and everything just came to him very easily. You know? And I always say it’s too bad that he didn’t have the opportunity to go to the University of Virginia since they lived right down the street. He performed well at Minnesota, why couldn’t he not have performed well at the University of Virginia?

EH: Did she talk about the school? Do you remember anything she said about it?

TI: Oh, yes, my aunt Julia. Yes. She was diminutive in stature. And she lived to be in like her 90s.

EH: Was her name Inge as well?

TI: No. No it wasn’t. It was Julia Melton.

EH: Nelson?

TI: No, Melton. She taught in the Albemarle County system. That’s what my recollection is. She also taught here in Charlottesville. Like I said, she taught my father, and several of my father’s brothers and sisters.

EH: And you think she taught him at the Jefferson Graded School?

TI: Yes.

EH: You don’t remember any stories about that do you? What the school was like? The conditions of the school?

TI: She just said that he was very smart. She said he was very smart.

EH: Did you ever attend a graduation at Jefferson?

TI: No, I didn’t because it was in conflict, with when I was in school.

EH: I’m trying to get a little more sense of what it was like to go there, if there were any other classrooms, do you remember... was there a cafeteria? Where did the people eat? Do you remember anything like that?

TI: A cafeteria? There was a cafeteria. That’s what my recollection is, I don’t remember having had privy to eat in there, you know. I was particular about where I ate [laughter].
EH: And probably still are... [laughs]

TI: Because you know cafeterias leave a little bit to be desired, but my recollection is that there was a cafeteria.

EH: And where did the band practice, up in that auditorium?

TI: The band practice? They used to practice up at Washington Park, that’s what my recollection is. I recall it was Washington Park.

EH: Do you remember whether their equipment was... what it was like?

TI: I don’t think it was like Lane High School had, let’s put it like that. It was basically, probably hand me-downs and that type of thing. Mr. Paige was a very good musician.

EH: What was his instrument?

TI: I don’t remember. I don’t remember what the instrument was. But I do know that he was very demanding. And the kids talk about him to this day...about Mr. Paige.

EH: This was probably in the ’50s, what we’re talking mostly, your visits to the school? Is that right?

TI: Umm, late ’40s, primarily.

EH: And the school wasn’t that old. But you just felt that it wasn’t up to the par of what you were used to?

TI: Well the school was an extension primarily of the Jefferson Elementary School, O.K.? So it was small compared to the standards I was used to. And I couldn’t understand how they could compare the two schools, how they could say, well you’re getting the same thing that we’re giving the kids over at Lane. That’s just not true, it wasn’t true.

EH: But a lot of them went on.

TI: I lot of them went on. You know a lot of the ones that I knew, I saw at Hampton. They were in school with me at Hampton. Chuck Chisholm and guys like that.

EH: Do you remember them talking, when they got there, they felt they were up to par?

TI: Oh yes, they were up to par.

EH: Do you remember stories that they had about Jefferson?
TI: My wife is a graduate, she’s back here now. She’s a graduate of Jefferson High School, you know, and she did well. She was a music major, she taught for thirty-five years up in New Jersey.

EH: Well this Mrs. McGinness who I’m working on a film about, her brother and sister were sent to New Jersey, I think after the elementary school stopped here, because there was no high school, and she went to Hampton in 1910 I guess, she lived to be 107.

TI: Mrs. McGinness? Yes.

EH: At that point there was no high school and if you wanted to continue you had to go elsewhere. And that’s what her brother, I think they went up to the err. I can’t think where it was in New Jersey. Probably in your general area.

TI: Yes, I was East Orange. That was Essex(?) county.

EH: I think that may be where they were.

TI: Might be up in the Passaic area?

EH: No, I think it was in that area... But she lived over here on Brown Street. I know she talked a lot about the church being the center of the community. In many ways, it was social and morally and every other way the center, but I’m wondering if the church, I mean the school, had other capacities. Was it a meeting place? Did other activities take place there?

TI: Well the church played a very important role in Charlottesville. I know when I used to come here I used to have to go to church all the time. Even when I was courting my wife, whenever I came in from Hampton I was expected to say something in church, with Reverend McCurry. I had to say something. “Oh, I see Ted Inge back there... won’t you say something Mr. Inge?” And I had to get up and say something, you know?

EH: What kind of things? About the world?

TI: About the world, about the fact that I was doing well in school, that I was in school, you know, that type of thing. I mean it was something to be in college at the time. Everybody didn’t have the opportunity to go to college. So that was basically very much what was going on. And they were proud of the fact that some of their youth were achieving, at least were goal oriented and were getting an education beyond high school, you know? They only went to high school eleven years you know, here in Charlottesville, whereas in most systems it was a twelve-year program. So all the students were like 16 years old and some of them were really not mature enough to be in college. Like my wife was only 16 years old when she went to Hampton, something like that.

EH: Do you know why that was?
TI: Yes, because the powers that were didn’t want them to have the 12 years, that’s all. It was not equal, is what I’m saying. It was unequal in terms of the number of years that you were exposed to secondary education.

EH: So were their courses just cut off or were they squeezed into the eleven years?

TI: Apparently they were squeezed in to three years. And that’s really not possible as far as I’m concerned, unless you have some exceedingly intelligent people. You really had to grasp the material and the information pretty quickly, and I mean what is the retention-rate going to be? But my wife did very well in music. Music was a very difficult course at Hampton, believe me. You had to learn all the instruments, composition, transposing everything, very difficult. We had a man there who was French who was very good, excellent. I want to push Hampton too, Hampton was a dynamite school. Very good school.

EH: What was the social life, as you saw it, at Jefferson, at the school, and then as it spilled out into the community?

TI: That’s something that was interesting. They really didn’t have that many places to go to in Charlottesville, O.K.? They’d go to the Paramount from time to time, and I can’t think of the others—the Lafayette Theater, but everything was upstairs, this type of thing. An ice-cream parlor—I think Dr. Jackson had a place—and that was basically it. There was no place to go.

EH: So where did people go?

TI: Washington Park. They could go to Washington Park to some of those little dances and parties, such as I said, and then they would have home parties.

EH: Was there socializing at the school itself?

TI: I’m sure there was. I was never involved in any of them because quite naturally I was up in New Jersey.

EH: But did you hear about dances or proms?

TI: Oh yes. They had dances and proms. Where, I don’t know. More than likely it had to be within the complex or the edifice of the school.

EH: Were you aware of extra-curricular clubs that they had: music clubs, language clubs, year books, I don’t know?

TI: Yes, they had those. And they had the year book; they did editorializing and they prepared the books, as I recall. I’ve seen some of them. Between my wife and my cousin Tom, I’ve seen them. They did the same things that everybody else did in the other
schools although not to the same degree or the same extent because they had limited funds to deal with.

EH: Do you remember any kind of stories Tom told you about the school?

TI: Well, kind of funny stuff.

EH: Can we hear some funny stuff?

TI: Well, some of them really can’t be said on screen.

EH: Well, the semi-clean ones.

