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.

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- 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 Questions by: Jacky Taylor and Liz Sargent
Date: July 2001
Location: Charlottesville, Virginia

The following constitutes a transcription of written responses provided by Clarence Jones upon reviewing the interview questions to be posed at the 2002 Jefferson School Alumni Reunion.

Q: Can you please state your full name?
CJ: My full name is Clarence Anthony Jones.

Q: Also, tell us the date and place where you were born?
CJ: October 2, 1924, in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Q: How many were in your family growing up?
CJ: Nine.

Q: How many brothers and sisters did you have? Did they go to Jefferson School?
CJ: I had seven siblings.

Q: What is your current address?
CJ: 1713 Vermina Place, Charlottesville, Virginia 22901.

Q: What is your connection with the Jefferson School?
CJ: Former student.

Q: As you may know, a group of Charlottesville residents are currently working to preserve the school and its educational role in the community. One of the ways they are trying to do this is to share the important history and stories of the building with the public—hence this oral history program. What are your thoughts on the future of the building? What does it mean to you? What do you think it should be in the future?
CJ: The building should remain an educational institution, or a museum.
Q: What years did you attend school at Jefferson? What grades did you attend?

CJ: I attended from 1940 to 1943.

Q: What school did you attend before coming to Jefferson?

CJ: Jefferson Elementary School.

Q: Did you go to another school after Jefferson?

CJ: Yes, St. Augustine’s College to get a BA. Then I completed 30 hours at New York University and I went to the University of Virginia and received an M.E. degree.

Q: How did you get to school?

CJ: I walked.

Q: If you walked, what was your route? Did you walk with others?

CJ: I walked about five blocks, with others.

Q: What did the area around you look like? If you could, describe the blocks surrounding the school building?

CJ: The surrounding area was residential and businesses.

Q: Were there any businesses that catered to the high school students, like a soda shop?

CJ: Yes. (name—Scot Dean’s—crossed out)

Q: Where did kids go when they had a break in their schedule? What kinds of things did they do during breaks? (i.e. visits a soda shop, go to the movies?)

CJ: Scott Dean’s—across the street.

Q: Did you go to the movies frequently? At the Paramount?

CJ: I went on Sundays.

Q: What was the school site like while you were there? Was it a big parking lot like it is now? Were there fields, or was it a lawn? What was down in the lower level area where the pre-school playground is located now?

CJ: Did not exist—addition to the school.
Q: Did you or any of your friends have a car in high school? Were you allowed to drive to school, or use the car during the school day?

CJ: No. (I did not have a car.)

Q: What classes do you remember taking? Which was your favorite?

CJ: My favorite was a college preparatory class.

Q: Where were they held?

CJ: In the Jefferson School building.

Q: What was your favorite subject? What were the required courses? Was there any time in the schedule to take elective classes? If so, what electives were offered?

CJ: History was my favorite subject. The required courses were English, math, history, and sciences. Woodwork was an elective that I took.

Q: Did the girls have any classes that were different from the boys?

CJ: Yes, home economics.

QA: Did you change rooms for every subject?

CJ: Yes.

Q: What was it like in the halls during the changeover? Was it noisy or were there rules of behavior, a hall monitor perhaps?

CJ: There were rules of behavior. We had to have a wooden pass to use the restrooms.

Q: Do you remember many of your teachers by name? Who was your favorite? How old were your teachers? Did you feel close to your teachers? Did you feel like you could talk to them about different subjects?

CJ: Mrs. McGinness, Mrs. Janie Johnson and Mrs. Heiskel were my favorite teachers. They averaged 40 to 50 years old. Yes, I did feel I could talk to them about different subjects.

Q: Did the teachers and the principal stay on for long periods, or was there much turnover?

CJ: There was very little turnover.

Q: How were you graded? Did you get a report card that was sent to your parents?
Q: Was there an honor roll or honor roll society?

CJ: Yes.

Q: What happened if you didn’t pass a course?

CJ: Some teacher would request that you remain after school to discuss your progress.

Q: Was there summer school? What happened on snow days?

CJ: I can’t remember if there was summer school, and I don’t recall missing school because of inclement weather.

Q: What happened when you were sick? Was there a school nurse?

CJ: No.

Q: Where did you keep your belongings during the day? Did you have a homeroom?

CJ: Yes, we had a homeroom.

Q: Where was the library?

CJ: It was in the same location it is in now.

Q: Where did you have lunch? Did you bring lunch to school?

CJ: Occasionally I brought lunch to school.

Q: Where was recess held?

CJ: In the schoolyard.

Q: What types of play equipment was there on the playground?

CJ: We had footballs, gym sets.

Q: Who monitored recess?

CJ: Coaches and other teachers monitored the recess.

Q: What types of “extra-curricular” activities did you participate in?

CJ: I played baseball and football.
Q: Did teachers from other schools come in to help out with these activities?
CJ: No, we had coaches.
Q: What about music? Did you play an instrument?
CJ: I played the French horn.
Q: Was there a school band?
CJ: Yes.
Q: Where did it perform?
CJ: It played in the auditorium and in parades and at football games.
Q: What types of uniforms did you wear?
CJ: I did not stay long enough in the band to earn a uniform.
Q: How popular were music activities? Was it competitive to participate?
CJ: Yes.
Q: What about sports.
CJ: Yes.
Q: If you played a sport which teams did you compete against?
CJ: We played against Dunbar, in Lynchburg, Addison, in Roanoke, Maggie Walker Armstrong in Richmond, Peabody in Petersburg, and Alexandria and Lexington.
Q: What did your uniforms look like?
CJ: They were red with black trim.
Q: Where did you practice and compete?
Q: Was it tough to make the team?
CJ: No, as youngsters we participated in these sports.
Q: What about arts and drama? Did you act, design and create sets, design lighting, make costumes?

CJ: No.

Q: Were performances held in the school? Other places? Outside?

CJ: No.

[End of interview]

(The interview began with a discussion of various people who should still be interviewed, in particular Reverend Carter Wicker. The discussion continued, jumping into the school experience itself.)

I. We had teachers in that school: Elinore Sellers, Rosamay Bess, who taught French, and Charlie Henry who taught English...they stood up in the classroom and said, 'I'm here to teach and you're going to learn.' I thought, 'They mean it!' You didn't play in their class, you know. We would stand around in Miss Mitchell's room because she was so sweet and never raised her voice. If they didn't laugh (like they did), we wouldn't have people like lawyers, doctors...

II. And what did they do at further education?

III. Yes, went to college. I always wanted to do hair; so I got a trade. I went to beauty school, I'm a cosmetologist. And I came back, and that's what kept me involved with so many people, because everybody in Charlottesville used to come to me. And with their mothers, their daughters...

IV. Did you have your own business?

V. Yes, I've still got my shop in my basement. Over the years, it has been hard for us to get a loan. It was hard for us to set up a shop per se. At one time, the only beauty shop in this town was called Carter's. Those folks had a beauty shop in part of the hotel. Do you remember that?
Interview with Ida Lewis

Interviewers: Jacky Taylor and Liz Sargent
Date: August 6, 2004
Location: Jefferson-Madison Branch, Central Library
Charlottesville, Virginia
Transcribed: August 2004
By: Jacky Taylor
Proofed: October 2004
By: Liz Sargent

[The interview began with a discussion of various people who should still be interviewed, in particular Reverend Carter Wicks. The discussion continued, jumping into the school experience itself.]

IL: We had teachers in that school! Elnora Sellers, Rosemary Byers, who taught French, and Charlie Henry who taught English... they stood up in that classroom and said, “I’m here to teach and you’re going to learn.” I thought, “They mean it!” You didn’t play in their class, you know. We would tease around in Miss Michie’s class because she was so sweet and never raised her voice. If they hadn’t taught like they did, we wouldn’t have people like lawyers, doctors...

JT: A lot of people went on to further education?

IL: Yes, went on to college. I always wanted to do hair, so I got a trade. I went to beauty school. I’m a cosmetologist. And I came back, and that’s what kept me involved with so many people, because everybody in Charlottesville used to come to me. And with their mothers, their daughters...

JT: Did you have your own business?

IL: Yes, I’ve still got my shop in my basement. Over the years, it has been hard for us to get a loan. It was hard for us to set up a shop per se. At one time, the only beauty shop in this town was called Carver Inn. Those folks had a beauty shop business as part of the hotel. Do you remember that?

LS: No, I don’t remember that.
No... you can’t remember that, that was some years ago. Louis Armstrong stayed at the Carver Inn.

Where was it located?

On Preston Avenue. Do you know where the underpass is? Where Reid’s Market is near the underpass? That’s where the Carver Inn used to sit, right on the other side of the railroad tracks. There was a street that went up there.

There was?

We used to go over there. There was a restaurant and you could go there and have dinner. I used to play softball, and after a softball game everybody would go to the Carver Inn.

And where did you play softball?

Over at Washington Park. Then we used to play ball... there used to be a place, part of Venable School, we used to call it the dump. I think they’ve built houses up in there...

Why did you call it the dump, do you remember?

I don’t know why we called it the dump. Just like where I live, we used to call it the Hike, up on the Hike.

Because it’s up on the hill?

I don’t know who brought that name... whether it was from a different era, you know? Like the kids who lived on Ridge Street and down on Lankford Avenue, we used to call them the kids from ‘Cross Town and the kids on the Hike. You know, stuff like that.

In Mrs. McGinness’s book that Florence Bryant wrote, she talked about how there are these different areas that people had names for.

Yes, like Tinsley Town, we used to call one area Tinsley Town. Over there, we used to call it Kelly Town, you know...

Yes, but I’ve never heard the Hike before...

The Hike, yes, we lived on the Hike.

These were all African-American neighborhoods?
IL: Yes ma’am. We were something like in the center. You would come down Fourth Street. One time I was trying to carve it out... I lived on West Street so we would come across Eighth Street, across the jail yard we used to call it. Come up Cramer Hill, and to the school. The kids who came from Ridge Street would walk down Ridge Street, and then Fifth Street. By the way, did you know that Lane High School was built in a black neighborhood down in Pearl Street? The area where they built Jefferson, they re-routed the people off of Fifth Street, off that side of Fifth Street to put up Jefferson School.

LS: When Lane High School was built, that was around 1938 is that correct?

IL: Lane High School used to be across over by Mount Zion, Old Mount Zion, that was Lane High School. Then when Lane High School moved, and I can’t remember the year...

JT: It was called the Midway to start with?

IL: Yes, and that’s where you used to get your driver’s license, over in that building over there.

LS: Oh, really?

IL: And then that lot stayed vacant for a long time. They knocked that building down and we used it as a parking lot. And then when they put in that building, that’s when we lost the parking. And then all around Mount Zion was Vepco. And when Vepco moved, I used to say we should have purchased that property. And then we could have had a garage; we wouldn’t have had to move the church maybe. But we had to; we had no place to park. Parking was terrible.

LS: Well, I guess we were hoping that some of the information you told us last night about how you started ... 

IL: How we started with the school? Into the present...? Yes, we were having a meeting...

JT: Who was that?

IL: The committee. We never stopped meeting.

JT: The committee for the Alumni?

IL: The Alumni Committee, the people I gave the names to, who did I give the names to?

LS: I’m not sure we kept all the names last night, but maybe we could go over them again?
IL: Yes.

JT: Ida Lewis...

IL: Ida Lewis, Mary Anderson, Leilia Dean Brown, Priscilla Whiting, Gretis Tyler, Oneta Mason, Joe Steanbors, did I say Leilia Brown?

JT: Yes.

IL: Jesse Williams, Earl Larkin, and Prince Jackson. That's the committee. We meet every month at somebody's house, for a luncheon meeting. I laugh because you know I like a meal. One day we were talking, and Chuck [Lewis] was a very good friend of mine. And I know Chuck has a lot of property. So he came, he heard—his sister went to the school; Carr Weston was his sister, and she went to Jefferson. He said, "I heard Jefferson's going to be for sale." Now we're getting all this feedback because we're going to move the kids out right, the little kindergarten, which we wanted to stay there. Still wanted a kindergarten in that school. So I said "Oh please Chuck, buy the school." He said, "Let me look into it."

So he left and looked into it and got some information. He's good at that, and he came back and he said, "Be careful what you pray for, you might get it." Well you know I had forgotten what I had said and I said, "Tell us what you're talking about, what have I prayed for?" He said, "You might get the Jefferson School."

Then I got excited, and I started telling him what we were going to do with the school. He didn't have the school, but I told him "We're going to put this in the school, we're going to do this, and you're going to let me have the Carver Recreation Center and I'm going to have this beautiful place all built up and..." So I was excited. This was the beginning of it.

So Chuck goes and looks into it to see about getting the school. When he went to look into it, it started out big, bold, all kinds of stuff, so we kept meeting, nobody told us who owned the school, we didn't know, we thought the City owned the school. So now you're dealing with City Council. These are the people the two of us were dealing with, City Council. Now I had gone back to the committee saying "We're going to get Jefferson School..." But then all of these roadblocks started popping up you know? All this stuff. So Chuck went in and wrote a proposal. Chuck still has it. He did a proposal for what he wanted to put in that building... You know he beautifies a building... he was going to have a fountain in the front, and he was going to have art studios like in New York, where they have art studios and you can live above it. Then he was going to have that, and he was going to have places for people to have piano lessons. I was saying we don't have enough music in this town, kids are not taking enough music, enough voice. I'm all for that, because I didn't even know my daughter could sing... had I known, I would have pursued private band lessons. Well, all of this I could see in my vision...
for in the school and we were keeping the auditorium part, all the rooms around the auditorium. We were going to have a room for all our trophies and a band room named after Mr. Paige, maybe other rooms named after different people. Then I said, "Maybe there are a lot of little day care centers that could rent a room, have their class in there. We could have a cafeteria in the room. People could take the class to the cafeteria; they'd teach them how to eat... all of this was in my vision. But then we saw all kinds of roadblocks. I guess you all know the history now. They brought in that man that Nancy was talking about, she didn't like...

JT: Tortie Gallas?

IL: Yes. Oh he came to tell us what we could do. So then Chuck backed off. Chuck just backed out. Then we found out that the School Board owned the building, so now we were going to run to the School Board to try to get them to keep the preschool, but as you know we lost that battle. So then the next thing we did, we asked them not to turn the school over to the City. Well we lost that battle, so now the City owns Jefferson. So then, the on-going fight has been we want to keep Jefferson School and bring the building alive, because that's all we have left. Nothing of the built... you know from the bottom of Vinegar Hill, all the way up to Inge's Store, was black owned. You know that. All the way down from Main Street, all the way down to Preston Avenue was black owned.

JT: And was it across the street also where Lane High...?

IL: No, that was a long time ago. By the forties, Lane was here. Margo was born in the sixties, and the changes started happening in the sixties. So, then they got all of that property whatever they were going to do with it. Once I think they were going to put a library over there, I really did, because they had some plans for what was going to go in there. Somewhere there are plans where they said what they were going to do, but they didn't do it. So all that's left in that little cluster is Jefferson School, Fifth Street, and Sixth Street. Now you see what that's turning into. They took all of the houses, houses used to run all the way down to Fourth Street from Brown Street, they used to come up all the way through, houses were all over; they took all of that.

JT: Where did those people go, do you know Ida?

IL: One of them, the Kelly girl, I know, lives across from Burley. She bought a house. Her house is still on Eighth Street a couple of streets from Levy, Miss Lias, the woman used to have a private kindergarten. They just tore that down. Helen White, she's still living, they moved to Eighth Street. There used to be a time you could find affordable houses. When we bought our house, at 723 Preston, we paid $2,600 for it. You could buy a big house for $3,000 dollars but who had money then?
JT: What about businesses? Did you know people who owned businesses?

IL: The Bells owned a business on Vinegar Hill, Henry Bell owned a store. Lawrence Tonsler, the Tonslers owned most of the businesses. Mrs. McGinness’s husband had a tailoring shop. Mr. Kenneth Paige, I think it was his grandfather, he had an insurance company over there. The Masonic Temple was over there—that’s over on Forest Street now. We used to have private dances in there because you could rent the upstairs and that’s where you’d have your private dances. A tearoom used to be over there, Kyle’s Tea Room used to be over there. Lawrence Hysler, Elsa Hysler was his wife, he used to have a business over there. The Inge’s had a business over there, you know, for years. Then we had the church, Zion Union Church was over there. Miss Core Duke who was a principal lived there.

JT: So it was residential mixed in with…?

IL: Yes! Residential. Fourth Street all the way down was houses, homes. On the other side of the street too, next to where Miss Peachy Jackson, her husband was a doctor. Dr. Jackson, a dentist, was there. There were houses above there, you know?

LS: Even when they added onto the building in 1958 we talked to Lyria Hailstork about where her house used to be?

IL: Exactly, Lyria Brown.

LS: She said there were a lot of teachers that lived there?

IL: Exactly, exactly, she’s right, it’s true.

JT: And they had to move away?

IL: Lyria left… Lyria and others moved to Ridge Street…

LS: Yes, she described her house that had been there in great detail…

JT: Yes, it was great.

LS: She misses that house.

JT: So the teachers that lived around there that taught at Jefferson…?

IL: Peachy Jackson, lived right there, she taught at Jefferson. Mrs. McGinness lived there, she taught there. The Coles lived on Brown and Sixth, that big white house. There were how many teachers in that house? Two or three? Maybe three teachers. They were all old ladies that lived in that house. Ms. Allen, Frank Allen’s grandmother was alive then, and she lived next door to where Teresa lives
now. The Jacksons, Teresa, grew up in that house on Sixth. The Bells have been there ever since I can remember, they were all born there. Henry, Raymond, John and Roosevelt. They lived over the funeral home.

JT: The Jacksons are not the same as Doctor Jackson are they?

IL: Olivier Jackson and his daddy, Jay Jackson, they had a son named Elwood, Love Jackson, Gloria Jackson, Punjab was what I called him.