TI: I know they used to get behind my wife and twist her hair to put a voodoo curse on her, and my wife would get very upset about that type of thing. It would scare her to death you know. I used to come back here a lot and talk especially since it was so close to Hampton. I used to come up here to get a meal at either my grandfather’s or my mother… my eventual mother-in-law and father-in-law, at her house. My brothers would drive. The food was amazing. Everybody was very hospitable, you know? Southern hospitality is something considerably different than you have in the North, I’ll say that about the South. They’re very gracious when it comes to hospitality, and as I said before, I used to be teased about when I would come here, because they would say, you know you don’t speak like everybody else, so you’re not from around here. I’d say, “No, I’m not from around here.” Although I don’t consider myself having a Northern accent, people would say, “Well, you have a little accent.” I’d say, “Yes I do.” But my sister-in-law used to always think, “Well, you have a funny accent compared to us.” My wife has never lost her accent, she’s retained her accent over the years. But I still feel that I have an attachment to Jefferson because of the fact that even when I come here now, they basically accept me as if I’m one of their classmates. I remain absolutely in awe of the fact that at such a small edifice they were able to have such strong feelings about the nurturing. That’s the thing. It’s the nurturing of these kids. I’m calling 70 year old people kids, but at the time they were kids and it has carried over into their older years, into the autumn of their lives. You know? And it really impresses me, and it kind of stirs me too. And I wanted to say something this morning then I said “No, I don’t want to take over this thing, because I’ve said things in the past about how when I come down here I almost feel like I’m a Charlottesvillian because it’s part of my heritage.” My father is from here, my mother is from Canada, and I dare say that Charlottesville has come a long way. They still have a long way to go, but I’ll say this, they have at least attempted to do some things and to better things for all the people. I think that they’re much more democratic in the process. I think they’re much more humane than they used to be, they’re much more honest and accepting of the fact that, yes, there were misdeeds that were imposed on people. That it wasn’t correct, that it was wrong, and we’re truly sorry. We’ll try to make some amends. Thus, the reason for you even speaking to us today. You know?

EH: Well, I think it’s important. That school is very central to the history of this community and a lot of us would like to see it remain.
TI: I would like to see it remain. I’d like to see it refurbished and held in some high esteem so that people can always go back and say, “Hey this is part of our legacy. This is part of a legacy of what transpired in Charlottesville at one time, and it was a good legacy, but then in the same token it was a legacy that people in Charlottesville should really be ashamed of that they did not have that school until 1930.”

EH: The irony is that such strength came out of it

TI: Absolutely, there was a lot of strength. To be able to achieve and to be able to have such strong feelings, such a small building, you know? Compared to what everybody else had access to. That’s the thing that I’m so amazed at. It’s a fact though. With all of the negativism in terms of the structure itself and making comparisons, they still felt good about themselves. They felt strong about what they achieved. They were least expected to achieve and there were really no favors as far as I’m concerned because prior to that they didn’t even have access to anything. What the heck did you do after you finished primary school? What could you do? Really? And to me that’s an indictment and that’s almost like it was having a curse imposed upon you. You were programmed for failure until Jefferson High School. Right? And then Burley came about. Now what is it Jefferson, Charlottesville High School, hey! And I understand you’re just as strong as you could possibly could be in terms of a school, in terms of a commitment, in terms of being together. I think togetherness is really important. But when we had this separatist type of mentality in charge of thinking, and I never did by the way, I was always upset with that separatist crap and nonsense. Especially when I pledged allegiance to the flag on a daily basis. I questioned it from the first day I ever attended school... What’s all this about? That’s not what’s going on! I questioned it, I’ve been questioning it ever since. I’ve been questioning it my whole life.

EH: Was it just the size of the building or what was it?

[Turns over the tape.]

TI: It was so small. That’s the thing.

EH: It wasn’t the condition?

TI: No.

EH: What was the condition of the building?

TI: The school was immaculate. It was in very good shape. It’s deteriorated somewhat. O.K.? But when I used to see it, it was very well maintained. Exceedingly well maintained. You know? There was pride in it. In the little bit of things that they had. You know? And that to me shows the fact that the kids did learn a heck of a lot, that you have to have love for what you have, and work with it. You know? A lot of people would be unwilling to do that. They would have an attitude like I would have had an attitude. I would have been...
fighting it the whole time. Separate? Come on. You can’t possibly achieve separate. You know? But they did.

EH: Well, like women’s education is a big argument that they do better by themselves. I mean may-be that was the sort of skewed thinking?

TI: But that’s a gender thing!

EH: Yes, it certainly is.

TI: That’s totally different. Suppose you had a gender and a racial thing?

EH: Not good.

TI: No.

EH: You told me something about the math teacher and the French teacher, but is there anything you can tell me, or any examples of something specific in the classroom that you thought, “That’s the way it should be?” Or even negative? Any stories?

TI: I’ll be honest with you, no. It’s not that I attended, it’s not that I went over to the high school every time I came down here. I didn’t. I primarily went over there several times to basically make comparisons, and to see just what was achieved there. You know? That was pretty much it. And I was astounded at what they had to work with, and what they got out of it. That’s the thing that strikes me to this day, to the very core of me.

EH: It was taken seriously.

TI: It was taken seriously. We might have very little, but we do quite a bit with what we have. And I think that’s the most that you can ever ask for out of anybody, is to work with what you have until you can do better. And when you can do better, then you are in more of a line to excel. And to basically do your own thing, you know?

EH: And what was it that you did? What was your own thing?

TI: Well, I should have gone into medicine. But I was rebellious. And I refused to go into it. I would have had my father’s practice and my uncle’s practice in Newark. And I would have been a good physician. But, I didn’t want to be told what to go into. I took pre-med and things of that sort, but I wouldn’t go into it. So I wound up in analytical pharmaceutical microbiology, what they call environmental protection and space, and chemistry. And, I was also in space administration and facilities control management.

EH: Were you an administrator, or what was your job?

TI: I was an administrator. When I first started in the field of chemistry, I was a bench chemist and set up labs and things of that sort. I set up lab procedures for working with
animals, primarily instrumentation, chemistry. Analytical work for antibiotics, all types of fields, infrared determinations, spectral photometric determinations, things of that sort.

EH: And where did you... are you still working?

TI: No, I'm retired. I've been retired. I retired early. [laughs] Quite early. I retired probably when I was 50-some years old. Because I was disillusioned... I got turned off by, well, supposedly having to train somebody else in a slot that I thought I should have had, and I kind of like got a little angry and said "Hey, I gotta get out of here or I'm going to explode." I did. Because I was looking for a VP-ship. I wanted to be a vice president, and when I thought that wasn't going to happen, I said I better get out of here.

EH: So what would I give you as a title? It sounds like you did a lot of different things, you were an administrator in the scientific field? I don't know?

TI: Well, I wound up in the pharmaceutical field as a director of manufacturing for a pharmaceutical house in New York called Nysco Laboratories. We were the largest pharmaceutical house in the country. Largest private label in the country. Thousands of formulas. We had a process called the Nyscap process which was a dialysis process with the little pellets that are in capsules with a time disintegration apparatus. And what we did was add an active ingredient to it, and it was to be dispersed over a 24-hour period. And we had a means for doing that. We did the encapsulation, we did the manufacturing, we did the process. We did it for international firms. All over the world—Yugoslavia, Japan, Germany, what have you. All over the world.

EH: So your interests were sci...