JT: Not Teresa’s family?

IL: No, Teresa’s family was Bill Post Jackson. There was Edward and Cox. Teresa was the only girl. Cox was named after his grandmother, Nannie Cox Jackson, so he got the Cox out of that.

LS: So they were on Sixth Street and the other Jacksons were on?

IL: He was at Fourth and Commerce, a big white house that is still there. And they had a lot of kids. All of us liked Love—he was different—and Gloria, and Franklin. Franklin is still living. A.W. is still living, and his grandson French is still living. French will be here for the Reunion, he lives in D.C.

JT: Did you know Nannie Cox Jackson?

IL: Yes I did, when she used to make us get off the railing.

JT: Oh really? You used to sit on the railing at the school?

IL: The front railing is the original railing. That was there when I was in school. We used to go over there and sit on that railing, and she would come down with a defiance... she used to walk like this... “Get off there, get off the railing.” She put that railing there, we couldn’t sit on the railing, if she caught you sitting on it...

JT: Somebody told me she paid for that railing?

IL: She could have. She had it installed there, plus she bought blankets and stuff. Our football team used to travel in a truck, what do you call those trucks?

LS: The open back truck?

IL: Open back truck. It was bigger than a pick-up truck, it was like a dump truck, and they used to go from Jefferson to Washington Park. We played football in Washington Park, down on the field. Now it’s all decorated up. We stood up on the hill. We didn’t have bleachers, we didn’t have fancy uniforms, we sat in the grass, or stood up but we were so busy cheering! We had a football team that was winning...
LS: We heard that those were very popular with the whole of Charlottesville?

IL: Hey, tell me about it!

JT: The white kids came too?

IL: No, that didn’t happen. We didn’t go to Lane games, they didn’t come to our games. Lane had a football team with uniforms. We would go back to the school and have dinner, feed the visiting team. And we cheerleaders would serve them the food. Then we would have the Ten Set Hop they used to call it, have you heard of that?

JT: Where did they have that?

IL: In the auditorium, and we had the prom there.

LS: Oh you did?

IL: But we decorated! We had all these streamers, and I’m sure we had a band, I can’t remember...

JT: Who paid for all that?

IL: We had class money. The juniors would always give the prom for the seniors, that’s how it happened.

JT: I think they still do that in the high school. Isn’t it some kind of tradition?

IL: We had a class treasurer, you know, and it wasn’t very expensive. You’d expect your mom to buy you the dress. Hopefully you’d get the date you wanted...

LS: Did you have a committee to decorate?

IL: Yes, the whole junior class would decorate... we would decorate for the seniors. I decorated for my husband’s class because he was a year ahead of me and then some of them decorated for us that came behind us. Class of... we graduated in ’46, so that was ’47. They decorated for us because I decorated for my husband’s class. We didn’t drink then; kids now they drink. We would go to Washington, that’s where we used to hang out, in Washington Park, and that’s when you learned how to drink wine may-be. Some of the older kids would come by and then you would try the taste because my mother didn’t take any stuff. She was strict.

LS: Like Baptist?
IL: She just was... she never let us. I couldn’t spend the night you know? She never let us go spending the night. I’ve always been against spending the night, and I’ve been very mindful of this. Do you remember the Katy Roskin case?

JT: She was staying at someone else’s house?

IL: [Discussion about a case of child being murdered when they went to spend the night at a friend’s house.] This is how we went to parties here. My sister was older than me. If she went to a party, I had to go. I had to go with her, so we would pick up all the friends, and all the families would see that I was going, and then we could all go to the party together. When we got to the party, they would give me a stick of gum and say, “You sit over there.” [laughter] That’s what they would do, then I would say “If you say whatever... I will tell momma on you.”

JT: So it was like having a chaperone?

IL: Yes, I was the chaperone. And we grew up like that as a family in that school.

JT: Were most families like that?

IL: Yes! Like for instance if you were coming from school and you got into some trouble. Some mothers would come out and say “Alright I’m telling your mother on you,” others would whip you themselves. They would, and then you’d go home and tell your mother. Then your mother would do the same thing to you.

JT: It sounds like people were very close-knit?

IL: It was, and the parents would come to the school and would attend all the affairs and there was just interest in what the kids were doing.

JT: Ida, unfortunately its eleven o’clock and I know you have to go. We got some really good stuff! Thank you so much.

End of Interview
Ida Lewis, August 6, 2004

(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:

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Interviewee: [Signature] Date: August 6, 2004

Interviewer: [Signature] Date: Aug. 6, 2004
Interview with Kenneth Martin

Interviewer: Alexandria Searls
Date: March 17, 2003
Location: Charlottesville, Virginia

Transcribed: March 2003
By: Alexandria Searls
Proofed: May 2004
By: Liz Sargent

Kenneth Martin has lived at 222 Lankford Avenue his entire life. He is African-American and attended Jefferson School from first grade through seventh in the mid- to late 1950s. He was also a student of Ms. Florence Bryant. Mr. Martin was one of twelve black children who enrolled in Lane High School in 1958, precipitating the closing of Charlottesville’s public schools as part of Massive Resistance to desegregation.

KM: There was no public kindergarten at that time. I went to kindergarten down the street. I used to get ‘C’s for deportment because I talked a lot. I was at Jefferson when the lawsuit came out. Doris M. Allen vs. Charlottesville City School Board. She lived across the street, and so did the Hamilton girls, the Dobson girls [students involved in the NAACP lawsuit]. Both elementary school and high school age. Doris was in high school. Doris and Olivia Ferguson (who had lived in Charlottesville’s current Mayor, Maurice Cox’s house) they were applying to go to Lane. Younger kids were applying to Venable. They just shut down Lane and Venable because those were the ones Judge Paul—a federal judge operating out of Harrisonburg—had ordered desegregated.

AS: Tell me a little bit about your thoughts on desegregation.

KM: I just thought it was something that should happen. I knew we were part of a cause—a Civil Rights cause. But we children pretty much adopted our parents’ viewpoints over the issues. They thought it was ridiculous that my older brother Alfred would have to go past Lane to go to Burley. I think he was part of the first lawsuit. The first lawsuit was to integrate the schools, the second to reopen the schools. None of the teachers at Jefferson discussed the issue at all. It was considered bad form for the employees of the system being sued to comment. None of their children were involved in the suit.

All of the teachers in Jefferson and Burley were black.
The suit wasn’t discussed among playmates. Why are you? Or why didn’t you? wasn’t discussed. It was a choice, and we respected each other’s choices.

We were very well educated at Jefferson. Broad curriculum. No elementary school had an art teacher, white or black. In first through third grade they had art, but no specific teacher. I became a teacher in math—I taught math eleven years, to the sixth through twelfth grades. Walker Junior High, middle school, Charlottesville High School.

At Jefferson I could see how hard the teachers worked. They were always prepared, always knowledgeable. They all seemed coordinated with each other.

[After noting that he didn’t teach with any Jefferson School teachers, Kenneth said] I did teach under John Gaines when he was Principal of Walker Middle School. He came over from Jefferson when the sixth grade moved to Walker. All of the black teachers had college degrees, but not all of the white teachers had college degrees.

AS: What do you feel about the building?

KM: It’s what went on in the building, rather than the building itself. Educational opportunities. Architecturally speaking, it’s not comparable to Venable, Clark, McGuffey, though the ’58 wing is comparable to Burley-Moran and Johnson. Only two schools were built for an integrated population—Jackson-Via and Charlottesville High School. They weren’t as well built [as the others].

Students brought their own instruments to the Jefferson School band. We had assemblies... we had plays. Each classroom put on their own play. I was in two plays that were put on by my classroom teachers. So we did have art and music. We also had a marching band that took part in the parades of the city—one in the spring, one in the fall. Apple Harvest and Apple Blossom [later merged into the Dogwood Festival]. We usually won the awards. They’d throw apples out to the spectators.

The elementary school fed into the Burley band and several of them turned into rock’n’roll bands. Others of us took piano lessons—from a private instructor, Robert Smith, a white. During segregation, he taught at Zion Union on 4th Street. Often we’d go for piano at 8 [a.m.] and right over to Jefferson at 9. The teachers were supportive. At seventh grade graduation, the teachers convinced three of us to perform at the graduation ceremonies. When they tore down Zion Union, Mr. Smith moved his classes to his downtown studios where before he had only taught his white students. Until then he had taught segregated classes. He lost a handful of white students because of it. [Zion Union was torn down during the Vinegar Hill demolition.]

The 1963-67 idea was to integrate at the elementary schools and then let them move up. Then there was freedom of choice. But Judge Paul said that was ipso facto segregation. Before freedom of choice, you had to win a lawsuit to go to a white school. When my two brothers got into Lane, it was a lawsuit.
Jefferson School had a strong core curriculum in math, science, history, language arts. Classes at Jefferson were probably twenty-eight to thirty students. Those rooms were full with children. As a teacher, I didn’t see where smaller classes outproduced the larger classes.

Blacks insisted upon education and whites weren’t interested in them being educated. They finally gave blacks an eighth grade education, so we’d learn to read the name of a store so we could make a delivery. Blacks were often encouraged before Mr. Tramontin to drop out of school and go to work. We started seeing students drop out in the sixth grade—there were whites that dropped out too. Mr. Tramontin came in around ‘60 or ‘61. I remember my parents complained when he was fired or when his contract wasn’t renewed.

My father graduated from Jefferson in 1932 after eleven years. He studied French in high school. My seventh grade history teacher was his French teacher, Mrs. Byers. She could play the piano. He went to one or two reunions before he died. After school, he usually had some sort of job, or worked for his father.

I’ve lived here all my life [on Lankford Avenue.]

Jefferson looks the same as it was when I was in elementary school. It’s been really well-preserved.

I was an escort on May Day one year. I wore white shoes—white bucks—white shirt. They had a May Day court, and you had a May Day queen, and you had lots of games. As an escort you weren’t allowed to participate in the games. At first we had it on the grounds in front of the old part because it was not paved, just dirt. They paved the playground in sixth and seventh grade. As separate but equal they started supplying more art materials, doing more upkeep.

We had a May Pole, probably on a stand. It had ribbons. The boys escorted the girls. The girls danced with the ribbons, and everyone wore all white. The court played with the ribbons. The band would play.

Occasionally whites would visit the school after the lawsuits. I remember one year some University faculty came in and staged a play. Using black students. Pat Edwards, Paul Scorr had the lead roles. Some little princess. Put on for the whole school. Prior to that time, all the plays were put on by the black teachers themselves.

The landscaping was just bushes. The flagpole may have been on Commerce Street. We went to school through the Commerce Street entrance. It was the closest entrance for us.

[More on plays…] One of my roles was St. Patrick. [Perhaps remembering this play due to the fact that the interview was taking place on St. Patrick’s Day.] My mother made the costume: green, with a cap. I remember dying on these chairs. I had to lay across three or four chairs and people came and spoke words over me. My first grade teacher put it on.
Parents spent more money in those days. They bought our books, paper, pencils, and made costumes. Teachers supplied our art supplies—which came out of their own pockets. That didn’t come out of the pocket of the city until later.

In the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades, we participated in the Lion’s Club Thomas Jefferson Essay Contest, and some of us were chosen to go to the library and do research. Patricia Edwards or Patricia Moss would usually win for Jefferson. One of the topics was Thomas Jefferson: A Surveyor. Each year it was a different topic, and you’d write about that. It was always about Jefferson. We used the books from the Jefferson library and the Downtown Library. It was either the Lion’s Club or the Kiwanis.

You had Black History week. When I was teaching at Walker in 1971, it was a month.

When I was at Jefferson we used the word “Negro.” When I went to college I started using “black.” I feel comfortable with “black.”

We had one school guard, Mr. Payne. He was white. Then we also had crossing guards—students who were appointed by the teachers a week at a time, and they put a sash on. Mr. Payne was at 4th Street and Commerce, a busy street. He was fat and had a very cherubic delightful face and he greeted you every morning with a big smile. He was a member of the Charlottesville Police and wore a uniform. Years later he was run over and killed by a car. He was there for the elementary school years. I’m not sure where he was when he was killed. Not so much traffic in those days. Not as if you couldn’t see a policeman with a blue uniform.

When I went to Lane, I wasn’t behind the white students and I was placed in the top class by the ninth grade.

In spite of the city’s neglect, Jefferson provided a wonderful education for blacks in the city. At one time, if you wanted to have a high school education you had to leave and go north or northwest.

[On Vinegar Hill...] We weren’t allowed to go through there. There were quite a few unsavory characters living among good people.

[On walking to school...] There was a stream of children along Ridge Street, Oak Street, Dice Street. Some people would have lunch bags or pails, and everyone would have book bags.

If we were due at ten of nine, we would leave at about twenty-five before nine. About seventy students walked to school together. Everyone was synchronized to leave at the last possible moment. Some of the younger students would go early to play, but the older you got the less you wanted to do that. A whole stream of us, walking to school and walking home. We went by Inge’s grocery. Sometimes we’d stop and get apples.
One of the things the teachers would do for us that was special was that they would show old films. The state owned the films and the classic novels filmed in Hollywood and for a nickel we could go in there and watch them. “Great Expectations.” The films were shown on the wall in the cafeteria. The walls were painted white. “Tales of Two Cities,” “Wuthering Heights,” Pride and Prejudice.” A lot of us would stay after school for the films.

The Paramount would show films. The Lafayette was the oldest. They tore it down and built Rose’s. They used to have midnight cowboys. We went to the Jefferson Theatre. At the University Theatre, everything was on one level, so they couldn’t segregate us, so they said no blacks, period. Very few blacks went there later, after desegregation. The integration of the schools didn’t mean that the restaurants and the movie theatres were integrated. They fought it for as long as they could.

Black customers could buy a hat, but not try it on. Some places wouldn’t let the black customers try on shoes. So blacks would go to New Jersey and buy lots of clothes and shoes where they could try them on. Up there they didn’t have signs, but the blacks knew where to go and where not to go.

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: \[Alexandria Searls\]
Interview with Elizabeth Minor

Interviewer: Mary Hill Caperton
Date: August 31, 2002
Location: Omni Hotel
Charlottesville, Virginia

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

[This transcript has been reviewed by Mrs. Minor, who has corrected some of the spelling and grammar.]

MHC: Would you state your full name, and the address where you live now?

EM: My name is Elizabeth Jefferson Minor. My address is 39 Schley Street, Newark, New Jersey.

MHC: How many years did you go to Jefferson School?

EM: Eleven.

MHC: Eleven years! When did you leave Charlottesville?

EM: I left Charlottesville in 1954.

MHC: And where did you go from here?

EM: I went to New York from here, got married, then moved to New Jersey, and that’s where I’ve been ever since.

MHC: How often have you come back for these reunions? I see you’ve got a 1990 T-shirt.

EM: Every two years since 1990.

MHC: Oh really?

EM: Yes.
MHC: When did they start? Right after you graduated?

EM: No. Our class of '49 had a reunion in 1979, thirty years later.

MHC: Waited a while....?

EM: Yes, it was a wonderful occasion.

MHC: I bet it was. I guess in those days a whole lot of the people who graduated left town to make their fortune?

EM: Sure. [they laugh]

MHC: Where did you live when you were growing up in Charlottesville?

EM: On Commerce Street.

MHC: Oh! Very close to the school?

EM: Yes.

MHC: So it didn’t take you a minute to get there?

EM: No.

MHC: What are some of your best memories of your school time?

EM: I can remember all my teachers from the first grade up until the seventh. I remember some of the high school teachers.

MHC: Some of the high school teachers? But you remember the grade school teachers best?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Ah.

EM: ....its like I can to remember yesterday but not today.

MHC: Yes, yes. I know exactly what you mean! Were both of your parents from Charlottesville as well?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Did they both go to Jefferson School?

EM: No.
MHC: I expect... well, they didn’t have a high school here when they were little?

EM: No they didn’t.

MHC: There wasn’t any place for them to go. Did very many of your generation, your classmates drop out of school?

EM: Not too many of them. Most of us went all the way through.

MHC: And you knew all your teachers pretty well, didn’t you?

EM: Yes, I did.

MHC: Where did your teachers generally live?

EM: They lived in the Charlottesville area.

MHC: Right in the same community?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Were you encouraged by your teachers to continue your education?

EM: Yes I was.

MHC: And did you have an opportunity to later on?

EM: No, I always said I was going to, but never did.

MHC: I can understand that... and did any of your children come back here?

EM: No.

MHC: Just to visit?

EM: Oh, yes, my daughter did come with me to my thirty-year reunion.

MHC: Now you say you graduated in eleven years, can you explain why it was eleven years?

EM: Because the school only went to the eleventh grade... [laughs]

MHC: Who was your favorite teacher?

EM: Miss Janie Johnson.

MHC: And what grade did she teach?
EM: She taught me in the sixth and seventh grades.

MHC: Oh... what was it that made you like her the most?

EM: She took me under her wing, she made me feel like I was her favorite.

MHC: Ah, ha... teacher's pet! Did she teach all subjects to two classes at the same time, or did she just move up when you moved up?

EM: Oh, she moved up.

MHC: And somebody else taught fifth grade the next year?

EM: She taught sixth grade one year, and seventh the next.

MHC: Yeah?

EM: Yeah.

MHC: Did you all go home for lunch, or did you bring your own lunch?

EM: We brought our lunch to school.

MHC: Brought it with you...?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Did they let people go home for lunch in those days?

EM: I don't think so... I really don't remember.

MHC: Brought it along with you?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Was there any kind of lunch provided at school?

EM: Oh yes, we had lunch in the cafeteria.

MHC: I mean you could buy lunch... if you wanted to? That was high school?

EM: Yes, that was high school.

MHC: Not when you were little?

EM: No. High school you could go to the cafeteria to get your lunch.
MHC: Do you remember any of the cafeteria ladies. They were all ladies... I suppose?