TI: We were very renowned.

EH: So your interest in science was early on.

TI: It was early on.

EH: So that's why it's interesting that you would remember the math tea... Do you remember the science? Did you go to any science labs at Jefferson? Do you remember?

TI: I don't remember. I really didn't get heavy into it until after I finished college. I was a science major in college, but I learned more science outside after I finished. I learned certain procedures at a lab in Newark called Rivertell Laboratories where I set up a lab there. You know with cultures and things of that sort, what they call microbiological determinations where you can have zones of inhibition? You take a millimicrometer dialyses processes, O.K., and you can determine as a result of the zone of inhibition of the material that's being dropped into a tube and dispersed on an auger plate, and you can set up a standard, a curve with that. And you can determine when, mathematically, the amount of material based on what the suggested label reading is. If you micro-cut the thing down, you can make determinations based on that, you can determine the amount of
dosage and what have you. And that’s what I was involved in. It’s very interesting work. I liked the work. But like I said, it’s a very transient field. When I think I’m getting stepped on, I’ll move on. I’m not going to be inhibited.

EH: This is a non-sequitor, but I was wondering when you came down here, and you visited the Inge family, if you could tell me a little bit about that, and their place in the community and the store, as sort of centerpiece for the community?

TI: Well, my grandfather was the first person of color to speak up at the University of Virginia. G.P. Inge. Like I said he came here from Danville, Virginia, and I guess the day of Emancipation he headed up, he left the plantation. He said I’m getting out of here, brother. That’s it. Free, free at last, Thank God Almighty, I’m free at last. And he wound up in Charlottesville. He bought that residence, at least that piece of property, and established Inge’s Grocery in 1891. Apparently he was very highly thought of, I know that he was industrious, he had nine children—he had ten children—one of which was a twin. The twin died. My aunt Laverne’s twin. The youngest died at 80 years old. The oldest at 101. Yeah. He just died in April. He was an M.D. He also went to the University of Minnesota. Two of the brothers graduated from the School of Pharmacy. My father’s the only one who did all of his work there at Minnesota. One, my uncle Fred, left the University of Minnesota and became a plant pathologist, a botanist. Somebody told me the other day that they thought he was the most outstanding of the botanists in the country, but he never got recognition. O.K.? And he had a doctorate out of Iowa State. Belonged to Sigma, which was a scientific society, and Hutch and Fred wound up with degrees in pharmacy. And they wanted to open up a place in Pennsylvania. It never materialized because my uncle Fred said the heck with that, I’m going to do something else. And it really upset my uncle.

I went up to Massachusetts to talk to my uncle to try and get some history, but he was too old. Out of it. He didn’t have the recall. And I should have gotten the history when he was younger. But when I went up there he was 101 years old. In New Bedford, it just didn’t happen. When I asked certain questions about Omega, whether or not they branded him, whether or not they were haz ing guys at that time, because I know that when I came through Omega, it was a terrible thing. They really put you through some paces. He showed me his brand which completely surprised me as I was unaware of this.

EH: Interesting, a lot of science in your family. A lot of science!

TI: Well, the Inges, the Inge plantation in Danville, I’ll put it—the master, let’s say the owner of the plantation, I might even call him a master, but anyway, that’s his term, but the owner of the plantation was an Inge because actually the name Inge comes from that, and he was a doctor. I found that out not too long ago. Thus, I think my interest is in medicine. I had another cousin who was a psychiatrist who was 15 years old when he came up to Newark University. He was 15 years old. And he was too young to be in school, so he came back to Texas. And he wound up matriculating at Texas Southern and he just died at about 75 years old. He used to come, like I said, he used to come up to New Jersey all the time, and we’d go swimming out on the shore and that type of thing.
And he was instrumental in establishing the first school, or at least hospital, in Michigan for child psychiatric care? You know?

**EH:** But was the store here more than a store?

**TI:** Oh, yeah. I'll tell you what it was. There was no place for people when they were traveling to stay. I'm talking about prominent people. Like Frederick Douglas or Booker T. or somebody like that. They stayed at the Inge House. O.K.?

**EH:** Now where was that. Was that part of the store?

**TI:** The residence, well there was the store, and then there was a door behind the counter that led into the residence, and there was a bedroom, there was a bathroom, there was an upstairs area, to the left there was a, to the left there was a bathroom, there was a huge living room with a fireplace, to the right there was another kind of sitting area. Remember there were nine kids there. Nine plus two is eleven. So there were eleven people there. They used to have a cow that they milked. A lot of chickens. I used to come down and behead a lot of them. Butcher them. So, I think for them to have sent all of those kids through school is astronomical. Only one of them didn't go through school, but he thought he was going to get a law degree on sitting... I can't remember the term, but you used to be able to get a law degree in Missouri doing that. But anyway...

**EH:** Well was it a place that people came to, almost like an inn it sounds like. People, you said, like Booker T. Washington stayed there.

**TI:** Yeah. As a matter of fact Booker T. and my grandfather were in school together at Hampton. And when I was out in California, this is interesting, when I was out in California, I saw some letters that my cousin had and there was a letter from Booker T. to my grandfather and it had the letterhead of the Tuskegee Institute on it, and it was asking my grandfather to help him found Tuskegee.

**EH:** Do you still have that?

**TI:** It's in California. It's in California with my cousin now. The Inges tried to turn over a whole trunkful of information to Hampton at one time, which was an institute then, it's a University now, but they wouldn't accept it, they didn't take it. Now it's been lost, so I don't know where it is now. I don't know where it is and that's unfortunate. It really is.

**EH:** So it was way beyond a store? It was really...

**TI:** It was way beyond a store. Because a lot of people used to come in for advice and things, and I remember at one time, I remember Truman driving by there. President Truman. And I took a picture. I had bought a Zeiss camera—I was a young kid then. I bought the camera in East Orange and I had it down here and I took a picture of Harry Truman in a motorcade passing the store, but I can't find that picture to this day! But people used to come there for advice, people came to sell their produce on credit, things of that sort. You
know? I mean he worked with the people, you know? But my grandfather demanded respect. I think he died in the late '40s, that's what my recollection is, the late '40s, or mid '40s, and then my uncle Tom took over the store. He was also a Hampton man. He took over the store until they closed it down in the '70s. Because you know you couldn't compete at that time. But I used to go out on a whole lot of the queries for the produce.

EH: Did he deliver?

TI: Did he deliver? Yes. We used to deliver.

EH: How did people get to school? Do you know? Do you know how they got there?

TI: This is something else I mentioned just the other day. I don’t ever remember my grandfather having a car. I don’t remember that. I do remember his saying that he used to deliver groceries by horse and buggy. I do know my uncle used to deliver stuff.

EH: In what?

TI: In a car! Because they had a car. But my grandfather, I don’t ever remember him having had a car. I’m going to ask my cousins whether or not he had a car! I don’t ever remember seeing a car that he had.

EH: What was the transportation to the school?

TI: They walked. That’s nothing new. I used to walk to high school in New Jersey! And my city was only four square miles, but 120,000 people lived there. East Orange. We had three high schools in East Orange.

EH: You’ve been very generous with your time. I just want to ask you about your wife. She’s being interviewed, but your impression of Jefferson by way of your wife was what?

TI: I met her down here. But I never said anything to her. You know. I didn’t take any interest in her until like junior or senior year in college. As a matter of fact we got married in college.

EH: Both at Hampton?

TI: Yeah.

EH: And you felt that, I mean, what was her impression of the school.

TI: She’s smart, she’s bright. And I don’t know if that’s just a result of genetics, or whether or not it was the result of her having attended, but she knew her French and stuff, you know? Like I said, music at Hampton was a very difficult endeavor. It’s a very difficult field. It was a five-year program at Hampton. Music.
EH: And she came prepared.

TI: She was ready. She had it together. She was young when she went, probably too young to be down there at the time, but...

EH: But she had you to take care of her!

TI: No, I didn’t start talking to her until like the advanced years at the school. I didn’t say anything to her in our junior years, when we were younger. She’s bright!

EH: Do you have children?

TI: I have a daughter. And when I went overseas, I didn’t see my daughter until she was a year old.

EH: You were in the service?

TI: I was in the service for a little while right after I came out of college. I was in the ROTC. I said I don’t want to go into the army. And a German teacher, Boris Nelson said, “you know Inge, you should take German, you never know when you’ll need it.” And I said “I don’t think I need German.” And the following year, where was I? Deutschland! I was in Germany. I was in Germany for a year and a half or something like that!

EH: Do you know what your actual address is? Because they’ve been asking for actual addresses. Would you mind giving us your street address.

TI: Do you want me to give it to you now?

EH: Yes.


EH: O.K.! Well thank you. Unless there’s something that I haven’t asked that you’d like to say that I’ve missed?

TI: I was here one other year. And there was a presentation or something like that. And I said some things, it was on a show, or something like that. And I never expected this, because I had decided to stay in the background, you know? This is their thing, I am not a graduate. But I said, I’ve been totally accepted—it’s almost like I’m a member of the Charlottesville community because they’ve seen me down here so many times from when I was young. I mean really young, as a young boy. And here I am, I’m 69 years old. And I just had a birthday. I don’t feel 69. But those are the facts. So I know a lot of people here, a lot of people know me. A lot of people know my family. You know. The Inge name is a respected name in the community. It really is.
EH: Well, even though the community is... after the urban renewal, there’s still that sense of community?

TI: Yes there is.

EH: Is that partly because of the school, do you think?

TI: Well, a lot of it has to do with the school. At least there’s some cohesiveness. People are working together in conjunction with other members of the community to fulfill what they think should remain an edifice, that it should be something that should be standing, as representative of “hey! This is something that we’re proud of, we’re proud of the fact that it was the first high school in the city of Charlottesville, Virginia, and it shouldn’t be torn down. It should be soundly restored and used in some capacity.” Even if it is just standing so people can say “well that was Jefferson High School.” You know? I joined the organization [Citizens for Jefferson School] today. Although I’m not a member of the high school class or for that matter a resident of Charlottesville, I still have strong roots here, because my father had roots here for a while, at least through his formative years. He left sometime ago, but he used to always come back to Charlottesville. My father used to always come back to Charlottesville.

EH: Well, thank you so much. That was really very interesting talking to you!

TI: You know I got emotional there for a minute, I really did. Because I feel strongly about race. I feel strongly about the connotation race. Racial differences, or let’s say physical differences. I feel strongly about that. Because I told you, my mother is Canadian. O.K.

(Video operator: Is your wife Canadian?)

TI: She’s got a lot in her. Irish, Native Canadian, Indian, and she was born on a farm.

EH: [laughs] Well, it’s funny, you know, I’m a bit Irish, and English, and French, and a lot of things, and I...Alright a people say, you’re “X,” you know, you’re a lot of different things!

TI: Thank you! Thank you! Exactly, as a matter of fact, those people, people who profess to be other than what they really are, are not aware of what they really are, because if man’s, if man’s origin is from the continent of Africa, and the plains of Ethiopia, then that means that we’re all brothers and sisters under the skin. We came from the same seed. Do you know—I’m serious! Yes, so anybody who thinks that they are 100% of anything, they really aren’t. They are an amalgamation. They are an amalgamation. And I always say if you have two different species, you come up with a hybrid anyway. Right? That’s the way I feel about it, so, I think the world would be a lot better off if there was a little reunion or communion of all types of people. We’d be a lot better off. And I really feel very, very strongly about that. Until we can all consider ourselves Americans, we call ourselves Americans and not have any type of classification in terms of ethnicity or cultural background or what have you, we’ll be a hell of a lot better off. We still have a
long ways to go, though, I’11tellyou. I found out my mother always thought she was born in Mukoka, Ontario. When she filed, she thought that when she married that she was automatically an American citizen. But that wasn’t the case. I never knew that. So, my mother, when she applied for a passport to see my sister in Germany, she wasn’t an American citizen. so they asked for where she was born and she was born on a farm and she could not...she wrote the council and got in contact with that area and they said, no, it might be Muskoka... and low and behold my mother was born in a place called Muskoka, but her birth certificate wasn’t filed until a year after she was born. So her age was different from what she thought it was and also her birth date was different from what she thought of. And she said, “Ted, what should I do? Should I get my American citizenship?” I said “No, retain your Canadian citizenship.” My mother died with a green card.

EH: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

TI: I have one sister who lives down here in a place called Hayfield. Two of the boys went to Virginia Tech. No all three went to Tech and the girl went to Radford. Yes.

EH: Smart crowd.

TI: I come from a smart family, I really do. You think of my father and all of his brothers and sisters, they went to Oberlin, they went to the University of Wisconsin, to Minnesota, all over the place, Hampton, I mean it’s unbelievable. And that was at a time when you know you just weren’t supposed to do that. Then, after you do it, what are you going to do with it? Who’s going to give you the job? Are you going to have to become an entrepreneur? Because unless you get into a profession, and even then you’re going to come across a lot of impasses. Even when you’ve got the doctorates, there’s a lot of reluctance and reticence in letting you work in that capacity. There was a guy who was up in New York City who had a Harvard Ph.D. and this guy was the vice-chancellor of New York and he was passed over. This guy is more than qualified. And so what happens if there is someone who sees the injustice and says “Look, Dr. So and So couldn’t even get it so what’s the sense in our going to school, here he had it from the finest of institutions and still can’t make it...”

[end of sound recorded on tape.]

End of interview.
Interview Consent Form
Jefferson School Oral History Project
Preservation Piedmont, Charlottesville, Virginia

The Jefferson School Oral History Project is conducted by Preservation Piedmont as part of an ongoing program to support preservation of the Jefferson School.

The purpose of the interview is to collect the stories of those affiliated with Jefferson School in order to document and preserve the history of the site for the benefit of current Charlottesville residents and future generations. Material developed from the interview will be shared with the Charlottesville community through publication of a booklet, a video documentary of the interviews, and a conference.

Copies of the transcriptions and other materials derived from these interviews will be donated to the Albemarle County Historical Society, and The Carter G. Woodson Institute for African and African American Studies at the University of Virginia.

It is also hoped that a museum will be established at the Jefferson School where material gathered from this oral history project will provide a permanent exhibit interpreting the history of the Jefferson School and its role in the community.