EM: They were ladies. I don’t remember their names.

MHC: Oh, O.K. If you got sick when you were in school, what happened? Say, did you go... there wasn’t a nurse there was there?

EM: Oh yes, we did have a nurse. I don’t remember her name.

MHC: Yes, but you remember there was a nurse?

EM: Yes.

MHC: So, she probably had a room where you could go and lie down if you weren’t feeling well?

EM: Yes, there was.

MHC: What did they do if you were bad?

EM: Oh...

MHC: Did you get sent to the principal’s office?

EM: Oh yes. I wasn’t one that had to go to the principal’s office, but that’s what happened.

MHC: You were lucky it didn’t happen to you... [they laugh]

MHC: Well, did you have very many brothers or sisters in the school?

EM: Just one.

MHC: Just one?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Older or younger?

EM: Younger.

MHC: Younger... so you helped her along?

EM: No, not really. We weren’t close. I had a lot of friends in later years. I was adopted into my friends’ family as their sister.

MHC: Uh, huh.
EM: And I went all the way through school with her, and she's still my friend.

MHC: Oh good. Was she the same age as you?

EM: She is a year younger than me.

MHC: Were most of your teachers young or older?

EM: Some were older. For instance, Miss Janie Johnson was older.

MHC: I guess they all seemed old to you?

EM: Yes! [laughs]

MHC: At that time?

EM: Yes, but in high school there were younger teachers.

MHC: O.K. What kind of extra-curricular activities did you all do? Did you do in particular?

EM: Well, there was football, basketball—boys and girls. I couldn’t play basketball because of a thyroid condition, but I was manager of the team. There was also the chorus where I participated.

MHC: Was there a band or orchestra?

EM: Oh, yes, we had a fantastic band. I started with the band, but didn’t go too far. [laughs] I was Miss Homecoming in my senior year.

MHC: Now that's something! What did you all do on the weekends for fun. Did you all stay in town, or did you all go out in the country? What did you do?

EM: Oh, we stayed in town.

MHC: And did the girls do any sports on the weekend?

EM: I don’t think so. No.

MHC: Were the parents very active in what was going on in school in those days?

EM: Yes, some of them.

MHC: But it was always the same group of parents that were doing things?

EM: Yes.
MHC: Did they help any with the teaching?

EM: No.

MHC: No they were...?

EM: No, there weren’t any subs or anything at that time.

MHC: Did most of your teachers go get their normal, you know, their teaching training in the state? Do you remember?

EM: In the state.

MHC: And were most of them from Charlottesville? Or did they come here and...?

EM: Most of them were from Charlottesville.

MHC: They were local people?

EM: Yes.

MHC: What big specific event do you remember the most that happened during your high school years? What was the most fun thing?

EM: We did two operettas, and they were fantastic!

MHC: What operettas did you do?

EM: We did one called Lilawalla, and another called The Belle of Barcelona. Those were the two biggest events.

MHC: The ones you remember the most? Well, who made all the costumes? Did you wear costumes?

EM: I don’t remember who made the costumes…

MHC: You don’t think it was the mothers?

EM: I don’t really remember whether they made them in sewing class or not.

MHC: O.K. Well did they have cooking classes too?

EM: Oh, yes.

MHC: Did you learn stuff to take with you that you could use later on?
EM: Not really, but the one thing I can never forget is making fried bananas.

MHC: Good for you. Was that your idea, the fried bananas?

EM: No, it wasn’t. I had to bring in a recipe and wasn’t prepared so I cut one out of a magazine.

MHC: You winged it?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Well, what was the biggest shock to you coming back to Charlottesville?

EM: The city had grown.

MHC: That’s right, it sure has!

EM: Yes.

MHC: Did you have a regular lunchroom where you had lunch, or was there a big multi-purpose room where you had lunch and gym and everything together?

EM: Oh, no, we had a cafeteria where we ate lunch.

MHC: And was that wonderful big auditorium there when you were in Jefferson School?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Were there a lot of other non-school activities at the church after school time, I mean at the school? Non-school activities?

EM: I don’t remember…

MHC: After school or on weekends, did people come back for things, sort of social events or anything?

EM: I don’t remember.

MHC: No, can’t think of any? There weren’t any community functions that went on? When you had student clubs, was that after school or during school time? Was there someone who helped you with those, or were they pretty much student run?

EM: A lot of teachers helped us.

MHC: And were there very many clubs that you could take part in if you wanted? Do you remember what any of them were?
EM: We had the French Club, we had the Glee Club…

MHC: Was there a…?

EM: Dramatic club.

MHC: Dramatic club. Was there a sewing club, or was that strictly in the classroom?

EM: That was strictly in the classroom. We didn’t have a sewing club.

MHC: What year was it you finished here?

EM: Forty-nine.

MHC: Forty-nine? Oh.

EM: Yes.

MHC: O.K. What would you like to see happen to the building, Jefferson School?

EM: The building should remain here, and we could have a museum.

MHC: That’s what you want to have here, a museum?

EM: Yes.

MHC: When was the last time you were able to go in the building?

EM: Two years ago, when we had our reunion, 2000.

MHC: So they had a tour?

EM: No, I don’t think they had a tour, I just went for the church services held there.

MHC: Oh I see, the services were there?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Where will they do the church services this year? Oh, that’s tomorrow.

EM: Right in Jefferson.

MHC: Oh, they’re going to do it here in the hotel?

EM: No, no at the school.
MHC: Oh, I didn’t think anybody could get in the school.

EM: Oh yes.

MHC: Oh good.

EM: We’ll have our services there.

MHC: When the boys had their football games and things, what other schools would they play?

EM: Maggie Walker in Richmond; Roanoke; Lynchburg.

MHC: Did you get to go to the games?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Was there a bus that took you down there?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Did a lot of parents go as well?

EM: No, just the teachers and the kids.

MHC: .. and the band, no doubt?

EM: Oh, yes.

MHC: Well, if you were the Homecoming queen, then I bet you knew a lot of the football players?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Knew them well. What church did you attend when you were in Charlottesville?

EM: Zion Union Baptist.

MHC: Zion Union, is that the one that... Where was Zion Union when you were growing up?

EM: On Fourth Street.

MHC: Oh, was it torn down when they tore down Vinegar Hill?

EM: Yes.

MHC: So, that’s when they moved it over to Preston?
EM: Yes.

MHC: Yes that's a beautiful church down there. Was Washington Park any kind of park when you were growing up?

EM: Just like a big barn.

MHC: So the barn was there? And it was used?

EM: Yes, we used to have dances after football games.

MHC: Oh, at the barn?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Oh! Were there any playing fields?

EM: Yes, we played on the lower level there, and the barn was up on the hill.

MHC: So where did the boys play football? The schoolboys?

EM: Down on the, down in the lower part of the park.

MHC: In Washington Park? They used to go all the way there from up here?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Was that hillside where everybody sat to watch the game?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Did you have any field trips that you remember, where everybody got on the bus to go somewhere, or walked down to visit something, like the power plant or something?

EM: I remember when I was a Girl Scout, and we used to walk up to Thomas Jefferson's home every year...

MHC: Walked up there?

EM: Yes, we walked.

MHC: Did you pack a picnic lunch?

EM: I don't remember..

MHC: That's a long walk.
EM: We walked every year in April for his birthday. Wasn’t his birthday in April?

MHC: Yes, I think so. April, I should know that… Do you remember who your Girl Scout leader was?

EM: I can’t remember her name.

MHC: Was it Mrs. Reeves?

EM: No, not Mrs. Reeves…

MHC: Can’t remember who that was? Were there Girl Scout meetings at... did the troop meet at the school? Or in church?

EM: We met at the school.

MHC: Was there more than one troop? Or just one troop?

EM: Just the one troop.

MHC: Did you have any interaction with the white Girl Scouts?

EM: No.

MHC: None at all?

EM: No.

MHC: Did you go to the movies on Saturdays?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Every Saturday?

EM: No, sometimes, I’m not a movie person. I’d go because my friends went. I would often go to sleep.

MHC: Just for the social part?

EM: Yes.

MHC: How much did it cost?

EM: I don’t remember the cost.

MHC: Then did you go somewhere else afterwards for a treat?
EM: After the movie? No.

MHC: O.K. Were there any little shops around the school where you all could go and get candy or soda after school?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Where did you usually go?

EM: There was a store on Commerce Street across the street from the school, the name of the place was Scott Dean's where we could buy snacks.

MHC: Are those buildings still there?

EM: No.

MHC: Different buildings now?

EM: Yes, and there was always a store, Inge's Store, on Main Street. We would go there.

MHC: Back then did the county children come to Jefferson school?

EM: No, it wasn't consolidated then.

MHC: Just the city?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Just the city children? And I guess most everybody lived within walking distance?

EM: Yes. We had to walk.

MHC: Where the big parking lot is now, after they tore down the grammar school, what was there? Was it playing fields? Or do you remember? Was it a grassy place? Could you use it? You know where the parking lot is now?

EM: No, nothing else was there after the school. At least I don't recall anything there after the school.

Unidentified questioner:
   We were just wondering if there were ever any playing fields associated with the school? Where did you have athletics?

MHC: Well, the football field was down in Washington Park where that field is now.
Questioner:

What a pain to have to walk all the way over there!

MHC: Was basketball the only sport that girls played?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Did you have bloomers that you had to wear? Or did you just wear your regular clothes?

EM: No, we had uniforms. [they laugh]

MHC: So, did you have bloomers?

EM: Yes, there were bloomers.

MHC: When you were littler, when you were in the lower grades, was there a playground near the school, with any swing sets or anything like that?

EM: No we didn’t have swings outside.

MHC: No swings or sliding board? So you just kind of played ring-around-the-rosy type things?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Now you say you were in the French Club?

EM: No, I wasn’t in the French Club.

MHC: Oh, but there was a French Club?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Did very many people take a foreign language?

EM: No, not too many.

MHC: It wasn’t required then?

EM: No.

MHC: Did they teach Latin there? Do you remember?

EM: No, we only had French.

MHC: I bet the French teacher taught other things. Do you remember if she taught anything besides French?
EM: Yes, she also taught history.

MHC: What was your favorite class, I mean subject?

EM: My favorite subject was math.

MHC: Math?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Good for you. Was there an honor society there, you know, an honor roll, for the best students?

EM: Yes.

MHC: And was that quite an honor to be in the honor society, or did everybody think you were silly?

EM: [laughs] It was quite an honor.

MHC: Good, so your teachers really encouraged everybody?

EM: Yes, to work hard.

MHC: Well, if a child was bad, did they try and find the parents right away?

EM: They went to the principal's office and they took care of it.

MHC: Did anybody you know of go back and teach at Jefferson school who was in school with you?


MHC: Oh, yes! He came back? He went away and came back.

EM: He came back.

MHC: And then he went away again and taught somewhere else I presume?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Did you have more men teachers or women teachers?

EM: I had more women teachers.

MHC: Women teachers. And what kind of subjects did the men teach?
EM: The men taught shop, music, and I had a male typing and shorthand teacher.

MHC: Were there any courses you had to take?

EM: History, and English.

MHC: But you liked math. Did you have to take a certain number of years of math?

EM: Yes, you had to take a certain number.

MHC: And, then could you take extra if you wanted?

EM: Then you could select the ones you wanted to... namely algebra or geometry.

MHC: Did they have any art classes?

EM: I really don’t remember.

MHC: You just remember the things you were interested in—the music—all those good things! If somebody failed a class, was there summer school?

EM: No. I remember they had to repeat the class.

MHC: Just repeat the grade?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Was there a school library?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Could you study in there? Or did you just go in there to borrow books?

EM: Yes, you could study there.

MHC: Could you take books home?

EM: Yes.

MHC: Oh that’s good. Can you think of anything else you wanted to say about Jefferson School? Have you mostly kept up with your classmates through coming to reunions or do you keep up with them by writing?

EM: I keep up with them by writing.

MHC: Good for you.
EM: And the reunions.

MHC: [laughs] Have you gotten into e-mailing?

EM: No. I do have an e-mail address, but my daughter never lets me touch it.

MHC: Thank you so much, I really enjoyed it.

EM: Yes, thank you, my pleasure.

MHC: And I know you’re going to have more fun. Are you all going to dance and party again tonight?

EM: Oh, yes. After the banquet they will dance. I still haven’t gotten into dances. Love the music...

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:

[Signature]

[Name]

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Date 8/31/02

Interviewer [Signature] Date 8/31/02
Interviewee with Barbara Myer

Interviewer: Alexandria Searls
Date: March 17, 2003
Location: Charlottesville, Virginia

Transcribed: March 2003
By: Alexandria Searls

Proofed: May 2004
By: Liz Sargent

Barbara is a white parent of a Jefferson Preschool Student, Eleanor, who attended 2000-2001 as a four-year-old.

BM: Nowhere in America do you have a concentrated sense of habitation like you have in Europe, but in Jefferson School you have a sense of the continuous successful struggle for education in the face of a society that doesn’t think you should be educated.

AS: What do you find special about the building?

BM: It’s still standing. It’s a building that’s been able to do its job. That’s pretty rare in this society where uses change so frequently... It’s been true to its job, and sustained its job, and that’s a kind of integrity that is rare.

In support of collecting Barbara’s story, the following excerpts from her writing were transcribed:

I am a divorced single mother. I had always intended to be home for my child and did not consider that the unexpected poverty of divorce should change that intention.

When my daughter was three years old, a number of neighborhood children she played with began going to preschool and were unavailable for play dates. One November morning, she crawled up on my lap in tears and begged to go to school too. I had to explain to her that school is something you buy, and that we could not afford it.

Shortly after that I began looking for a preschool for her to attend the following year. Even the most generous “scholarship” opportunities I could find left a tuition I could not pay. The Jefferson Preschool screening came late in my search for a preschool. The screening experience itself was amazingly positive. My daughter flitted happily from teacher to teacher while I was interviewed. At the end of the screening session, I was verbally reassured by all the educators.
involved that it was very likely that my daughter would be accepted into the program. Fortunately she was.

At that time, all I knew about the Jefferson School was that it was where the consolidated preschool was housed.

During my daughter’s year there, I learned more about the history of the school itself as a long-time entity in the Vinegar Hill neighborhood. I attended two economic development meetings at the school. The building had been added into the West Main Street Corridor Study, and many development options were explored. I frankly learned far more from the citizens attending those meetings than I did from the people conducting them.

I learned that the school had been built to teach a group of people who society at large did not deem appropriate to educate. I learned that the school had grown during decades of segregation. I learned of the profound pride the Vinegar Hill neighborhood took in its school. I learned human truths beyond the mere fact that Vinegar Hill had been razed some decades ago. Stories of lives that should have been marred beyond redemption by the hubris of white society, but that were not. Stories of lives like the phoenix—repeatedly reborn from the fire. I heard and witnessed fierce joy and pride in not merely surviving, but in being fully alive despite lifetimes at the mercy of racism, both direct and indirect.

I felt far more connected to the humanity of the people who fought and sometimes succeeded and sometimes failed, but who fought on nonetheless, than I did to the blindly racist and money-based desires of today’s School Board, City Council, and hired architects.

I began speaking about the Jefferson Preschool and the Jefferson School at every public opportunity presented. I was less than fully informed at the time, but I spoke from the heart and I spoke too often alone. Still I spoke. I felt that if I did not speak, I would be less worthy of my sense of connection to those whose profound humanity I so admired. Already I owed them a debt and I had to repay it. I had to repay the debt both to the Jefferson Preschool for their incredibly fine fulfillment of my daughter’s desire to go to school and to Charlottesville’s black community who had fought on so long, so often alone, to create and preserve the physical building in which my daughter was experiencing her first taste of school.

Now a broader river of voices flows on about the Jefferson School. There is a non-profit organization whose sole purpose is the preservation of the site. There is a task force dedicated to determining future uses for the site. Despite these forces for preservation, I still fear deeply for the school. The City remains in a position to do as they wish with the property. Just as the School Board who ordered a study of the preschool was in a position to ignore the top four recommendations of the study’s findings and break up the preschool at its discretion, so is City Council still in a position to do whatever they will. My deepest concern is that the time and money being invested is a squandering and delaying tactic—that despite findings and recommendations, excuses will be found for doing what they always meant to do: make money off the sale of the school’s four downtown acres and throw a sop to the black community in the form of an African-American museum on the site. “Look what used to be here! We couldn’t be bothered to keep it!”
Barbara Myer and daughter Eleanor Sissom, March 2003

(photo by Alexandria Searls)
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 Teresa Price, Jane and Gene Foster

Interviewers: Jacky Taylor and Liz Sargent
Date: June 29, 2003
Location: Charlottesville, Virginia

Transcribed: June 2004
By: Liz Sargent
Proofed by: Jacky Taylor

[This interview is sadly marred by technical difficulties, associated either with a defective audiotape, or the tape recorder. Segments of the conversation periodically were not recorded at all.]

JT: This is the Jefferson School Oral History project. And I am here with...

TP: Teresa Jackson Walker Price. My address is 206 6th Street, N.W. Charlottesville. I arrived in Charlottesville in 1925. My family has been involved in Jefferson School for a long time. I have three brothers, I was the youngest...My grandmother was a teacher at Jefferson for many, many years. Nannie Cox Jackson was her name. She was involved in the home economics program and the cafeteria, the athletics program, and I'll think of some other stories later.

JT: What about your parents, Teresa, were they involved?

TP: Yes, my parents were involved as supporters of the program at the school, as good parents are, because there were four children enrolled.

JT: But they weren't teachers?

TP: No. No. My mother was a stay at home mom, and my father was in the advertising business, but he was very active in the sports program because my brothers played football. All of them played football, and in the early years, with the beginnings of the football team, my grandmother pretty much got that underway. And, my father provided a lot of the transportation in an open truck because they could not afford to rent a bus in those early days...