In support of this program:

I ____________________________ (name)
of. __________, __________, ______ (address)

herein relinquish and transfer to Preservation Piedmont for such historical and scholarly purposes as they see fit the following rights:

1) All legal title and literary property rights which I have or may be deemed to have in said work. 2) All my rights, title, and interest in copyright, which I have or may be deemed to have in said work, and more particularly the exclusive rights of reproduction, distribution, and preparation of derivative works, public performance, and display.

Interviewee ____________________________ Date 6-31-02

Interviewer ____________________________ Date 6-31-02
Theodore Inge, Jr., August 30, 2002

(photos by Alexandria Searls)
Interview Consent Form
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Interviewee...

Date...

Interviewer...

Date...
Interview with
W. DuBois Johnson

Interviewer: Ben Ford
Date: August 31, 2002
Location: Omni Hotel
           Charlottesville, Virginia

Transcribed: May 2003
By: Jacky Taylor

Reviewed: May 2003
By: Liz Sargent

[This interview has been edited for readability.]

The interview begins mid-question...

BF: .......Your association with Jefferson?

DJ: W. DuBois Johnson is my full name. What else?

BF: Your address, and your association with Jefferson, may-be the years that you went there?

DJ: Ah, now you want the current address?

BF: Sure if you have it.

DJ: Oh, well, let me just follow through on that over there, so I don’t miss anything. O.K. Now my address is 3709 Shannons that’s spelled S-h-a-n-n-o-n-s Green, G-r-e-e-n followed by Way, Alexandria, Virginia 22309.

BF: And what years were you at Jefferson?

DJ: Oh, it would have been... let’s see, I graduated in ’38 so I would have been there ’36, ’37, and ’38.

BF: And what grades did you attend there?

DJ: Well, they had a regular schedule... English, math, some science, I forget whether they specialized in any particular science or not... but it was the normal high school curriculum we were set up for as studies.
BF: And did you go to school in the Charlottesville area before you went to Jefferson, at another school?

DJ: No because there were nine of us.

BF: Wow.

DJ: Four boys and five girls. All of us were born in Lynchburg, Virginia. Our father was an outstanding clergyman, a doctor; he had a doctorate degree in sacred theology. He was a writer, and very much in demand for other areas and other churches, and that sort of thing, so he moved around quite a bit, and as I remember he was called to go to, I believe it was, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and they invited him to come with the family. At that time there were at least three of us who were very, very young, and my mother said she would not go across the country with all of us, so our grandfather, who was a building contractor in Charlottesville, and of course her father, said "You come to Charlottesville and I'll provide a home for you in Charlottesville." So we all moved to Charlottesville and that's where we grew up. And that's where the youngest ones of us got our education started, in Charlottesville rather than in Lynchburg.

BF: Uh, huh. And what were your grandparents' names... you mentioned your grandfather...

DJ: They were Charles Coles & sons. He was a building contractor with his two sons.

BF: Uh, huh.

DJ: They have done outstanding work in Charlottesville.

BF: Do you know some of the names of buildings that he contributed to?

DJ: Well, it was basically homes.

BF: Homes.

DJ: Yeah, I do recall one that he built for Dr. Coles. I forget the name of the street, but it was a beautiful home that was constructed by him. And, it's still there, and I like to go down and take a look at it.

BF: Wonderful, so you say...

DJ: I think it was 8th Street.

BF: Eighth Street where the home was located....And you said you graduated in '38 and did your grandparents live here in the Vinegar Hill neighborhood or did they live a little bit away from Charlottesville?
DJ: Grandparents? Yeah, they lived right on Main Street. They had lived in a home previous to Main Street but I don’t recall that address... But it was right on Main Street as I remember a statue right around in that area. A very historical thing, and they lived very near there, right across from it.

BF: So you would walk to school in the mornings?

DJ: Oh, yes, that’s right. Yes.

BF: Now, do you remember walking to school and passing through the Vinegar Hill neighborhood? Can you tell me a little bit about the neighborhood?

DJ: Oh yeah, yeah. That was a very busy section there. There was Ridge Street feeding in, there was Main Street, and then after you’d pretty much passed that intersection, there was South Street, then you went right. And that was where we lived.

BF: You lived right on South Street?

DJ: Right.

BF: Really, a stone’s throw from the school?

DJ: Right.

BF: What was the neighborhood like, were there a lot of businesses? Do you remember?

DJ: Oh yeah, very much so.

BF: What kinds of businesses?

DJ: Well, on Main Street there were barber shops, there was a drug store, there were grocery stores, confectionary stores, and then, as you went further, going south, then you would begin to get into the business section of downtown Charlottesville.

BF: Uh, huh. Now what do you remember about the school itself? I don’t know whether you have had a tour or seen the school since you’ve been here this weekend. But, does it look the same, or has it changed since you were living here?

DJ: Well, I haven’t been inside, but I pass it. Usually when I come this way, I kind of go in that area just to kind of see how it’s holding up... whether deterioration has set in or what. But I’ve been impressed, it looks like there’s been some care and concern to it, and what I usually look for is whether all the bushes have grown up, or is there some indication that there’s been someone trimming them?

BF: So when you were here in ’36, ’37, ’38, you would have been attending the Jefferson Graded school, the old building which is no longer standing, is that correct?
DJ: No, no, when I was here, we were in senior high school

BF: Oh! O.K. Because I think they built a new part of the school in '39, may-be a year after you left... The WPA...

DJ: Oh yeah, yeah.

BF: What do you remember about the curriculum at Jefferson? Were there any favorite classes or classes that you really didn't like going to?

DJ: No, because you see both of our parents, in fact grandparents, were well educated, and they made a point of telling us how important it was to get an education. And, of course, we were in a convenient living situation because we weren't far from grandparents, uncles, and aunts. You could walk from where we were on South Street right up to Main Street, you see, and that environment, as such, in my opinion, did not have many undesirable existences, businesses or that kind of thing. So we felt that we had to show that kind of respect to our parents and our grandparents. Because we visited them, we shared dinner with them on Sunday or sometime during the week, and that sort of thing. So we couldn't escape our parents or grandparents, uncles or aunts...[laughs]

BF: Beyond the classes at Jefferson did you attend any extra curricular activities—band, theater, any types of classes like that outside of your usual academics?

DJ: Football!

BF: Football was your sport?

DJ: Yeah!

BF: And what position did you play?

DJ: I played quarterback

BF: Did you? Now was that for Jefferson?

DJ: Yes, that was for Jefferson. And, the interesting thing about this was the fact that my older brother went to... See, so much of our background in the Johnson-Coles family was associated with Hampton Institute. My grandfather, I'm not sure that he went there, but his two sons went there. His brother, another Coles, taught there in construction work, and there may have been another brother associated with the school. But the Coles went to Hampton Institute to become outstanding in building construction, cabinet making and that sort of thing.

BF: And when you played football, you said Jefferson had a team. Did you play other black schools, did you play white schools? Was it mostly in the Charlottesville/Albemarle area?
DJ: Well, it was mostly Negro schools, but we went to various places—Roanoke, Virginia, Lynchburg, Virginia, Richmond perhaps. Those were some. Now, there’s one thing that happened at that time. We’d had a fairly good athletic program. But in my senior year, it so happened that our oldest brother who’d finished West Virginia State College in physical education, his first job was to come back to Charlottesville as coach. He also taught some other subjects. He was there a year and that was my senior year. But after that, other high schools started trying to get him, which is when he left Charlottesville and went to Alexandria, Virginia.