JF: So there wasn't a subsidized athletic program?
TP: No. My grandmother recruited the coach and recruited the doctor because she felt that we should have a physician on board. They would obtain most of the early uniforms from the left over things at the University of Virginia. She brought the blankets... we always walked to the Wine Cellar field for practice. Have you heard of Wine Cellar field? That’s behind Lane High School, further down that way. It was a marvelous tract of land with many bumps and holes.

JT: Oh? No.

TP: Later, of course, we went to Washington Park to play. The last brother I think played at Washington Park.

JT: So what years were they playing?

TP: I know I was already grown up, but I don’t remember... you can count from 25 to 12 years.

JF: ’37?

TP: Uh, huh. They played in ’36 or so I think... Then of course you have to remember that we were so divided that at that time I didn’t realize what was going on at Lane High School. I passed by, but I wasn’t concerned about what they were doing. I was having a marvelous time at Jefferson.

JF: We were dazzled by what they had.

JT: So you went on a tour of Lane High School at some point.

TP: Oh this is early on, we’re jumping too far ahead.

JF: I’m jumping too far ahead.

JT: May-be you can introduce yourself and tell us...

JF: I was just thinking of the difference between what... teachers had to provide and what was provided for the kids in the high school... I always learn things from Teresa. Because I too, like many others didn’t know what was going on between the two.

TP: You were separated.

LS: And we heard too that to go to the football games you had to go to other communities where there was a Black school.

TP: I mean really, were you considering that we would play Lane High School? [all laugh]

LS: You couldn’t play anyone here in Charlottesville...?
TP: No! You couldn’t play any White teams in the area.

JT: What about the county? Was there a... team?

TP: The same thing was going on in the county.

JT: No, but I mean there weren’t any...there wasn’t a high school in the county?

TP: There was Albemarle County Training High School, which was all Black.

JT: Did you play them? Did they have a team...?

TP: No. They didn’t...either it wasn’t large or, they didn’t have a sports advocate like Nanny Cox Jackson at Albemarle.

JT: So you had to travel further, to Richmond and Roanoke...?

TP: That’s right, to have some competition, Richmond and Roanoke and Lynchburg.

LS: That’s a long way to go for a game!

TP: Right. Imagine being in the open truck going to Lynchburg. And then you heard those stories about the teams being so competitive and after all the game might be a fiasco...and then you’d have to jump on the truck and drive home. [laugh]

JT: That’s exciting!

TP: That was exciting.

JF: Did you go to those games Teresa? Did your mother let you?

TP: Well, not during the truck time, but as we gained a little prestige and you were able to pay for some buses...then my father always went on the trips, you know, just as a parent, as many parents did.

JT: Did they?

TP: Yes, to support the teams.

JF: And you went along?

TP: Yes, oftentimes he would let me come, not to every game. And of course he didn’t go to every game. But my family was really supportive of the sports program...most parents were.

JT: So, other students from the school would go to the games, and parents, too?
TP: Yes, traveling with the team.

JT: That’s great. You didn’t pay, though to go to the games?

TP: Oh, yes. You paid a small fee I think, and I don’t remember that at Jefferson as well as I remember it at away games. You know, that was...because you had to do something to support your own sports program. So, that necessitated that. And a big part of their sports program was...my grandmother...after the games would feed both teams—the Jefferson team and the opponent, and so that was a big thing. And I was very popular because all the girls wanted me to ask my grandmother if they could be waitresses. They’d say, “Ask your grandmother if I could serve lunch to the boys.” My grandmother cooked all those meals in a little kitchen about the size of this. And I didn’t get to go to a local football game until she retired because the family always went to help her get the meals.

JT: Where did she cook?

TP: The cafeteria at Jefferson—there was this small Home Ec. room and across the hall where the boiler room is, next door to that was a cafeteria. At the back of it was dirt floor, and she had that covered with steps, she had somebody build steps and cover it up. She found somebody to equip the cafeteria, my grandmother did all that...She had tables and chairs...What do you call it in cafeterias now where you keep the food hot, but she had it all arranged and the children loved it too, you know, the students in the Home Ec worked in the cafeteria... She didn’t give any free meals, she sold meatballs for a penny each, Popsicles, and...saved the money, gave it to the principal’s office.

JF: Did your grandfather, Mr. Jackson...

TP: He was already dead.

JF: Where did your grandmother get the meat for the meatballs?

TP: The bones from the...But Mr. Gleason was a good friend of Nanny’s...And we go and get those and she would bring them back....and begin her...the meatballs, so she would scrape the bones, and she’d take the marrow out, and whatever else you put in meatballs. I never ate one of those meatballs. [laugh] I just watched her.

JF: You didn’t want to eat them after you saw how they were made?

TP: No. But other kids loved them. She made this wonderful soup.

JT: What did they put in the soup?

TP: Broth soup. And some of those bones, you know you got the essence from those bones. And biscuits. And for the football team she did the same menu every time. Meatballs and biscuits...Oh, yeah. She did it on a shoestring.
JT: This was while she was teaching?

TP: Yes! While she was teaching.

JF: Is Jackson Via named after her?

TP: Jackson Via is named after her because she was really a powerhouse. But, um, when she wanted...if the children came to her and said “we needed so and so,” you know, “we want to start a football team, Mrs. Jackson.” O.K. Then she would proceed. The superintendent, Dr. Johnson...said “Nanny, if you can do it, go ahead!”

JT: So she didn’t go to the principal, she went to the Superintendent?

TP: The Superintendent.

JT: Who was the principal of the school at the time, do you know?

TP: Initially, Mrs. Cora Duke.

LS: Oh, a woman!

TP: And then Mrs. Maude ???...Or vice versa. And then Mr. Duncan. By the time Mr. Duncan came along times were changing. So...her techniques didn’t jive with his new educational standards, so she retired soon after that. But she had done marvelous work, and her opening that...I couldn’t tell you what kind of degree she had, if any, but because she worked at the University as a seamstress...this, one of the ladies that she worked for decided that they needed more, they needed better trained maids and seamstresses and so forth...And Nanny Cox started the Home Ec department for that kind of training, so that was her initial purpose...well, she did sewing and cooking...

JF: How many kids did she have besides your mother?

TP: There were three girls and two boys. She was the breadwinner. She educated those girls.

JF: Do you have aunts and uncles around? Did they go to Jefferson?

TP: What did you say?

JT: The girls...you said she educated them.

TP: The school system...Um I could look that up and find out how many years.

JF: What was the elementary school?

TP: What was the elementary school? I guess they went to the early Jefferson Elementary, and then they went to Washington early on. That’s where they stayed. They finished
college there. And one was a nurse, and another one worked in the government. In Washington, D.C.

JF: They had to go to relatives. They had to go stay with somebody in Richmond or Washington, or if you had money, Mrs. Coles went to a private school cause she was the last of thirteen. You also told me about the baseball games down in Farmville, that they had to have in order to have two months of school. They had to raise all the money for their own school. And Mrs. Coles was a...when I was in school was married to Doctor Coles, so she was probably in her 60s then. But, anyway, she taught me a lot.

JT: What was her first name?

JF: Lotilía Coles.

TP: Oh, oh Tilia. I see. You're talking about Main Street.

GF: She was a funeral director.

JT: Oh, she was a funeral director....

JF: Her father Colberg would come over for some meeting.

TP: She was originally from Charlottesville. She was from Farmville?

JF: Where is the Courthouse where they signed the end of the Civil War?

GF: Appomattox.

JF: Appomattox, and you and Gene and I went with her down, and she told us all about her life down there. And, to have two months of school.

JT: So, Jane, when did you first come to Charlottesville?

JF: I got here in 1959. And lived in the university houses at Piedmont. That's where...and Teresa would bring her boys over to play with our son and the Gaston's son in ... Mimosa. You took them berry picking. It was the Gastons that took us to the Council on Human Relations where we met Teresa. And Ed, and Ed's wife Eunice....And Florence Bryant.

TP: And ... ???

JF: May Jackson and Edgar Jackson, and other teachers I think, and people like Mr. Ferguson. If you had a...it was definitely a middle class bunch of people but we were very compatible, and we had a lot of Christmas parties and all sorts of nice things.

TP: And our children played together.
JF: So this was, this was, the, as the Gastons said, “this is where you’re going to meet people that you really will be glad to know, because otherwise you knew your maid. Or you knew the man who did yard work or whatever. But that was all.

TP: We did things like attack the housing issue.

LS: What?

JF: Imogene Bunn wanted to get to work on housing, but Reverend Bunn, Ben Bunn, said “It’s jobs, jobs, jobs.” And so we all went and talked to employers.

TP: Right...

JF: And they all said “it’s too soon. You young women are pushing this too much, and all of our employees would quit, and our customers wouldn’t come back.” But we kept trying and trying. And finally we got discouraged, and we got Washington in on it. Lyndon Johnson was the head of the...he was the Vice President and he was head of equal employment. And there were several companies that had government contracts.

GF: Sperry.

JF: Within three days they had managed to find all these people that we had been trying to get them to employee, because they needed to show that they were complying with equal employment.

GF: You understand that the...what the employment situation was at that time. Not a single secretary, at the University or the hospital was Black.

JT: The jobs that they did were...

GF: The jobs that they did... the highest jobs...

JF: Janitorial.

GF: They were janitors, they were messengers, orderlies in the hospital...and that was about the highest that a woman could get at that time.

JF: One woman, ...she had four employees I think...Above blue collar, you know you had to be qualified...and...had a husband and two kids, she was putting her husband through school, she was a very ardent catholic. She agreed, she and Gene agreed who would be...the one that they would hire.

GF: A messenger who constantly dealt with our...she brought the records, this was a woman who had a college degree, and this was the best job she could have. Carting records back and forth, here and there.
JT: She was an African American?

GF: And she obviously was the kind of person who could have done better.

JF: We happened unfortunately to be in Europe when...boy did she have to put up with a lot of comments from people. But, and the other three employees said, “We’ll have to quit, our daddies wouldn’t like this.”

JT: Was she African American?

GF: No.

JF: "Well you just try it for a couple of weeks, and then quit if you don’t like it.” And by the end of the first week they were all having lunch together, because they all knew her. Her name was...

GF: Anne Tinsley. And she later became the head of...

JF: And that was the first non blue-collar...

GF: She was the first person above the messenger level...That was 1959...oh, that was 1961.

JF: ‘Cause that’s when we were off in Europe. She was a very brave girl, because she was having to take a lot of stuff from people.

TP: An interesting partnership at the same time was Paul Gaston with the business department at Burley. He said “I’ll see that we get...hire a secretary if he can find us one.” So Elizabeth Crenshaw moved into his office, and she’s still there. And the same thing was true for the school of engineering. That’s Roger...

JF: Eunice?

TP: Roger Bristol took Eunice.

JF: Eunice, right. So a few things are beginning to happen here and there. But most people who came here from someplace else, did not want to upset people. I mean you couldn’t expect...Paul Gaston got away with this being the big blond southerner. Enjoyed flabbergasting people with his...

GF: ???

JF: Yeah. Unexpected liberal ideas. But bit by bit, and there never were any repercussions. Everyone was so afraid of repercussions.

LS: So do you all feel like the group that you were involved in and then the hiring made a difference?
TP: Gradually… Those were big inroads, though. Those two or three!

JF: If you can prove that nobody is going to quit and nothing is going to happen, you’ve already exploded…

GF: I don’t know when the first retail clerk... Because there was always this talk, “Well we’ll lose customers, and all of that nonsense.”

JF: Well, we got Mr. … the guy at Safeway?

GF: Mr. McMullin.

JF: Mr. McMullin, we kept after him, because we all bought all our food in there.

TP: He was right down the street.

JF: And he said, “I know who I’m going to get.” And he got a young man that he had known forever and ever to be one of his…

TP: One of his teller? As one of his cashiers?

JF: Yeah. His cashiers did everything. His cashiers also took care of the shelves. Each one of them did everything, so there was no higher level. And this guy, I can’t remember his name… Mr. McMullin knew him for a while.

JT: Where was it located?

GF: Republic Plaza.

JT: O.K.

TP: That was the first Safeway. No it wasn’t. One was originally down on Main Street. But the one we’re talking about was right there on West Main.

JT: O.K.

JF: One other thing about the jobs, Althea Anderson [an African American] was hired by Sperry. Very beautiful, college graduate, just absolutely perfect, and had the job forever and ever, but one of the things they said was “the rednecks would be so… would make life so difficult for everybody, and in fact it was a nice redneck country girl who was nicest to her and had lunch with her, because at first she had to eat by herself. The other women left her alone. And it was not true at all that the rednecks made trouble, it was all the educated people who were so afraid that something might happen if they made the first move…
TP: The first time, because finally at Siege Williams we did get some clerks. It was a big thing.

JF: It was just supposed to lead to all kinds of trouble.

GF: I don’t think it happened until after the Buddy’s affair. When Buddy’s integrated…

TP: Yes, may-be so.

JT: What was the Buddy’s affair?

JF: This is the spring of 1963, and I was staying clear of demonstrations. But Paul Gaston…

TP: We met at Zion Union that night, remember?

JF: Well, I was staying clear, because I was the president of the Council on Human Relations and I was keeping our reputation clear of that.

GF: It was a moderate organization.

JF: That was the one time I really wasn’t involved in any protesting or whatever, I was keeping our record clean, we were a middle of the road respectable, bourgeois, mixed organization. But Paul…everybody was having stand-ins at restaurants and being served. One restaurant didn’t serve them, and that was Buddy’s, just a nice place to eat. Which is now where the Science Museum is.

GF: On Emmett Street.

JT: Oh, O.K.

GF: Right near Emmett and Ivy.

JF: So all of these faculty wives, I mean there were…everybody you know was standing there. But the three who got…it was Paul and the three Jacksons…

GF: Johnsons.

TP: Johnsons, Paul and…

JF: River Johnson, Henry Floyd, and…

TP: Clu Johnson. No that was William.

JF: And Reverend, uh.

TP: R.A.
JF: R.A.

TP: And his brother.

JF: Who has the cleaning, the forty years of cleaning. Anyway, there they all were, and some rednecks came and roughed them up. And Paul went across the street to call the police. And when they came at him, he put his hands up to save his glasses, and they said that was a threatening gesture, so they had a counter suit. So then they were all down at our old courthouse, it lasted two days. And that poor judge had never had anything like this before, and we had newspapers from Washington. And New York. Everybody was having a marvelous time with this big sit in, and in the end, neither side was convicted of anything terrible. But the publicity. . . Suddenly, bowling alleys, everything was open.

GF: Everything was open. Suddenly.

JF: It just happened. Almost overnight.

JT: Just from this one incident?

JF: Yes.

TP: The publicity was so massive, you know.

JF: The league of women voters was pretty moderate about everything, but one good thing they did was pull the voting out of the back room where you went to register to vote. You had to keep asking and asking...

GF: You had to register.

JF: Country people and Black people. You had to be pretty brave to get yourself into that registrar’s office. And they would have...you could register to vote out in public, in the markets and places, so they got it out of the back room. It was just amazing how the old southern Democrats had this town in their...

TP: . . .clutches.

JF: Yeah. There was one liberal, and his name was Robert E. Lee. And he was from Michigan.

TP: Oh, he was from Michigan?

GF: He was a Republican.

TP: He was Robert E. Lee for real?

JF: He was the Republican on the Council, the only liberal.
TP: Oh, I don’t remember that....Is that Lee Construction?

JF: Yeah.

GF: That’s it. That’s his father.

TP: Oh, my goodness.

JF: There were all kinds of interesting things happening. Then at one of the lessons she
turned to me and I said “Oh, Teresa, you’ve got to take your boys to see Henry V.” A
wonderful movie back in 19?? And she said, “We can’t go there!”

TP: And she was amazed! Amazed.

GF: There was no balcony.

JF: See there was no balcony upstairs, so how could they go?

LS: That was the first you knew?

JF: And I said, “Oh, I didn’t know” And Teresa said, “How could you not know?” I was just
being dumb and White and not noticing how the world was.

LS: So you were here after all the trouble in the schools, you were here a little bit after that.

JF: They were closed when we came in February to look at the job.

GF: I came to interview for the job. Venable and Lane were closed. And they were having the
basement schools. By the time our kids were ready for school, all the schools were open.
But we were living in Piedmont, so Susannah was the only one old enough to go into
town.

JF: Schlepped all the way out on the bus.

GF: Had to go to Red Hill School on the bus. But then what happened was that one of the
ways to subvert integration was a voucher program that they had, which was called
Tuition Grants. And what they did was the state would pay you whatever you had to pay
to some other school district to send your child there.

JF: They had built up this academy. The Rock Hill Academy.

TP: That’s where MACAA is now.

JF: And the only schools really that were integrated at first were the high school. But this
means one kid in a class.
LS: It's called token integration?

JF: And at Venable too. So they fled Venable and we all rushed in, all of us people in the county.

TP: Did you have to pay tuition?

GF: We subverted the tuition grants, we had to pay tuition because we lived in the county, but we got the tuition grant to allow us to send our kids to the nominally integrated schools.

JF: Which was a wonderful school.

GF: Well, it was the best school around.

JF: It still is. For all the faculty kids, and all the...junior executive kids. Even after everybody moved out to the county, Venable just keeps on being an absolutely wonderful school. Again, the integration meant one kid to a class. Because the Superintendent was not encouraging any of his teachers to apply. You had to apply in order to get your child into the nearest school to your house.

GF: This was so called freedom of ...?

JF: And he discouraged it. And you didn’t apply, did you?

JT: So the Superintendent discouraged the teachers from doing that?

JF: Yeah, Teresa didn’t apply to have her kids into the schools. It was not...the Superintendent...

JT: Who was the superintendent back then? Was that Johnson?

TP: Ellis? Was it Ellis?

GF: Yeah, Ellis.

JF: And when Eugene Williams, who had his own insurance agency, applied to have his own two kids go to Johnson, I said to his wife “Aren’t you worried about them?” And she said “this is not the worst thing that can happen to them. There are plenty of worse things, they’ll do fine.”

TP: And they did.

JF: And they did. But they were the first two...But he didn’t have to ask permission from anybody because he had his own business. And it was Mr. Ferguson who also had a funeral home, and who had a child in... she had to go in a room all by herself, they didn’t
close the high school, but they put her in a room all by herself so she wouldn’t contaminate anyone.

JT: So she had one teacher teaching her, or how did they?

JF: Whatever they did, they got her through her senior year in high school.

TP: She went to college from that. She never got a diploma from any high school. She always talks about that. “I don’t have a diploma. Lane, Burley.”

JT: Because she was one of the first ones?

TP: The first.

LS: Whatever happened to all the teachers at Jefferson School? Did they find a job?

TP: With integration they went into the other schools.

LS: Were they, I mean, that was O.K. with the Superintendent to employ?

TP: Oh, they didn’t have any choice?

LS: They didn’t have any choice even though the students...

JF: Well, then Mr. Ellis left, and Mr. Tramontin took over very soon. They were looking for teachers who didn’t mind. So they had...Florence was one of the first ones, Bryant, who really.... You’ve read her book? About...

TP: Now I was one of the first who went to Lane.

JF: You went to Lane. You were? O.K.

TP: Florence the next year went to Walker I think.

JF: O.K.

JT: So Teresa, you were one of the two teachers...

JF: And Bessie Williams, and I, I was teaching at Venable. But, and I didn’t, I just didn’t know Bessie Williams. ...’Our Mrs. Williams!’ And I found out many, many years later how much they liked her.

TP: What grade was that?

JF: Fourth grade. That’s when you go from class to class.
Yeah, she was a good teacher.

Well!

At first, you see, I was at Burley with Lorraine and...

Did Lorraine come when you did?

No, and Tramontin and Booker wanted to try...the students were already at Lane, the Black students were already at Lane. And they wanted to try a Black teacher, so Janet came in from the county, because they said “You were recruited to go in, I don’t know why they picked you to go.”

Someone said you were co-teachers at Burley?

Yes. But um so we made our own way that first year.

How did the White teachers accept you?

Oh, we had some of both, because there were some teachers who obviously thought it was harmful to have us in the building, and then some others were quite, you know! We had some run ins here and there. Then the next year Lorraine came and it was comforting to have her with me.

So you were there alone the first year?

With the other Black teacher? And I didn’t get to see her that much because she was in a different area of the building. And my schedule made me float from place to place, she could stay in one room.

So you were all over the building?....

Listen, I had some of the best experiences with students during that time, because I was the only bookkeeping teacher so they had to come to me if they wanted bookkeeping. And there were a number of students who did not want to be in there. And there was one boy who went to guidance all the time to complain about me.

Have you ever seen him since?

I haven’t. His name was Zimmerman.

It would be interesting.

And I had the most wonderful experience from a little girl from Belmont. That’s one of the few things I remember about all this. The best class I’ve ever been in at Lane High
School, and she was a senior. She said “This was the first time I’ve been made to feel like somebody.”

JF: See Belmont…that didn’t have much cache.

TP: And that made me realize that poor White folks were having a hard time, too.

JF: One down, really one down all the time.

TP: All the time. It was really a caste system in that building. And, then my note-keeping class, which was like shorthand. It was a 45-minute period, and every day we spent about 30 minutes most days talking about race relations.

JT: Really?

TP: Uh, huh. And then I would say “We’re going to have to stop talking now because I don’t want you to go home and tell somebody that I’m not teaching school. So we would do some note hand at least. But they had an exchange with the Black kids, interaction, and with me, and I learned so much from them, and they talked about how much they were taught at home about hating Black folks. And some kids cried. It was a good counseling session.

JT: So they were really interested to talk to you.

TP: Wanted to talk with me, because many of them initially didn’t realize that I was Black and so they were…then they became inquisitive about a lot of things [Teresa is a very fair skinned African American woman]. And so it was a wonderful opportunity to talk with so many young people. The Mayor’s daughter was in there. Haggerty I think?

GF: Bernard Haggerty, yes.

TP: There were some rednecks in those classes.

JF: How did he behave, because he was a friend of Ethan’s in third grade I remember. The Haggerty kid?

TP: She was a little standoffish.

GF: This was a girl.

JF: She had polio?

TP: Yes. That’s right, and she was a little standoffish. And we had a lot of instances where kids were…had heard that there was a Black teacher. They would stand there and say “Let’s go by and see this Black teacher.” There was this baseball star, remember him?
Yes, Vaguely.

Walter Jones was teasing him and said, “Man, the Black teacher said...” He did this circle and he went up and told Walter and said, “Ain’t no Black teacher in there.” [laugh]

Well, people are confused. Because once I was with Teresa and her sister and brother, and the lawyer who didn’t know them very well thought I was Mrs. Jackson. So that was one time I....

She thought you were colored.

Yeah, she thought I was Teresa’s sister in law. And I passed several times recently cause several of my, the assistant city manager...Rochelle...

Rochelle Small-Toney?

Yeah, she said, the minute she walked into that interview, and saw me she felt comforted and safe and that everything was going to be alright. And two other people after that have said that I...one of the gals at ... [laugh]

It was a wonderful opportunity to embarrass people who were racist. You know you would be in groups and folks would say the most outlandish things. And I would say “See?...” I was always surprised because we spent so much of our time talking.

They probably didn’t tell the parents what was going on.

No, because they told some awful tales in that time.

I only found out later that some of the Black students had a very rough time those first few years. People pushing books out of their hands. Nobody was threatened with anything horribly dangerous, but just very unpleasant. But they never told us then, they just were putting up with it. They wouldn’t let the...of course, they didn’t let the Black kids play football.

They wouldn’t let them play football?

Can you believe it? And the music...

Or basketball.

And the music department, too...

The music department, they began, but when there was a picture being taken...The nice head of the group, didn’t have a...he took the instruments out of the Black kids’ hands and gave them to a White kid for this publicity photograph.
He was terrible!

Do you remember that?

I do.

Who was that?

I'm not going to call his name.

I can't think of it, but he was a nice...

I can think of his name.

Well you worked there. They were terrified of something awful happening. If you had, I mean the idea of not letting Black kids play football or basketball, nobody could believe it these days, but then they were so afraid of something dreadful happening.

And the other dumb thing...They discontinued the honor society. They resurrected it, I was on that committee. But Lorraine reminded me that we had a girl at Jefferson who was then at L...no a girl at Burley, who was then at Lane, Doris Curry, who was already in the honor society from Burley. And so I approached my leader, and I said, "Listen, you know, there's a young lady here already who is a member of the honor society. So what are you going to do with the students who were already members before you discontinue this thing? And that lady...she...and I remember her name, but I'm not going to say it. She frightened me to death, cause I'm not a great fighter, but I thought she was going to hit me... I had to confront her...

And I didn't know there ever had been an honor society, because certainly our kids would have been involved if there had been one.

Have you ever heard the story of how Jefferson ended as a segregated school. Do you know the story behind that pretty well? Unfortunately I don't have the exact date, but you probably have the date.

We have both the NAACP and ....(Council on Human Relations?)

But, the situation was after all of the court decisions, et cetera, was that we had freedom of choice. So, you had to apply to go to some other school. So, one night we had a meeting at Mr. Fergusons.

We had both the NAACP and ....(Council on Human Relations?)

The principle people who came up with the idea were Eugene Williams, and ???. The idea was that we had to get rid of this freedom of choice game.
JF: Where every parent had... I mean people lost their jobs. Drury Brown’s wife lost her job.

GF: I think people understand the implications of it. Let’s... let’s... We know that it wasn’t good. Let’s...

JF: Just so they know how bad it was.

GF: I think they know, I think they know that. Eugene Williams, and Mr. Ferguson and Dick Bowden who was a resident in our pathology department, were the three leaders of this move, and what was decided at that time was to get a bunch of volunteers to go to the homes of all of the parents of the kids at Jefferson School and get them to see if they wanted to request transfers to a school that...

JF: To the nearest school.

GF: To the nearest school. And so, within not very much time, in a couple of weeks, this whole crew of volunteers went from home to home getting, with the forms, and so forth, and got so many people to make the request that the formerly all White schools would have been overcrowded and Jefferson would have been empty. And as a result of that, the whole city was redistricted... One school at the periphery...

JF: What they did was to recruit all these nice young church members. And they collected people from St. Paul’s and the others who were... usually if you didn’t like that you went to a downtown church. One of the problems with integration... and so almost all the people were pretty favorable, and it was amazing what they did. So what they did was put all the schools... get rid of the sixth grade in the schools, and send all the sixth graders together. And so that’s where I taught.

GF: This just doesn’t appear in the public records. Oh, we just decided, suddenly we decided to do it.

JT: So that’s why they chose to take one grade from all the schools.

GF: They just had to abolish the school because...

LS: The districts are the same now as...

GF: Well, they always fiddle with the districts because the population... I think yes it was because...? Basically the people at Greenbriar and Venable in particular, also at Clark, were not so interested... We don’t know because we were not privy to it, all we knew was that we forced the issue, they had to do it. And they had a big headache.

JF: So before that the people who had requested to go to Venable or to Greenbriar, they had to drive out to Greenbriar. There was no bus provided for them. I guess usually they could walk to Venable well enough...
TP: But they caught a bus, right?

JF: There were no buses. No they didn’t provide anything. It had to be volunteers. So there weren’t that many who went to Greenbriar. Venable was easy because it was right there.

JT: So how many...these were young elementary school children...?

JF: Well, the ones when there were one...it’s O.K. when there’s a critical mass.

GF: The big problem that occurs at the middle school level, just as with sex...

LS: Yeah, that’s a bad time to have everybody in the big melting pot.

JT: That would be interesting to talk to people about.

JF: Well, Ethan was at Buford... when Philip Rogers’ son –C.J.--was one of his best friends, and...?? Brown who was White, his father was...I found out when Ethan was 40, that they used to go get cigars and beers...

GF: Yes. They stole them.

JF: Stole them and sit in a boxcar on the railroad which is right behind our house and play cards. They were dear friends.

JT: During school?

JF: After school.

TP: They were hooking school.

JF: And, Lula Rogers and I of course had no idea what our sons were doing, we knew they were friends. And the sad thing was when they went off to high school, is the older boys separated them. They didn’t want them to be friends with Whitey. Because Ethan really enjoyed them.

JT: Who was it who didn’t want to be friends?

TP: The White...the Black kids didn’t...put pressure on the other kids for having White friends.

[end of tape side one]

[sidetwo]

JT: One thing we wanted to know about was the school books that they used.
LS: We heard from Julia Martin that she had students at Jefferson School, and the woman she worked for had books for the next grade for her son, and she looked at the book and she realized that it was completely different from the books that they were using.

JF: This is Kenny’s mother?

LS: Yes. And that she said “I would love to have these books, but I can’t use them because they are not the same as ours.” And so we were wondering...

TP: I am much older than Kenneth so whatever books we were using, I didn’t know...

JF: ?? Rosemary used to meet with us, all of us French teachers, who were, you taught kids for half an hour to an hour every day, and then went on to...Rosemary taught a lot of different things and she would meet with us French teachers and we would coordinate how we were to...

TP: Billy Beyers’ mother?

JF: Yes. And apparently, I was reading about her, she taught a million different things.

TP: A million different things. That was interesting about the curriculum. We had eleven grades, right? Now I can’t vouch for the books, but we had some great teachers. Now that’s really true. Now, if there was something missing, just like Nanny Cox, you know, if there was something the children wanted, had a request for, she got it. Rosemary was similar to that. And in order to give you things so that the school would be accredited, and so that you could get into most colleges, she was one of the people who was willing to go to summer school or do something to make herself accredited so that she could teach. She taught French, she did the music program, you know, the chorus, along with Pauline Garrett’s mother.

JF: I don’t know Pauline Garrett’s mother.

TP: No, you don’t. That was before your time. The school decided that we needed business education. She went off one summer and came back and taught shorthand and typewriting. And many of us did well from that course. I mean that’s what I majored in.

JF: She taught you?

TP: Yes.

JF: Rosemary did.

TP: Yes. We prepared our own yearbook in that classroom, you know typing stencils and duplicating, and we had students—Walter Johnson—who was great in art, who did all our artwork. And my brother did all of the ads. You know, you got...
African-American businesses and ask for help, or what?

Any business. White folks were good about giving you an ad. It didn’t cost but $5 so...As long as you stayed in your place it was fine.

And as time went on, they were more and more eager to help. If it would keep things separate.

This one lady said “I’d give you your own football field if you’d just play football over there.” We’ll play football over here.

We heard from some people who said that the football games down at Washington Park were a very big draw for not just the students at Jefferson...??We were surprised that the students at Lane weren’t allowed to play.

They were just afraid...??

Well, for one thing, you know, their excuse was “well, we would do it, but if we have to go play in Prince Edward County or Buckingham County, they won’t play with us.

Oh, I see.

The Girl Scouts. Which...they stayed segregated. Have you heard about that? Because my...when I found out that they were still segregating the scout groups, I wouldn’t be a leader anymore. But they would let me go to the Girl Scout camp. And that’s where I got to know...???

The Girl Scouts. Which...they stayed segregated. Have you heard about that? Because my...when I found out that they were still segregating the scout groups, I wouldn’t be a leader anymore. But they would let me go to the Girl Scout camp. And that’s where I got to know...???

Littlepage? Yeah, I think it was a Littlepage was one of my girls.

Oh, Margaret Rose. Maggie.

Yeah. Anyhow, they wouldn’t let me take my two daughters. I had to find somebody to baby-sit my two girls who would have been just the right age for the Girl Scout camp when I went out to be a counselor. Finally, they called me and said, “Jane, we’ve got an integrated troop for you.” Rebecca was nine, cause it was just the end of Brownie time, and I could have twenty little girls in my basement. And two of them were colored.

Is that right?

The integrated troop. Darling girls, and I was saying...

Was Margaret one of those?

No. No. She was older, I think...you had to be...
JT: Did they get along well?

JF: Perfectly well. They were all, I mean, they…school was integrated, these kids went to Venable. They just had to go down to their own troop down at Jefferson School. Everybody was afraid. When I talked to the head of the Girl Scouts, she was not from Charlottesville, she said, well she wouldn’t get any money from United Way if you...Everyone was afraid of something.

JT: So how did it escalate into being something...?

JF: Just like what...they’d say something…it was alright to go to the movies, it was suddenly alright to go to restaurants, nothing happened at all.

LS: But it was all because you guys pushed and made sure that...

TP: No, we just got it started. You know. The parents, I guess the older White people were the ones who were most afraid. And the Black folks too.

JF: But remember when Mrs.... Booker was hired by the librarian? And he got fired? That was one example.

TP: Mrs. Reaves?

JF: Mrs. Reaves, that’s right. And the librarian was fired for doing that. Bonnie Herndon had people urging her not to keep her housekeeper because....asking to have her child go to a White school. And of course Bonnie didn’t listen to them, Bonnie’s a nice Catholic girl from New Jersey, she’s not about to let them do that. But still, the pressure was on everybody.

LS: Sounds like you all were part of the solution.

JF: So... this freedom of choice wasn’t very free.

LS: It sounds like you all can come up with.... many more examples.

GF: You know, there’s this faith that if people actually got to know each other that they would...

JT: And was that on both sides, did the African-American community feel the same way?

TP: Absolutely. And there were plenty of African Americans who still stayed withdrawn for one reason or another. For example they still don’t go to the University [of Virginia] to a lot of events for the same feelings from the old days. I mean I have ill feelings for University Baptist Church because of it.

JF: What happened?
TP: Um, you remember Henry...Harold Marsh? Course I never went to University Baptist. I was one of those nice folks who stayed in my place.

JF: But you were...

JT: Sounds like it Teresa. [laugh]

JF: You went to Trinity?


JF: In the law school?

TP: Well that was his last thing, but the first thing was the engineering school. And he was always testing, and he often would go up and down the corner, he would start at the corner, and go down Main Street to see who would let him in to eat.

JT: He was an African American?

TP: Yes. By the time he got to my house, he said, “I’m just stuffed!” He said...And then he was trying to go to church, so he went to the University Baptist Church one day and they said, “We don’t let your kind in.” And so I’ve never forgiven them for that. And so, that’s true with many African American’s experiences they’ve had. They never go again. They won’t go to an event at Cabell Hall for the same reason, you know, so... Yeah. It’s hard to get over those things.

JT: But they didn’t necessarily share that with their children? Well, I mean...

TP: A person like Harold...

JT: Share those sentiments with their children, they wanted their children to get on...

TP: Oh, yeah. Because you figured those families, that’s what Harold was breaking up, you know Henry and Harold, those two Marsh brothers have been very active in Civil Rights. And their children don’t know anything about um...Separate but equal.

JF: And how unequal it was. I’ll never forget Teresa’s shock at seeing all this wonderful equipment in the other business classes.

JT: Somebody told us about going...when the circus came to Charlottesville...

JF: It was Grace Tinsley?

JT: No. Can’t remember who it was.

TP: They wouldn’t let her in at all?
LS: No they would let her in, but there were separate sections. And she said “I’m not going to go sit over there.”

TP: Was she an African American?

LS: Yes.

JT: Yes. And she was totally shocked because she had never really encountered that before.

[laugh]

LS: They told her to go sit in some roped off section, and have her children be exposed to that kind of treatment, so she left. And the children were very mad about it because they didn’t get to see the circus.

JT: I think she left in the end. She didn’t want to be put in a different place.