BF: Uh, huh...

DJ: And developed some good teams there.

BF: What field did you play on, did you practice on?

DJ: Oh yes, that was the one just off of Preston Avenue. I forget the name of it.

BF: Down near where Burley is now, near Rose Hill?

DJ: Yes, yes. That’s right.

BF: Wow, that’s great. And how did your team do when you were quarterback?

DJ: Well, my brother was coach so I had to kind of measure up. [laughs] He held you to high standards?

BF: Yes, and then, in case I, maybe, created a problem with him when I called the play, he would snatch me out. [both laugh] You know, and I wouldn’t go near him, I would just walk further down, and when he’d kind of cooled off, he’d say “Why’d you call that play?” [laugh again] So, it was really something...

BF: What about your teachers? You said your parents had very high standards and were well educated. What about your teachers, can you talk about them?

DJ: Those in high school?

BF: As role models…

DJ: Oh yeah, yeah! Well, one that really sticks out was Mrs. Sellers. Her first time coming to Jefferson may have been my senior year, but she stood for control, discipline. You were to listen to her, repeat, read, and then she wanted some feedback. So she really set a standard.

BF: What about…Go ahead, please.
DJ: Yeah, now another teacher who was really impressive was Mrs. Heiskel who taught history. She was very, very good. In fact, not too long after I left they were each offered some nice contracts to go up to the college level. So that was a loss for Charlottesville, but we benefited from them, and then of course...

BF: What about your future? Did your teachers talk about your future, either in terms of secondary education, or college, or jobs?

DJ: Yes, yes.

BF: And they pushed you towards that?

DJ: Oh, yeah. Not only them, but also my parents, our parents, and our grandparents. You see all of them were college graduates.

BF: Uh, huh.

DJ: My dad, I would say was the one, or maybe one of a very few, Negroes who had a doctorate in sacred theology. He spoke Greek, Latin. My mother was highly educated. In fact, it was interesting. Some time back when I was looking through some things... at that time there was a colored school for Negro women, only for Negro women... and this was interesting for me to find out.

BF: In the region here?

DJ: Yeah, in Charlottesville! No, no, not the school, the school for women wasn’t in Charlottesville... I’m trying to think... it was in Virginia. But right now, the name, I can’t think of... But it was an outstanding college for women... Many Negro women who made outstanding contributions started there.

BF: Uh, huh. Did your parents ever talk to you about segregation and its impact on you in terms of education? Were you aware as a student not only that there were white schools, white children that were going, but did they discuss the reasons for segregation for you at all, or what types of information did they give about it?

DJ: Well, we lived in a situation where this existed, and we saw it. But both our parents were highly educated, and they said to us “We expect you to do your best. You are an individual of your own and we are going to assist you and try to plot certain things for you, which, if you follow those you will be successful.” And as I said, our father had a doctorate in sacred theology, speaking Greek and other languages, my mother had attended college, and after she finished this particular school she did some teaching herself. But you see there were nine of us who were born sort of rapidly [laughs], so she had to leave the teaching field. But that was when our father’s career was highly recognized, always in demand, always traveling, always writing. And there was one instance that he was called, I think to go to... I can’t remember, but it was in the Midwest. Wisconsin. That’s pretty far away from where we are. Milwaukee, Wisconsin. And he
wanted to go! He wanted to go, he wanted to take the job, but my mother said "You take it, but I'm not going across country with nine children." And that was when our grandfather and grandmother said here's a house here in Charlottesville. Come here! So that's what took place.

BF: Uh, huh. Did you ever at Jefferson interact with any of the white students that would be in Charlottesville, or was that something you didn't do? You, or any of your brothers and sisters?

DJ: Well, when we moved to Charlottesville, all of us were there, see, nine. And the top ones, or the older ones, began to move, I mean to progress, in education, like I think I mentioned Lewis, the oldest one, our grandfather sent him to Hampton. Now the oldest sister, Margueritte, an aunt took her in in Washington D.C. Sent her to one of the schools in D.C, which was a good school! Now, about that time, Jefferson had moved up to the standard of a high school, so that meant that the last six, I would say, went to Jefferson High School.

BF: Mmm! Amazing. What do you remember about the school, and the black community that lived around it. Obviously the Jefferson School educated the children that lived around it in the area, but did it also, was it also part of the larger community? Did it host social functions or community functions beyond classes?

DJ: Yes! Oh, yes.

BF: Can you talk about that at all?

DJ: Oh yes, well where we were, as I say, there was kind of a commercial congestion of some kind, but if you went towards, I'll just say, the University of Virginia, then you had fewer businesses. Because the businesses went down to the area where the business section was. So, if we went, let's see going to the University of Virginia would be going? West?

BF: West, on Main Street.

DJ: Yes, you had some small businesses, some of them were Greek, Italian, and that sort of thing, and then of course, going... this would be going, what south?

BF: Uh, huh.

DJ: There were Negro homes...

BF: Right.

DJ: Very good Negro homes and that sort of thing. And then of course as we went towards the University on Main Street and 7th Street, I think, there was the large Negro church, the First Baptist church where my grandfather was the treasurer and did repair work there with his two sons. My mother attended there.
That was First Baptist.

Yeah, First Baptist, right. And, those of us who attended church went to First Baptist. In fact, I was Baptized there when I was quite young. It was interesting because both my parents were concerned with us living a spiritual life. And my mother asked me one time, "When are you going to get baptized?" She didn't say must or what, she just sort of left it to me. So I guess it was maybe within another year, when they had a, what do they call it? Uh, there's a certain name for it, they have just night after night, weekend after weekend, a spiritualization kind of...

Meetings, or camp meetings?

Yeah, that's right. So on my own, one night, I just decided, didn't say anything to her, just decided to go up during this time and declare myself. And, I think it was maybe within a couple of days that I just told her. I think she was surprised, but very pleased that I did that on my own.

I bet she was! Did the school serve a larger role to the community? Did the community hold meetings in the school? I've heard other people say that there used to be a library open to the general public there, not just students who would attend the school.

Yes, now, not so much when I was there because the school was building up then, preparing for larger graduating classes and also the parent-teacher association was building up, and they were making demands and that sort of thing... So there was that trend.

And what about the teachers, did they actually live in the Vinegar Hill neighborhood here as well, within the larger black community, or did they come in from the county?

No. They didn't come in from the county, but they were in nice areas. I think I mentioned Ridge Street. Also there was Oak Street and Dice Street where there were nice communities you see... and many of the teachers who perhaps grew up in Charlottesville knew of these areas. And then, of course, for teachers who wanted to come into Charlottesville and become a teacher, they were given information about Dice Street, Ridge Street, etc. And they usually were successful in finding a nice home, to rent maybe first, but if they stayed in Charlottesville, they eventually wanted to buy a home.

You said you attended First Baptist, right down Main?

Yes.

Did your father regularly preach there, or was he invited on special occasions?