TP: We have all kinds of exciting activities like that. Shall I tell you my experience of this? My father was in the advertising business, so he did the advertising for the circus, so we always got passes so we could go to the show we would look forward to it. So my mother had us, the four of us, with my mother, ???where to sit, because we had been??? and we looked across the performing area and we saw some of our friends across there. And we knew they were African Americans, so we “Hey, you down there...”

JF: To ruin it for them?

TP: They had come with their maid, who was Black. And so the people sat them on the White side, you know?

JT: So they were White?

JF: No, they were light Black.

TP: We had the best time. You’re in the wrong place girl?

JF: But they didn’t have to move?

TP: No, they didn’t move. Nobody paid us any mind, because there was a lot of stuff going on, you know like ushers didn’t pay us any mind. But in going in the theater downtown, I would...I had a great time teasing...if you ever had a line, the line was principally students, you know, and the students would have gone to sit anywhere. So if you were going to the Jefferson Theater, they...you know there was a booth out front. Remember?

JF: No. We didn’t go to movies.

TP: If you’d go to the front window, that was the White window. If you went to the side window, the same booth now...
JT: Is this at the Paramount?

TP: No, this, you knew about a set entrance at the Paramount.

JF: Is this at the Jefferson?

TP: Now, we're at the Jefferson, now. And I just had a good time doing this anyway.

JF: Going to the wrong window?

TP: No! Well, I went to the window that I was supposed to go to, and I had my four children behind me, you know Eunice's two and my two. And the lady tried to make me get out of line. And so I said "No, I'm in the right..." And she said "You can't get your ticket here. Go around and get in that line." And I said "I'm not going to get in that line. I want a ticket." And I banged on the door.

JF: Did she sell you a ticket?

TP: No! She was adamant. She wanted to call the police to get me to do that.

JF: That's a strange story. That's a funny, funny story.

TP: That's a funny...and I knew exactly what I was doing. So finally...

JT: Good for you.

JF: Did you eventually get a ticket?

TP: No.

JF: Were your kids mad at you?

TP: Yes. And Brenda said "Please, Aunt Teresa, let's go."

JF: That's not what they were there for.

TP: And then these people who were in the line realized what was going on. And so they were saying "Give here a colored ticket!" You know, they'd join in. It was hilarious.

JF: A funny...

TP: That's bad.

JF: A funny, funny story.

TP: That was bad, just being bad.
JT: You mentioned somebody at the???. Who was that?

TP: You met him?

JT: No, you talked about him.

JF: Free Cherry Pie.

TP: Yeah. Free Cherry Pie.

JT: What was that story about?

TP: There was a group of Black kids that was very unhappy at Lane. And so, oftentimes they would riot or threaten to riot. And they were very disruptive in the classroom, because, you know, the White teachers felt threatened by some of the students. That's still true. So Cherry Pie took advantage of it. He's a very smart fellow. Took advantage of that fear. One day they were going to walk out and Lorraine and I said We can't let them go by themselves so we walked with them.

JT: How many were there?

TP: Alex-zan.

JF: Really?

TP: Who had a great time being disruptive.

JT: This was in the early '60s?

TP: Early integration days.

JF: Which is the early '60s.

TP: I forget when I was there.

JF: When I was here, was well settled in, I mean the town was integrated, for better or worse, people weren't all sweet about it, but.... Our kids, when we came back from England, all of them got interested in the drama, and that's where they made more friends, because you aren't in the same classes if you're not heavy students,???. Bonnie and some of her friends did, and our kids were in it,???. the Black kids, including ???. What's the family, Gene, the guy,???

GF: Taylor, Roscoe Taylor.

JF: Right. And there was another family, they were so bold and bad that they could be integrated as much as they want and nobody would accuse them of being,???
GF: Oh, yeah.

JF: Do you remember their names?

GF: Yeah.

JF: This kid, he was nice. He was a big tough nice...

TP: Wells?

JF: Wells!

GF: T.J. Wells.

TP: Tank Wells.

JF: He could do anything he wanted, nobody could accuse him. But the drama program was where there were more encounters. Gradually the athletics got to be, you know, a good place to make friends.

GF: It was the theater first.

JF: For our kids.

JT: So the African-American kids were very interested in theater.

GF: Well, some of them were.

TP: Some of them!

JT: They had a lot of theater at Jefferson hadn’t they? I mean people have talked about...

LS: We’ve heard about the operettas.

TP: Right. And the drama. That’s Rosemary and Mrs. Sellars did a lot of that again just on their own. Just to have things that we could participate in and then go state wide and do them elsewhere. So it was very, very helpful.

JT: So they kept that up when they were integrated.

TP: ???

JT: If they were, what’s where you said they were...

JF: Well, that’s later. This is in the late ‘60s. At Lane High School.
LS: I’m thinking may-be the parents of... that had been involved in the drama at Jefferson...???

JF: I don’t know. Because we didn’t... the PTA suddenly died because the president’s child had cancer.???. We weren’t around schools so much, as you are when your kids are little, but much less when they graduate.???

TP: ???.did do drama. Ben was a...he encouraged people. ???. everybody to participate.

JF: It was a, it was a friendly ...

TP: Yeah, I see his face, and I can’t recall his name, because he was on the honor society...Yeah, the honor society.

JF: I can see him, too. There was one who took the kids on trips. Down to the Everglades and places?

TP: Stacey?

GF: Yeah.

TP: What I was telling you about that, about us leaving...the kids getting ready to leave, and Cherry Pie, and Lorraine and I said well, we have to go with them. SO we walked out with them, and walked up to Trinity Church and Henry Mitchell met us...??? And ???. not in control a little bit. Henry did. Lorraine and I had to go back.

JF: You had classes to teach.

TP: But, there were little things like that.

JF: Well now, was he in jail? “Free Cherry Pie.”

TP: They called...I don’t think he was ever actually put in jail. I don’t remember that detail.

JF: But may-be he had a court case or something?

JT: Did they suspend him? Did they suspend the kids from school?

TP: No. We were able to take care of that. That’s why we wanted to go with them. You know, had we not gone, I think they may have.

LS: Does Cherry Pie still live in Charlottesville?

TP: Oh, yes. Indeed. He’s always been gainfully employed because he has a good brain. [??] One channel?
LS: What's his real name?
TP: I don't even know.
JF: Does he have a family.
TP: No.
JF: No. No kids to raise.
LS: Do you think we could interview him?
TP: Oh, that would be delightful. I can help you find him.
LS: That would be great.
JT: Yes, we would love that.
TP: He rents a house from Celestine. I think Wells is working up there at Papa Johns. You should interview him. Do you know him?
LS: No, but we would love to, if you guys know how to...
TP: Go find him. Somebody was talking about him the other night.
LS: We are really interested also in how the students felt? What they went through.
JT: The White students as well as the Black students.
LS: Yes.
JT: It would be interesting.
TP: Oh, yes it would. Listen, don’t let me give you the idea that everybody there was a rotten guy, because when I went there, Mr. Spiedel was there.
JT: This was Lane High School?
TP: Uh, huh. And if something had upset me a little bit, but it didn’t upset me too much because I’m too dingy lingy, but...
JF: Too what? You’re too what?
TP: Too dingy-lingy to be disturbed over what some White person did. If I would, if I was in the chemistry room and teaching something or other...and I left there trying to make it...
downstairs before the children, then I could...? Then I could try and get inspiration from Mr. Spiedel. And he was a member of the Human Relations...???

JT: Oh.

TP: He inspired some teachers...? and I began to???

LS: ??? life difficult, make it hard for you...?

TP: Yeah. But I was younger, and I could manage. But then I had to take all my stuff with me.

JF: My daughter Susannah was a...has always been pretty shy socially. She’s fine as long as anybody comes to her...??I can hardly believe she’s our child. But she did one brave thing, which was teach a little cooking class down at the projects. ??? She taught a bunch of little Black girls..?? It was a sweet thing to happen, an unexpected reward for her to have some protectors instead of people ???

TP: When I went there, Mrs. Reaves was already there, in the admin department, as a stenographer[?]

JF: Who was the women who gave me the names of all the kids that needed tutoring, because the thing the Council on Human Relations did when I was starting as president, and then after...?? We started out with 25 tutors for kids, and the next year it was 50 and the next year it was 75. And these were volunteers...??

TP: Donna was. Donna Reaves was there.

JF: Probably another name. She was a ???

TP: Mrs. Michie?

GF: That sounds familiar.

JF: That sounds familiar. So she cooperated. They were stuck with a lot of kids from?? Who needed some help.

TP: Mr. Barnes?

JF: Apparently this was one to one at the kids’ house or the person’s house, or at the library, I don’t know where, they made their own arrangements. And Mr. Tramontin said to me once, “Do you know all these people? We might get into trouble!” It was true. I didn’t know all...you know, I knew roughly who they were...but I just trusted...

GF: We’d never did anything like that.
JF: In order to do this they must be nice people. But anyway it got to be...really people felt that this was helping them get through school. And then they said to me one day just before we went off to England, "Oh, we don't need you anymore because now we have a big grant, and we are going to do it after school with real teachers," and they had that for one semester.

LS: What happened to the Council on Human Relations?

TP: It just pooped out, it died.

JF: It sort of petered out. We didn't need it so much, we had integrated PTAs, we had an integrated democratic party. The democratic party was Mary Ann Elwood, and a bunch of...Grayson and Robert Tinsely and a bunch of people. Just before we left for England, in 1970, suddenly we had a very, very active town, counties, and gown. Black townies, and White professors ??? It suddenly began to take over the town, and I used to have parties with Black and White friends, and everybody said to me "What should we talk about?" ??? Couldn't see movies, there were all sorts of things we couldn't do, couldn't travel, and I said, "You can talk about the weather, and you can talk about guinea pigs. Because we had given everybody guinea pigs. Our guinea pigs were producing like mad. And they would come, and eventually everybody found plenty to talk about. But after we came back from England, there were plenty of integrated parties. We weren't the only ones at all.

GF: So, statewide the Council on Human Relations sort of withered away. They had quite a state organization, a lot of things, and they had an executive and they were trying to start things up, but its time had passed.

TP: Yeah.

JT: They'd done their work.

JF: It had a wonderful function.

TP: It really was worthwhile.

GF: I mean the social aspects of it, partly, what Jane was talking about, but also a lot of art people began to ?????

JF: Also, church women. There were all sorts of places where people could meet each other who wanted to.

TP: Council on Church Women was not originally integrated.

JF: No?

TP: No.
JF: Nothing was.

LS: Do you know where the records....I'm sorry, I just wondered if the records of the organization were...?

TP: The Human Relations Council, where would that be? I was secretary at one time.

JF: I've got a lot here.

GF: We've got a lot of minutes.

JF: I've got a lot of minutes. As a matter of fact, I talked to Patricia Cherlackean, because I had seen her name in my list of ??? you know going out to see people and taking out, you know these were interviews, and the personnel man wasn't there, they could it. Because they hadn't realized Althea was going to be dark. I have a notebook full of stuff. But I don't know...

LS: Well that early '60s period just sounds so important....?

GF: ???

LS: And if you had any minutes, or you knew where the minutes from the...?

JF: Those parties, we played a lot of things like, Going to Jerusalem. That was a group ??? and that was the kind of thing I could do. I could, you know, we would meet at churches, usually Westminster Presbyterian, I think. ??? up some kids, and then we'd take one chair away, and we'd go round again, and take another chair away.

TP: You'd really get to know people, it was so nice.

JF: We had some good times, and I was touched. I went to hear Florence talk about her book. And she pointed at me, and said it was "people like Jane Foster and the Council on Human Relations that made things easier when the schools did get integrated. We knew we had some friends."

TP: And you've heard of Frances Brown. She was a famous activist.???

JF: She and Patty Boyle...Patty Boyle and Frances Brown are dead, but they certainly were very ???

TP: A lady called me from Northern Virginia to ask me if I could get some people together who knew Sarah Patton Boyle. And immediately I said ??? I said now sure I can get some old people together to talk about Sarah Patton Boyle. She's into something now, studying Sarah Patton Boyle. I sent her a copy of her book.

JF: Every now and then somebody comes along...
And I said that would be Jane Foster.

To talk about either Patty or Brandy. They’re going to do a thesis, or going to do something. But there are people…Chick Moran now was very involved, and he’s just died.

That’s right.

And there are people that were…Mrs. Brown, before I came, was president.

She was president of Human Relations?

Council on Human Relations I think.?? I think I’m making that up.

Who started the local chapter?

These guys did.

No, no. It was all going…

Imogene ???

It was all going when we got here. Wasn’t it…what was the old surgeon?? No, I’m not talking about that.

Dr. Janeyes?

No, I am not talking about that, I’m talking about the surgeon. ???

He started this?

We don’t know because it was all going…

By the time you got here.

For Paul to take us to, we were active in it…

How did you get involved? [to Teresa]

Me?

Did somebody come to you and say “We want you to be part of this?”

I guess ???, and Miss Jackson, and, because they were all at First Baptist with Mrs. Bunn.

So it was through the First Baptist Church?
TP: Sorry?

JT: Was it through the First Baptist Church? You said they were involved in the First Baptist Church.

TP: Well, Reverend Bunn was the minister at the First Baptist Church.

JF: On Main Street?

TP: On Main Street.

JT: So, he talked to you about getting involved?

TP: I don’t think so, I remember exactly how I got there, but I imagine it was Mae Jackson, and other friends of mine who live right there at the corner of Fourth and ???

JF: So you came along.

TP: I came along.

JF: Who is alive yet?

TP: Just us, the other people are dead.

JF: We didn’t get here until 1959. So by that time when Paul Gaston took us…

TP: I’ll ask Mae Jackson if she remembers.

JF: Who else is alive?

TP: She has a good memory about everything that happened.

JF: Because I didn’t know Eugene. He was that Eugene Williams, and Patty Boyle said, well she said “I love Eugene, he has been very kind to me.” ???once he makes up his mind, he’s so determined. But you can’t help loving that.

TP: He gets things done.

JF: We were all at a meeting last spring, and I saw him ???? He’s so sweet

TP: Oh, you’re so dear.

JF: Isn’t he dear? Yeah. I think he’s ??? I am very fond of him, although I could ring his neck some of the time. He’s being so darling to his poor wife.

TP: Oh, just perfect.
JF: He was taking care of...?? And they were an interesting couple. Big Lorraine, a teacher and all, and small, active, little Eugene.

JT: Lorraine Williams is the...I'm sorry to interrupt. Was she the same Lorraine that went with you to Lane.

TP: Uh, huh.

JT: Eugene's wife.

TP: They were together at Burley.

JF: But very strong, and I said once "Aren't you afraid they'll fire you?" And she said "They're afraid to fire me, I'd go work for Eugene, and that would be worse."

TP: She was very supportive of Eugene.

JF: She had a tough responsibility. They really were a happy couple. Lorraine was cooking dinner for about 37 relatives that were coming to their house for Sunday dinner.

JT: Jane, you mentioned the...?

JF: Jefferson School, that one year, sixth grade French. I don't remember anything about parents...I taught fifth grade at Venable, that's the only thing other that I did. ?? Buford and Lane.

JT: You don't remember it very well.

TP: I said they were not involved.

GF: The parents in general are not very involved.

TP: At that age group especially.

GF: Yeah, but even in the elementary and middle schools, a very small proportion of the parents have anything to do with the PTAs.

TP: At Burley, I thought it was pretty interesting that we had ??? better participation in the PTA, and that was surprising because people had to come distances to be there.

JF: City and county.

TP: Yeah.

JF: I remember going over to Burley once in the first year or two when we were here...?? It had a nice???? I never got over that.
I’ll explain it to you. I would like to put you in touch with Tank. I’ll tell you another interesting student for them to talk with along with Cherry Pie, remind me of that now, because I’ll forget when I get home.

They could call Kenny?

Well, Kenneth has talked with Alexandria, we’d like to interview him again, but we need, um.

Why don’t you interview him and his mother together?

We’ve interviewed his mother. We did interview Julia with Lois Sandy.

The interview was interesting because he speaks in short disjointed sentences, and that’s the way the interview was, in short, you know... That could be neated up a little because it makes him sound like he isn’t educated, but he’s very educated.

Yes he is.

That’s one of the hard things about this is that you really want to type exactly what people say...

Because he thinks in short spurts.

You don’t want to put words in their mouth, and so we don’t pretty them up, we try to have them just exactly how they sound...We also don’t want people to ???

But if he were writing it, it wouldn’t look like that. So what you speak is not what you write, and that isn’t fair.

But people who read transcriptions of oral histories understand...

Spurts of words are good when you’re talking, but when you’re writing...

We’re doing an interpretation, we’re going to try to do a publication that tries to weave all of these stories together.

The interesting thing to me was, I always thought it looked like a factory. Then I hadn’t realized that the one side of it is a very pretty front, and then they kept adding things on. And somebody, not me, thank goodness, said something about it not being a very pretty building, and boy,...They pounced on her, everybody pounced on her including Patricia Edwards, and Kenny, and ... they said “To us it’s beautiful, to us it means...” I mean they all told her. So I keep my mouth shut now. I still think it looks like a factory. That whole side, but I think it’s a very important point of reference to the community.
GF: I think it needs to be preserved. I think it serves a key purpose, and I think that one thing that would be important to have there are some of the community service organizations. Centrally located there, people have easy access to it...

TP: Services.

GF: Yeah. I think that would, that should be the main use. Have a little museum, a cultural center, you name it, but I think the community service organizations...

JT: I think one thing that we have learned is that the school wasn’t just somewhere where ???

TP: It meant everything to the African American community. ???? It was full of people there servicing those students.

JF: And the kids all felt that they had personal interest in them, and they did not feel that the White teachers had a personal interest. However, the White students also did not feel that the teachers had a personal interest, because I did this...several of us on a PTA committee did a big survey. Which I think I’ve got, and the White kids almost all felt that the teachers didn’t care about them. And the teachers felt of course that the kids didn’t want them to. And I remember as a parent of teenagers, you don’t...you know your kids aren’t crazy about you, and you don’t really want to encroach on them too much, you hope they will grow out of teenage hood, you don’t communicate enough. If we had only, if I have one regret, that I didn’t get, that we didn’t get the kids together once a month just to have a little...??? Day together when everybody wasn’t around, not watching TV. I said we went to too many meetings...because she was the last kid.