No. I wish I could have brought... see, he wrote this outstanding book The Young Man and His Bible, and he was also a member of the National Baptist Publishing Board, which was also making demands on him to do further writing you see... of various kinds,
but related to religion. So, now let me see, maybe I’m missing something, I don’t want to get off track answering your question.

BF: That’s O.K.

DJ: What was your question?

BF: I was just saying did your father preach at First Baptist regularly?

DJ: No, he did not. As I said, he was very much in demand to continue his writing, and those who knew of his book and some of his writings, maintained an office in Nashville, Tennessee, which was the National Baptist Publishing Board. If he wasn’t writing or traveling, he was pretty much there.

BF: Are there any people that you went to school with, any of your classmates, or people that you may have known, who you would consider prominent people either in the Charlottesville region, or at the Virginia level who have contributed to life in a prominent way?

DJ: Well, one of the persons that comes to mind immediately is the persons that I usually see when I come to Charlottesville, and that’s Carter Wicks.

BF: Uh, huh.

DJ: He is a preacher, he’s a minister. I shared a copy of my Dad’s book with him, and he has been just overwhelmed with what is in the book. He said “Your Dad must have been a highly intelligent man.” And he holds the book very dearly. So I always contact him when I come to town.

BF: And he was a classmate of yours, or just someone you knew here in town?

DJ: Who’s that?

BF: Carter Wicks.

DJ: Carter and I were in high school together. I think I was a year ahead of him. We were on the football team…

BF: On the football team…

DJ: And then my brother coached…

BF: Is there anybody else that you remember that may-be went to Jefferson School, that contributed prominently to either the local area here, or Virginia?
DJ: Well, so many of them moved out, you see, they got married and moved out. You see there was the Jackson family. Dr. Jackson was a dentist who had maybe five children. Those families who could afford to sent their kids to college. Some would come back, but they were looking for jobs you see.

BF: Now would the college choices for children in the late ‘30s be mostly Virginia schools like Hampton Institute, or were they sent beyond Virginia as well?

DJ: Oh yeah. Hampton Institute, Lincoln University...

BF: Lincoln?

DJ: Oh, yeah, Lincoln University.

BF: Howard, perhaps?

DJ: Howard, oh yeah. Those were the schools that attracted attention. Hampton you said, Virginia State in Richmond, a number of us went to that school. Virginia State, Virginia Union, Hampton, Lincoln...

BF: Did you go on to college yourself?

DJ: Yes.

BF: Where did you go?

DJ: I went to Bluefield State College, Bluefield, West Virginia.

BF: Did you like it there?

DJ: I did. It wasn’t a large school, but it had high standards.

BF: And what did you study there?

DJ: Business education and sociology. And it seems as if, as a result of our Dad’s ministry, some of us, as we were growing up, looked at the ministry, you know. But as we went to college, and that sort of thing, and we traveled, I’m speaking more or less for myself... I went into military service right after I finished college. I volunteered for the Navy. I didn’t want to be drafted. [laughs] I felt I ought to be able to make my choice.

BF: Uh, huh.

DJ: Which I did, and I think it was a good choice, because I traveled quite a bit...

BF: Got to see a lot of the world?
DJ: Yes, yes. But the other thing, that I’m speaking of... I know two of my brothers—Carl who was in Air Corps, and maybe Walter who was younger—we were thinking that we wouldn’t want to go into the ministry but sociology, to be a social worker. To do some work in that area. While I was in the Navy, a lot of my time was in the northern part of the country—Chicago, Cleveland and those sorts of places—and when on leave I would go to these places, especially Chicago, that name sort of said, “Let’s go there and see what it’s like.”

BF: Big city?

DJ: Big city, that’s right. I went there several weekends and got into some areas of Chicago that were very displeasing. Dope, whiskey you name it.

BF: Different situation from Charlottesville?

DJ: Totally, totally. Yeah, different from what I had envisioned. If I went into social work I wanted to help those people who needed the help. So my brother and I decided, that, well, let’s not go in that direction. But, realizing that when I was in college I had majored in business and sociology, so I felt that, well, you could very easily mix those two. So I stayed in that particular course and when I graduated, see I graduated in June of ‘42. See ‘41 was the explosion, ’41 was the...

BF: December ’41, Pearl Harbor?

DJ: Yes, December ’41. That was the Japanese situation. Yeah, so that kind of made us think a little more. I remember that Sunday night, I think, it took place, several of us left the campus that night to go to a movie, and about half way through they stopped the movie and turned on the lights, and said what had happened. And we sat there looking at one another, and said, well, we have to go back to campus. Let’s go, we can’t sit here. So that was quite a shock.

BF: Now, to your recollection did all or most of the students who went to Jefferson High School graduate?

DJ: Oh yes.

BF: Without question?

DJ: Yes, you see, I think that was a psychological kind of a thing. See until we had a high school you went up to what, maybe the seventh grade see, and then we had relatives in Washington D.C. who had a full swing of everything, and good schools. So our relatives in D.C. would say “We can take one or two,” and that was when Marguerite went up there. But I think it was the determination and enthusiasm of Negros, and, of course, could have been whites as well, who felt that Charlottesville was moving up and should have a recognized high school.
BF: And of course Burley High School was not built until the 50s, I think. And did the school and teachers at Jefferson send a report card straight home to your parents, is that how it worked back in the 30s?

DJ: Not in the high school, but in the elementary school many times that was the case. Our mother would say I've received your card... and I'm not pleased. [laughs]

BF: It was a nervous time, huh, as it always is!

DJ: Oh yes indeed. [laughs] But when I was in high school, they examined the card. My mother having been a college graduate, father a college graduate, they were expecting us to measure up.

BF: As all parents do.

DJ: Oh, yes. I remember our Dad enjoyed it very much. See, in the home where we were, in the dining room, we had this big round table and when we came in from high school our parents expected us, unless you had something urgent, you sat at this table and did your home work. And if our Dad was there, he in a sense really enjoyed it, and we enjoyed him because we knew if we had hard questions, he could answer them. [laughs] And then, of course, it got to a point where he would, you know he said well in a sense, I don't know whether he said it to us, he may have, but he felt that our group...

[End of side of tape....They flip it over and continue.]

BF: About the football games, you said that you were quarterback. Now, were the games popularly attended by students at Jefferson?

DJ: Oh yes.

BF: Most of the school would turn out?

DJ: Yes, because you see, when we got to the high school level, and we were getting better teachers, and then of course you saw a better kind of, what should I say, devotion, and determination that we're a high school now, and let's measure up, and I think that's one of the reasons why my brother took one year to come there and coach, you see. Carter Wicks and I were on that team, and some other young men who developed to be good athletes and went to colleges. So we felt then we were really getting up in the big time. Big coach, big schedule, expect to win, and that creates a certain kind of spirit in a school.

BF: Oh sure, sure. Now did most of the girls, or some of the girls, in the school, were they on a cheerleading team, as well at the football games?

DJ: Oh, yes, in fact my sister was. I wish I had a picture of her. She was very pretty. In fact, we have the Cherokee line in our family, and also the Powhatan.
BF: Really?