TP: And you were on the telephone all the time.

JF: Yes. But she said we could have been home more. You don’t know unless you have a little bit of communication, and I never organized that. I am sorry that I didn’t.

TP: My kids said I was always typing somebody else’s paper.

LS: One of the things that I’ve always noted about the school...???

TP: I thought it was amazing, my grandmother...the boys went to her one day and said “Mrs. Jackson, we want a boys Home Ec class.” “You have a girls Home Ec class.” That was in one of those letters, remember?

JT: Yes.

TP: And she said, “Oh, O.K.” “We’ll have a boys’ Home Ec class.” And so she put it in the curriculum herself.
JF: You know somebody should write up the story of your grandmother! And I don’t know if its Florence Bryant, or... Rebecca McGinness. She could easily do your grandmother. I think that would be a fabulous book.

TP: Yeah, we did...

LS: Its people like this that made such a difference and made that school like a home and also a symbol at the same time.

TP: Absolutely.

JF: A Country Girlhood, by Florence Bryant. And you know who Rebecca McGinness was. She wrote that.

JT: Yeah. Do you have a copy of Florence Bryant’s book?

JF: Country Girlhood. I just love it. I just love it.

TP: I have one if she can’t find it.

JT: I think she sold it at the church.

LS: The other thing I think was so important there, was no place for them to come back here and work except to teach at Jefferson, and so that was a very important role that it played as well, provide good jobs. Another thing we have been wondering is how the lessons of the history... Hear these stories, because they don’t know anything about this history...?

TP: Times have changed so much, because when you were segregated, those teachers it seems to me felt a certain responsibility to make sure that you did what you needed to do... Saw any spark in you at all, you know it was just that kind of push you received...?? I’m going to have to explain it, now I’m not saying that White teachers don’t do that for their students, either White or Black, but there are so many opportunities for you now, that I think you assume a student doesn’t need that kind of nurturing now. Did you hear that Jacky? That was a profound statement?

JT: No, say it again Teresa!

TP: There are so many opportunities now for everybody, Black and White, that that might account for teachers not doing as much nurturing to students as they did when we were segregated.

JF: Do you know Vivian ???

TP: Yes.
JF: Well Vivian was the mother of the minority medical students at Tufts New England Medical Center, and she urged, she bullied, she pushed, she pulled, and they all applauded. The testimonials to how much...

TP: And she did that to Black and White students?

GF: No, mostly to Black students. And the Hispanic students.

JF: The minority students.

GF: They had a minority student’s organization, and she was the mother. She was one of these really tough mothers because she had very, very high standards that she insisted on, but she really worked them, but on the other hand....

JF: She made things, she just made them do it and they all were grateful. She had a secretary, and together this was a refuge, because these were all smart people, and they were paying to go to school.

TP: And that’s why you still need these minority offices, too, because those persons serve that same purpose for the minority students.

JF: Well we got to know, they used to have fundraisers. We got to know...?? one of Gene’s ??? at a dinner with her boyfriend for a couple of ???

GF: Creole dinner.

JF: It was so good, and her boyfriend, with bread pudding, oh, but the boyfriend became the agent for...?? So there we got to sit right there with Wynston Marsalis, and who was the older???

GF: Sarah Vaughn.

TP: Oh my goodness.

JF: They had this absolutely marvelous performance, concert, and we hadn’t bid for that, that was just something...

TP: You had so many good times because you’ve known so many Black folks!

GF: That’s right. Don’t know what we would’ve done without it!

JF: It’s out of pure self-interest. That was exciting, that was an example.

TP: Did you teach ???

GF: I sure did.
TP: Yeah. She was one... I don’t remember her here.

GF: She was partly responsible for my going to Tufts.

TP: Oh, O.K.

GF: She got there before I did.

JF: She was a big deal. But Gene said, she, came to talk, and he said she walked in to the first day... “I’m the only woman, I’m the only person of color in this class.” And you could just see what a miserable time she was going to be having. And at the half, right, about you know we’re almost right away Rush Winn and Kenny Greer, who were darling, also first year students, he said, he came up and said “Would you be a partner at the...”

GF: Lab partner.

JF: So she said you know things were extremely positive because of that.

TP: She never came downtown.

JF: She didn’t have to, she had a million... she was just surrounded by... she was gorgeous, and these were young men who appreciated a smart gorgeous woman, and also were quite liberal themselves.

TP: I don’t remember her at all. She must have been after the first guys.

GF: Oh, yeah. She was not the very first. She came after... I think she must have started around ’63.

TP: Oh, ‘cause African Americans students...

JF: That’s a nice story ‘cause Kenny Greer are like dermatologists.

TP: Yeah, he is, I know his wife.

JF: Wash Winn and his wife are up in Vermont now, but we see them when they come back. But it’s kind of sweet when you know nice things about people.

JT: It’s wonderful to see your relationship and hear about the friendships... ???

JF: As Teresa says, we’ve gotten a lot of good out of it! But our guinea pigs were all over town. Did your kids have any?

TP: I don’t think so, I turned them down on all pets.
JF: Well, these are...you put them in a box and shove them under the bed. They don’t get into trouble.

TP: They do get into trouble!

GF: Guinea pigs are the least trouble of any pet in the world.

TP: You always had two. They got into trouble.

JF: We had three. A boy and two girls. And then we had....

GF: Well, times have changed. Susannah has guinea pigs now. They neuter them. I mean it’s crazy.

JF: We didn’t neuter them.

LS: The vet bills for the guinea pigs.

GF: They go to the vet, you know!

JF: We thought we were teaching them all about life and death. As we always said later, you didn’t tell us if people like guinea pigs.

TP: Oh, my goodness. I am glad I missed those guinea pigs.

JF: You would have loved them, you just shove them under the bed and they’re out of...they’re not in anybody’s way.

JT: Wake up in the night and they are scratching...

LS: The great unifier, right? The guinea pigs

GF: Right.

JF: It was something you could talk about. There were an awful lot of subjects that were...

GF: Wasn’t it Eunice...

TP: Eunice, I’m sure you gave Eunice guinea pigs! She was good about that.

GF: But I mean, she said you know, she said guinea pigs are like us. You never know how they are going to...how the children are going to come out. And it’s really true.

TP: Guinea pigs are like Black folks, you never know how they are going to turn out.
JF: Because the colors are all mixed up. You have no idea how they are going to turn out.

TP: Eunice was in the hospital night before last. Another episode.

JT: Did you deliberately give the guinea pigs...??

JF: We had so many guinea pigs, we gave them to anybody who would take them.

GF: We had to get rid of them.

JF: We were at Molly Michie. We would check with each other, "I have a red one, have you got a Black one," because someone wants a pair of two different colors, they really were ???. And it costs nothing, and you got garbage free from the grocery store. You don't have to say stupid, put that pig down, you're driving...pigs don't care what you do.

JT: This is going to be the metaphor on the cover of our publication. Black and White guinea pigs....

LS: We're going to say thank you very much.

JF: We could just go on and on forever!

End of interview.
Teresa Price, Jane and Gene Foster, June 29, 2003
(above with Liz Sargent, below with Jacky Taylor)

(photos by Jacky Taylor, 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. Select transcriptions will be excerpted from interviews and put on a website as part of the Carter G. Woodson Institute’s Race and Place project viewable at www.virginia.edu/~woodson

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..............................

Jane Foster
Interview Consent Form
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Preservation Piedmont, Charlottesville, Virginia

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Interviewee: ____________________________ Date: 7/18/02

Interviewer: ____________________________ Date: 7/18/02
Interview with Laura Robinson

Interviewer: Ashlin Smith
Date: August 31, 2002
Location: Omni Hotel
Charlottesville, Virginia

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

AS: This is Ashlin Smith interviewing Laura Robinson on the 31st of August 2002. Laura can you tell us, give us your full name, your current address, and how you are connected with Jefferson School?

LR: My full name is Laura Alice Reaves Robinson, and my current address is 1108 Preston Avenue, Charlottesville, Virginia 22903. And you asked me the question, how was I connected with Jefferson School?

AS: Jefferson School?

LR: Jefferson School. I went to school at Jefferson from the third grade through high school. I first went to the old building that was torn down, that was an eight-room school, and it faced Fourth Street. And after a few years, when I was in the sixth grade I believe, I moved over to the present Jefferson School that is there now. And went to the sixth grade there, started in the sixth grade in the present Jefferson School. I stayed there until I finished in 1933.

AS: Now, where did you live in Charlottesville when you were going to Jefferson School?

LR: The whole time I was at Jefferson School, I lived on Hartmans Mill Road, 119 Hartmans Mill Road. I walked to school from Hartmans Mill Road to Jefferson School every day, rain, snow, ice, because we did not stay out of school like the children stay out of school today.

AS: And you walked to school. Did you walk with anyone else?

LR: I walked with my peers and the other children, White and Black, that were leaving Hartmans Mill Road and Ridge Street. And they would peel off and go to the Midway.
School, and I would continue around to Jefferson School. My brothers and sisters along with me would continue along to Jefferson School.

AS: Do you remember the names of any of your friends in the neighborhood? With whom you walked?

LR: Alright, with the Black students that walked to the school from that area at that time were Dewood Fox, the Carters, the Sellarses, and the Alecs, and I can't remember the others. Those were the Black kids, children that walked with me to Jefferson. And the Whites that would walk sometimes with us would be the Mictums, the Battle children, the Browns, the Gleasons, and different folks like that walked to school. And they would go over to the Midway. And I would continue to Jefferson.

AS: As you walked to school, do you remember some of the things you would particularly notice from time to time, any favorite houses, or stores, what is your memory of what things looked like on the way?

LR: On my way to school? At that particular time, Ridge Street was considered...the people who lived on Ridge Street were considered some of the top people of the City of Charlottesville at that time. Because the mayor lived out there, Mayor Brown, at one time lived out on Ridge Street, the Gleasons, and the Holcums, different people like that lived out that way. Along with the other people, but no one would ever be quite as, what is it I want to say? The children got along. Even though we were going to different schools. And the Stodges lived across the street, across the street in front of me, and they were White. And we always got along. Well, we studied together. They would come to our house to study, we would go to theirs. The Neimples lived out that way, and we all got along beautifully.

AS: Well, good! I am glad to hear that. Those are some familiar sounding names. Beauforts are another

LR: Well, and the Browns. Brown was the mayor. This is old! You can take that out. He was the mayor of the city at one time, and then Mr. Gleason became the mayor. You should know those guys. The Michums lived out that way, ran a store. Victoria Zenemans who was down on the mall, well it wasn't the mall then, down on Main Street.

AS: What are your memories of what Jefferson School building looked like?

LR: The interior?

AS: The inside and the outside. What do you remember?

LR: Let me say this. The classrooms were large. Most classes were large. The teachers had anywhere from 38 or 40 children in a classroom. And that is a large classroom. And, at that time, the Superintendent did not see fit to have lights put on but one side of the classroom in the first building that I was in. And that was on the far side. And light
You do know him. Booker T. Reaves. He was a student at Hampton Institute. He completed his work there. And when he completed his work at Hampton Institute, he was the first Black from the city of Charlottesville, first known Black, to go to the University of Virginia to get his masters degree. He went on to teach here in Charlottesville, and he became principal of Jefferson School. After integration...you don’t want to talk about after integration do you?

AS: Could you give me the names of your brothers and sisters?

LR: All right, Booker T. Reaves. Do you know him?

AS: Yes.

LR: You do know him. Booker T. Reaves. He was a student at Hampton Institute. He completed his work there. And when he completed his work at Hampton Institute, he was the first Black from the city of Charlottesville, first known Black, to go to the University of Virginia to get his masters degree. He went on to teach here in Charlottesville, and he became principal of Jefferson School. After integration...you don’t want to talk about after integration do you?

AS: We’ll get to that.

LR: Ok, well. He became, he was the principal over at Jefferson. The elementary part, and Owen, Mr. Owen Duncan was the principal of the high school. My sister that went to Hampton was named Anna Reaves. And my name was Laura Reaves, Reaves at that time. I went to Virginia State College. I did not want to go to Hampton, so I went to Virginia State College.

AS: Were there any other sisters and brothers in your family?

LR: Yes, I had two more sisters. One became a technician at the University of Virginia. Her name was Theola Reaves Paine. My other sister who moved to Boston, Massachusetts, my older sister, she did not work. She was John Gaines’ mother. She lived here in Charlottesville after living in Boston for twenty-some years. She came back to Charlottesville. And John her son went to Hampton Institute. And he finished at the University of Virginia. And getting down then to my daughter. Would you want to hear about my family?

AS: Go right ahead!
LR: My family, I married Willard A. Robinson. And he came here from Washington, D.C. to teach when he first came out of school. He taught at Jefferson, he was the industrial arts teacher at Jefferson until he decided that he did not want to teach for a while, so he became a businessman for himself. He ran a shop over on Anderson Street, and I have one daughter. Her name is Laureen Robinson Bennet-Moore. She finished St. Paul’s College and the University of Virginia. And she has 30 hours plus level at the University of Virginia. She got her masters at the University of Virginia. That’s my daughter. I have one granddaughter. Her name is Alicia Ray Bennet. She finished the College of William and Mary, and she went on to do some more work at the Morgan State University. Because she had not had the experiences of Black schools. Because she went to St. Anne’s-Belfield before going to college. And she needed to be exposed to many Blacks. And I told her that. And that was her reason for going to Morgan State University. And she mixed with people from all over the world, and it gave her a broad outlook on life. She is now teaching in Maryland. But before that, she traveled all over this country teaching other teachers how to set up their classrooms for reading and English. But, after getting married last May, she decided that she needed to be home, so she came down there from traveling every week, and coming home, getting a change of clothes, going out again. So she’s home, but she’s teaching in Maryland now.

AS: That’s a wonderful history of education and teaching.

LR: I haven’t finished yet! My family taught in the city, my whole family, taught in the city of Charlottesville for 225 years. And I will name those persons who made those 225 years possible! My brother, Booker T. Reaves; my husband, Willard A. Robinson; my nephew, John Gaines; my daughter Laureen Bennet-Moore; and Laura R. Robinson. I may have left out one or two, but we were the ones that...and those were more years than any one family...close family taught here in the city of Charlottesville. That was given year before last at one of the school functions this year in the city of Charlottesville.

AS: An award was given to the family? Is that what you were saying? You were recognized?

LR: Recognized. As...it was at my...my daughter when she decided she wanted to take early retirement. It was said at that retirement.

AS: Well, now, what teachers do you remember most fondly?

LR: My...the teachers that had...I went to...

AS: In elementary school, as well as the high school.

LR: Ms. Maggie Turner. Mrs. Kathy Chisholm. I could tell you all of my, all of them. Going on. Mrs. Bessie Taylor. Mrs. Rebecca McGinnis. Miss Jessie Carrie. And then when I went to high school... Miss Marion White... And then when I went to high school I had many teachers. I can name all of my, all of those, but time will, I don’t want to take up too much of your time...
AS: Um, when you went to high school, did you happen to change classes, did you go to different rooms, or were all of your classes in the same room?

LR: In some instances, the classes were in the same room, but most of the time you changed rooms. There were so many rooms, you know, in that school, there at that time.

AS: And what were the halls like? When you changed classes was it crowded, was it noisy?

LR: Not really too...well I didn’t think that they were too crowded, or too noisy, back when I was in school there weren’t as many children in school here in the city of Charlottesville as they have today. When I was here in school. Most of the crowd came in after World War II.

AS: Now what are your memories of World War II while you were in school, was there anything special happening?

LR: During World War II? Many of the young men if they were of a certain age were all, they all had to go to the service. The only thing that kept my husband off from going to war in World War II was that he had an allergy that kept him out of the war.

AS: What year did you graduate from Jefferson School?

LR: 1933!

AS: All right.

LR: That’s a long time.

AS: That’s right, you were out of high school by the time World War II began.

LR: I was out of school by the time of World War II. I went through the Depression years, you know. You had in there after World War II you had the Depression years.

AS: And what were they like?

LR: No, no, no. The Depression years came before World War II.

AS: Oh, yes. They were in the ’30s.

LR: Late ’29, ’30. During the time I was in high school. You had the Depression years.

AS: And then World War II came along.

LR: Right. I had it vice versa. But you’ll straighten it out, I hope.

AS: You’ve already done that. [they laugh]
LR: I wanted to be as...

AS: Tell me about lunches at school. Did you carry your lunch to school, or were you able to buy your lunch there, or could you do either one? And where you ate...

LR: At one time when I was in school, if you want...well, when, to go back, when I was in the lower grades, we only went to school a half day. That was one class that started at 8 o'clock in the morning until 12. And I went to school from 12:30 to 4:30 in the afternoon when I was in the lower grades.

AS: So you had lunch at home.

LR: At home, right.

AS: Before you went to school.

LR: Right. That's right.

AS: Well, what was it like in high school for lunch?

LR: You could carry your lunch; you could eat lunch at school. You could buy lunch at the cafeteria at school. Lunches were served in the cafeteria. And the lunches basically were prepared by the people who were taking home economics under Miss Nanny Cox Jackson. You know the name.

AS: Yes! Were those good lunches? Did you ever eat them?

LR: Yes, because I'd help prepare some of them.

AS: You were in a home economics class.

LR: Yes, in high school.

AS: In high school.

LR: Right.

AS: Who taught that class again?

LR: Miss Nanny Cox Jackson. And her daughter, Helen ...Mrs. Helen, I can't think of her married name because she got married after she left here.