DJ: Yeah, and Roberta, no, Flora Zell, who was in the same class as I, and I think Margueritte had a very rich brown complexion and long black hair. In fact, in high school, Flora Zell was called, it was an Indian name. It wasn’t given by the family, but someone picked it up, and I can’t think of what it is... but because she had that long hair and beautiful brown complexion... that was her Native American name.

BF: That was her nickname, you say?

DJ: Yeah, nickname.

BF: What was the football team’s name?

DJ: The Red Devils.

BF: The Red Devils. Red jerseys and uniforms?

DJ: Yes. Didn’t have the pants, but we had the jerseys. See, when my brother came there, that was when some organization took place in the athletic field. He was the one who went out to men you know, who were in certain businesses said, “Can you buy a set of shoes, or sweatshirts” or whatever.

BF: Ah, right.

DJ: And that was when the athletic program...

BF: And did you play any other sports?

DJ: No, no, not in high school. The thing that I pretty much had to do, because my brother who coached us, he wanted to be sure that as many of us as could should go to college...

BF: Uh, huh.

DJ: And some of us had to work, you see, because parents at that time didn’t… So, I was fortunate in having a job at the drug store right on Main Street, not far from where we were living on South Street, as a delivery boy. I just went in and said I’m looking for a job and I want to stay in this area near home and that sort of thing. So they said “O.K. We’ll try you and see.” So I was a delivery boy on a bicycle.

BF: Was that pretty common? Did a lot of the students in the neighborhood work jobs outside of school, certainly during the summer?

DJ: Oh, yeah.

BF: But during the school year, they would work either after school, or...
Some of them did, but here again, you see it depended. We had a great respect for our parents, you see, and if we said there’s a possibility of me working here, or I’d like to go there and ask. So our parents in many instances would say “Where is it located?” You see, get some idea of the neighborhood.

Wanted to know where you’d be.

That’s right, absolutely.

Mmm.

In fact I was, as I said, it wasn’t too far from where I lived on South Street right up to Main Street, and from time to time my mother, coming up to go to her parents, our grandparents, would just pass by [laughs], and, you know, kind of look in, see if DuBois is still there.

What other sports did students at Jefferson participate in? Football of course… Basketball?

Basketball, uh, huh. I’m trying to think, it seems to me there was someone, my aunt for one, who was playing tennis, and she was on a team called the National Negro Tennis Club or something of that sort. She evolved into a good tennis player. Now also Lewis, my oldest brother, he started teaming up with her. They would play doubles, so he became a good tennis player. And then of course when you do that, some of the others, pick up on it and start playing.

Did you ever visit or go to the McIntire golf course in town here? I remember that there was a period, may-be one-day a week, where they would let blacks in to play?

Now that may have been, but that probably took place after I finished college.

Uh, huh. You mention you worked in the area after you graduated, but you went to college right away in Bluefield, West Virginia.

Oh yes, I stayed at the drug store and then after that it seems to me some opening came up at the University of Virginia hospital… but they carefully interviewed people, and they interviewed me and gave me an assignment, where there was a ward where they needed people of high school age or finished that they could depend on. So I worked there for a period of time until I was ready to go to college. Then I left there.

What about the school facilities themselves? Do you remember much about the school, can you picture what it used to look like?

Jefferson? Oh, yeah.

The library?
DJ: Oh yeah. You see up until I guess the sophomore, junior, senior year, there wasn’t very much. When it became a recognized senior high school then you attracted qualified people, teachers who wanted to come there, and saw the area develop. And that took place, and we were proud of that, just like my brother was happy to come back there and see what he could do in developing an athletic program. And he also taught shop there for a period of time.

BF: I guess I’d like to finish the questions. I just want you to know that a group of Charlottesville residents are currently working to preserve the school and its educational role in the community. One way we’re trying to do so is through oral histories and sharing the knowledge and this information about the school and the students and teachers who used to work here. What are your thoughts about the future of Jefferson School? Do you have any ideas about how it should be used, or whether there should be any programs there? What should its role in the future be?

DJ: Well, I would like to see it remain there, and when I come down, it’s sometimes just for a short trip, I always drive by it to see if the outside looks like it’s, you know, the shrubbery, the grass, or whatever, you know... does it look attractive, and does it look like it’s being preserved and well kept and that sort of thing. I hope that that can be the case. I really do. It’s a historical location, the number of people who’ve gone through there, the number of people who’ve served and that sort of thing.

BF: A lot of history associated with the building.

DJ: Yes, yes. And the location is good! You see, it’s not too far from Main Street, and there are streets on the sides of it running off.

BF: Commerce and Fourth Streets.

DJ: Yes. Right!

BF: Is there anything else you’d like to add about the school, or the people you knew, or the teachers?

DJ: No, no, I enjoyed being there.

BF: Fond memories?

DJ: Oh yes, and Carter Wicks, whenever I come this way, I have to stop by to see him. Interesting thing about Carter, I didn’t know, I guess there really wasn’t any way for me to know, that he was leaning in the direction of becoming a minister. At some point he mentioned it to me when he came to Bluefield, where I was.

BF: Visited you...
DJ: Yeah, yeah. In fact my oldest brother who went to West Virginia State College, those two
schools, Bluefield and West Virginia, competed against one another, and my brother
having finished West Virginia State College, wanted me to go to one or the other. And of
course at that time, due to the West Virginia State, tuition was just a bit higher than
Bluefield, so we had just that choice to make, you know. And I talked to Carter you know
as I came back and forth, and my brother also talked to him. And I think it was near the
end of my freshman year that my brother brought Carter out to see Bluefield. And
convinced him that he should try it there, you know. I was here, and we had played on the
high school football team together, why not try it? Carter did, but he became quite ill, and
he had to leave Bluefield. And I've learned since then... of course one of the things I did
also, I mentioned this book that my father wrote. I gave Carter a copy of it, and he said,
"This is magnificent. It was my decision when I got this book to go into the ministry, that
was the way," so...

BF: That's great!

DJ: Yeah.

BF: Well thank you very much, DuBois, it really was a pleasure talking to you.

DJ: My pleasure.

End of interview.
Interview Consent Form
Jefferson School Oral History Project
Preservation Piedmont, Charlottesville, Virginia

The Jefferson School Oral History Project is conducted by Preservation Piedmont as part of an ongoing program to support preservation of the Jefferson School.

The purpose of the interview is to collect the stories of those affiliated with Jefferson School in order to document and preserve the history of the site for the benefit of current Charlottesville residents and future generations. Material developed from the interview will be shared with the Charlottesville community through publication of a booklet, a video documentary of the interviews, and a conference.

Copies of the transcriptions and other materials derived from these interviews will be donated to the Albemarle County Historical Society, and The Carter G. Woodson Institute for African and African American Studies at the University of Virginia.

It is also hoped that a museum will be established at the Jefferson School where material gathered from this oral history project will provide a permanent exhibit interpreting the history of the Jefferson School and its role in the community.

"In support of this program:

I, W. Dubois Johnson, of 3109 Shannon Green Way, Alex, VA 22309, hereby relinquish and transfer to Preservation Piedmont for such historical and scholarly purposes as they see fit the following rights:

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Interviewee: W. Dubois Johnson Date: 8-31-02
Interviewer: Ben Ford Date: 8-31-02