AS: And what did you learn in that class? Obviously cooking.
LR: We learned how to cook, we learned how to take of a home. Clean, how to clean your home. How to wash and iron, because we did all the towels in, ah, and curtains that were used in the Home Ec Department. We had to do them there. That was part of our training.

AS: I see. Now, did you learn how to sew?

LR: Yes, we learned how to sew. I learned how to make rows on a loom. There was a loom over there. And, I don’t know what they did with that loom. But I knew how to take braids and put them together to make rugs. I made silk ones, and I made cotton ones. She taught certain girls how to do that, ones who wanted to do that. She taught them well. The teachers were very thorough.

AS: Did you finish a rug, and were you able to take it home?

LR: I took the rugs because I brought the materials from my home and used my materials. And some of the days I would stay back after school and work on those rugs. She taught me how to thread the loom, made those large rugs. In the home Ec. Department. And I learned how to can foods, because during that time, people did a lot of canning. I learned how to lay a table. I think that’s correct to say to lay a table. I learned how to lay a table. We would sit down, and, um, most families at that time would usually... they ate together. She would have the girls to sit down at the table like... eight generally, to train many of them who did not know how to sit at the table, and to eat. Which spoon, which fork, what to use. Because a lot of people do not know which fork or spoon to pick up first. They don’t know where to put the cup. They do not know where the glasses go. There are many things that they just don’t know. And I know those things. I was taught well. And my mother, she was one of them, if we did not do what we needed to do, we had to do it over again. You did things, and when you learned how to do something, you should do them thoroughly. People are...

AS: Were there other classes that you particularly enjoyed, like math or did you have a science class?

LR: Yes, I had science classes, I had math classes. I had history class, English, and what else did I have? Geometry. Algebra. French. Those were the class...the basics, but there were other classes that I did not have—nature study, or things of that nature. I had um, general science and biology, when I was in high school. All the other sciences that I have had, I took them since... leaving Jefferson. All the other sciences.

AS: You were very well prepared for college, it sounds like.

LR: Not really, because the kids that came from big cities, they were better prepared than we were, because we went to college when we had finished eleventh grade, they went to college when they had finished twelve grades. That was the difference there, a whole year. But if you have it that you want to do something, you do that. Whatever is in your heart you want to do you do that.
AS: And you did it. You managed.

LR: I tried.

AS: You managed very well. Were there classes in athletics or games?

LR: The boys played football. Um, the girls...No! We didn’t have P.E. when I was in school. The boys played football.

AS: Not even in high school?

LR: No. We didn’t have P.E. when I was in school. I say we missed so many things that the city children had, and the year’s difference makes a difference in one’s training. And, frankly, we should have had P.E. all the way through. But we didn’t have that like the children of today. But I managed...I did P.E. at college, I took swimming at college, and I did all the P.E. work that I had to do. I guess I had about 12 hours in P.E. during my four years. You know how it goes.

AS: What about recesses?

LR: Recesses?

AS: Recesses at Jefferson School...In elementary...I guess you didn’t have recesses in high school...

LR: We had a fifteen minute break when we going half day. Fifteen minutes. And high school, I can’t seem to remember the recesses. Thirty minutes may-be?

AS: Probably with your lunch? Was that the break.

LR: Yes, that was the break in high school.

AS: Was there play equipment outside? Did you have a playground?

LR: We had a playground, but we did not have all kinds of equipment on the playground when I was coming up. The only thing that I can remember was a bar that we walked across, there might have been one or two swings, but other than that I don’t remember. Because we would make up our own games, we would play marbles, we would play hopscotch. I can’t remember all the games.

AS: Jump rope?

LR: Jump, oh yes! We would bring those from home. We’d do that when I was in school.

AS: Sounds like fun.
LR: Well, we did not have a lot like the children have today.

AS: Well...

LR: But they don't take advantage of it.

AS: You can do very well with very little.

LR: If you try and you have willpower, and you have it within you that you want to succeed. You can do whatever you wish to do to a certain extent.

AS: Now, was there a library?

LR: Pardon me?

AS: Was there a library at Jefferson School, either elementary or high school? Was there a place where they kept books?

LR: They were out in the hallway, there were some bookcases, back when I was in the lower grades, with the old books that had been sent over from the White schools, they were sent to the Black schools at that time. Some of the books that my family, if they lived elsewhere, would send us... My family members...my father's brothers, and my mother's sisters. One lived in Boston, my mother's sister lived in Boston. My father's brothers lived in Buffalo, New York, and in Ohio. They would send us things that they thought would help my father's children because they had no children.

AS: Were you able to use the public library? Was there a public library in Charlottesville? Like McIntire Library?

LR: It... yes, but I didn’t at that time, I did not go down there to get books or whatever. You know segregation was in Charlottesville at that time. And there’s still segregation. People segregate themselves. Segregation will never be over until people find within their hearts they must not do that. That’s the only time it will actually be over. Because I know it, I’ve lived it, after I came out I taught in the... I taught over here at Jefferson. I taught at Burnley Moran for eleven years, and I taught at Greenbriar. And the people were nice to me because I was nice, but I was straight along with their children. And they were nice to me, and if you are nice to people and straight along with people and don’t talk out of both sides of your mouth, be frank with people, you are better off. And whatever I would do if I were working for you, I would be frank with you. And if there was something that you would say to me...If there was something that you would say to me, that you wanted me to do, if I felt within my heart that was not what you were paying me for, I would tell you that. And I said no I will not do that.

AS: So, you got along very well in the three schools you taught in, and one in a segregated school. Jefferson School.
Jefferson was segregated. And the other two were supposed to have been integrated. And my teaching career I enjoyed it. When I left, I was given the honor of being a master teacher.

Very good.

When I left. I took 21 hours at the University also when, you know, after I started teaching. I was still teaching at Jefferson when I started those 21 hours.

Well, now, what do you think about Jefferson School now and the future of that building? Do you have some feelings and ideas?

This is the feeling that I have. Most of the...So many people had activities at Jefferson...everything that was owned by Blacks has been sold or taken. All of this area, even this hotel, Black folks owned all around here. Every bit of it is gone. And I feel... Ask that question again.

How do you feel about Jefferson School now, and what the future of the building should be.

I feel right now the city of Charlottesville, and the School Board let Jefferson down because they did not renovate that school or take care of that school like it should have been in prior years, and it has gotten run down so badly that they don’t want to repair it. That’s why they took those young people, that kindergarten group out. Or first whatever, that group out. I feel that, that’s the last thing that Blacks really went to by themselves, and it should be left, because all of the other things on this street are gone, in this area. But it is not complete. And I’m going to tell you this. I don’t know whether they will ever get businesses here built just like they should, because it was wrong. Look at it over there. Charlottesville was the first city to have their schools integrated. As such...

In Virginia.

In Virginia.

Do you think Jefferson School could still be used as a center for education? Would that would be a good, a good...and perhaps part of it being used as a museum of the local history...

I think it would be good to use it as part of it for a museum for Black history, of the people who lived in this area. Because so much of Black history has been lost among the Blacks in the city of Charlottesville. And a lot of it has not been taken, and basically, when I was in school, the school histories did not carry what the Black people were doing. I learned all of that when I went to college and since. And met a lot of people, because I’ve traveled a lot since. I’ve traveled halfway around the world. I’ve seen every state in the United States, all 50 of them. Eight countries in Europe, and all the Carribean
Islands. My hope was to have gone to Africa, and Australia, but fate has not let me do that yet. But I can do it through pictures and reading.

End of interview.
Laura Robinson, August 30, 2004

(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.

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Interviewee..........(name) Date.8/31/2002

Interviewer...............Date.8/31/02
Interview with
Charles and Janice Rogers

Interviewer: Ashlin Smith
Date: August 31, 2002
Location: Omni Hotel
Charlottesville, Virginia

Transcribed: May 9, 2004
By: Liz Sargent

AS: This is Ashlin Smith, and I am interviewing Janice and Charles Rogers on August 31, 2002. Charles, give me your full name and your current address, and what your association with Jefferson School has been.

CR: My name is Charles Lawlor Rogers, Sr. In Charlottesville I am known as Charlie. I live in 1005 Firethorn Lane, in Newark, Delaware 19713. I grew up in Charlottesville, was born here, and I went to Jefferson Elementary and Jefferson High School and graduated from Jefferson High School in 1949.

AS: Where did you live in Charlottesville when you were going to Jefferson School?

CR: I lived in a location called Carterstown, which is on Grove Street. Carterstown...my grandfather lived there, aunts and uncles, it was a section off of Cherry Avenue and Valley Road, and right next to the Southern Railroad, in fact the train track. And I used to walk every day. And thought nothing of it.

AS: Charles, tell me more about your walks to school. You said you walked to school. Did you walk by yourself? Or were you with other children.

CR: Most of the time I remember I was by myself. And I would go up to Grove Street, I guess about half a block, go up a little path to the railroad track, and I would walk along the railroad track until we got to the station—Southern Station—they’d get up on Main Street and then finish my trip. I don’t know how long it was, it must have been at least a couple of miles. But I walked every day to school, and back home at night. And, once I had a bicycle, but at that time you—the mode of transportation was walking for kids.

AS: When you were a child, you did this also?

CR: Yes, when I was a child. And my mother would take me sometimes.

AS: She’d walk with you?
CR: She'd walk with me, yes, to school.

AS: You've mentioned your route, you remember that clearly,

CR: Sure.

AS: Are there any other things that you remember noticing or seeing as you walked to school, maybe particular buildings, or empty lots, or you mentioned railroad tracks. Just to get a picture of what you would see...

CR: Well, I'd go along the railroad track and if I was walking towards school, towards Charlottesville, ok, there's a residential section called Fifeville that was on my right, then, on the left there was a lot of the University Hospital, and the grounds of the University. If I had left my house and walked across the railroad track, instead of going down, but across, I would go into Brandon Avenue and into the University of Virginia. I lived about maybe a mile, half, three-fourths from the University of Virginia. If I walked out of my front door and just kept across the railroad track, well, I'd be at the University. In fact, my grandfather worked at the University. He was a... worked as a custodian. And my father worked in one of the eateries in the University, the University cafeteria at one time.

AS: Did you have brothers and sisters who also went to Jefferson School?

CR: No, I have one brother, but he was born when I was in college. Ok.

AS: I see!

CR: So I grew up by myself. I have a cousin who graduated the year after that. We are very close, like brothers. He didn't have a brother, and neither did I until later in life, so we grew up like brothers. But he did not... we would visit each other. But he lived in, you might say in town. In Charlottesville, while I lived out on Grove Street.

AS: I like how you make that distinction. Did you have any playmates in your neighborhood? People that you could play with.

CR: Yes. There were some. There were some cousins in the neighborhood. They were a little younger than I was, but there were some cousins there, who lived next door. A couple of girls who lived next door, and then up the street there were some cousins who were a little older than I was. So I did have... we did have some playmates. And these were relatives, and then later...

AS: Can you give me their names?

CR: Yes, one was Rosemary Dearing, and she was a cousin, and her cousin was Jackie. And then up on the hill there was Valto and James Jones. We called James, we called him 'Slick.' That was his nickname. Then later on the Dawsons moved in. That was a family
of two...three sisters and two brothers. You know with their mother and father, they moved in. In fact their father was a porter and he worked at the Southern Railroad Station.

AS: When you got to Jefferson School, and we are talking about Elementary School, what do you remember about say the Elementary School? What do you remember about the buildings, the outside of the buildings, and the grounds?

CR: I remember it was a... about a three story building. Just one building.

AS: What year would this have been?

CR: Let's see. I graduated in '49, so this was...I started school in December of 1939. Because at that time...

AS: This was the Elementary School?

CR: Yes, the Elementary School. And we had seven years of elementary school and four years of high school. We only had eleven grades at that time.

AS: And when you went to high school, what is your memory of the building?

CR: Oh, it was big, with the auditorium, and you know, we liked that. And one of the things I remember was that I joined the band. Ok. And I can remember the day that I was a...once...I was in elementary school then to go back, and I was on the steps of downtown by Mount Zion Baptist Church. And the band director, Mr. Page, was there, and I said “Mr. Page, Mr. Page, I wanted to join the band!” And he said...he talked real fast and he said, “What do you want to play, what do you want to play?” And I said “Oh, either tenor saxophone or trombone.” He said “Trombone, man, trombone.” So my parents bought me a used trombone that summer and I started taking lessons and I ended up in high...learned to play the trombone, in fact my cousin Chauncey, who was like my brother, he started a little before I did, he played the trumpet. And, he helped me with my lip early on in lessons, and learning to read. He’d come and sort of coach me. And I got to the point where in high school I was the student conductor of the band. So I played in the band, and I also sang in the chorus. Besides that I enjoyed it and so therefore, I majored in music when I went to college.

AS: Did you?

CR: Yes, and so my...L. Augustus Page, Sr. was the band director, and Harry Johnson was the choir director. And we had a great time in our musical experiences in high school, and I can remember a man by the name of F. Nathaniel Gatlin who at that time was the band director and music teacher at Virginia State College it was then. It’s the University now. He would come down and sort of recruit and give workshops. So I ended up leaving high school and going to Virginia State. But my experiences at Jefferson were wonderful. I can remember the plays, and I can remember that you know we enjoyed being together. It
was just fun, being there and learning, and the experiences that you had. At that time your parents were very involved in your education you know...and we were kids who were always striving for success. And so Charlottesville is a small town, and there was only one high school, so you knew everybody. You knew their mothers, their aunts, you know, and all the kids. It was just a wonderful experience. I can remember the proms that we had, going to the prom you know, and the graduation exercises and things.

AS: So, were you in plays. Did you participate in drama, there must have been concerts, all stuff that you were a part of. And your parents would come?

CR: Yes. Parents would come. Of course we had parent associations. Where parents would...like band boosters. And parents were involved in that, and that was good. And sometimes we went on trips with the band, and parents of course would go to chaperone. And we had band concerts, and we would go to Virginia State, at that time we had the state music festivals. And schools of course were segregated at that time, and we would go down to Virginia State and other schools, high schools, would be there from Lynchburg and Newport News and Richmond and so forth and so on. And the same thing in choir, we had, we would have state festivals in choir and the same thing would happen. And at Jefferson of course, we had choir concerts and we had operettas. We had done one opera where there was Lela Walla, and I had a couple of solos in the operetta, and we went on the road one time. We went down to Newport News. Took our operetta Lela Walla down to Newport News, Virginia to perform and we thought we were big stuff then. [Janice laughs]

AS: Now, do you do something with music now?

CR: Yes, now I do. I, um, I’m the...I was the...I just retired as Supervisor of Fine Arts for Brandywine School District. I have been a band director, in high school, elementary school. I have been a choir director in high school. I have been a band director and head of a music department in a college. And then my last position I was Supervisor of Fine Arts for a school district in Delaware, for the Brandywine School District. Now, I’ve retired. But now I have two choirs that I direct—Hildoman Chorale, which has been in existence for approximately 22 years, and the Dupont Diversity Choir, and I’m the only one that’s not a Dupont employee. And we give concerts every year. And also I, um, also I [coughs] Excuse me. I give recitals of Negro spirituals and popular tunes. And I have done that for senior citizens’ homes, I’ve done those in churches, I’ve done them for schools. And I enjoy this very much, and um...in fact I have a recital coming up in October. The...I also have a CD of popular, of ten popular tunes, that I recorded. In fact I recorded that with a guy from Charlottesville, Melvin, George Melvin, who...and I did that in Charlottesville. He used to work at the Boar’s Head Inn and I would come to Charlottesville. And, we... had come to Charlottesville, and I’d go to the Boar’s Head Inn, and I would sing while he played. And I said “I want to do a CD,” and so we did a CD together. Also, in Delaware, as far as music is concerned, I’m on the board of Opera Delaware, I am on the board of the Delaware Symphony, Christina Cultural Arts Center. I’ve had the opportunity to direct the Delaware Symphony in a concert called Handel Hallelujah. A lollipop concert for kids with a children’s chorus. Also, I have been, I have
done the Brandywiners, which is a wonderful group in Delaware. People who put on a musical every summer in a wonderful place called Longwood Gardens. I directed three of their productions—Oklahoma, Carousel, and Camelot. And I also have, I have conducted Opera Delaware’s production of Harriet the Woman Called Moses, and I also have been the chorus master for some of their productions—say Sticks da Fale and Aida. So I’ve been, and I’ve directed ... singers in three Gilbert and Sullivan productions. So I’ve been quite busy. I am retired, but I am still very, very busy. I’m on these boards, and I’m in a book—The Color of Water—written by a young man by the name of James McBride. James McBride’s mother was Jewish, his father was African American. His father died, and the mother brought her siblings out of New York into Wilmington, so that they could get away from the hustle and bustle of New York so they could have a quote unquote “normal life.” James McBride played the...I taught him trombone lessons, and he was also in the band when I was the director of the P. S. Dupont in Wilmington. To make a long story short, he wrote a book. And in this book he states that his life was changed with the help of a Black man, his music director, Charles Lawlor Rogers, Sr. at P.S. Dupont.

AS: Excellent. I am certainly impressed. I asked the right questions, didn’t I? [they laugh] Well, this makes me think of the Jefferson School and the auditorium there, and the space. Is there a place for music in the Jefferson School? In its future? What do you think? Could it be adapted to concerts?

CR: Oh, yes. I think so. We had concerts there. Yea, I think it’s a wonderful place. It’s downtown, basically, and I think it’s a place where we could still have concerts. We had plays there. The stage is adequate. We’d have to do some renovations and so forth and so on. But I think the facility yes does warrant, and if I remember the I don’t know what the floor looks like now, but I remember the floor as being a wooden floor, which acoustically is good.

AS: As you know, there is a community discussion about the future use of Jefferson School, and that is why I asked that question. Do you have any other ideas or thoughts or feelings about the future of the Jefferson School building.

CR: I... you know, if it...obviously its not going to be a school again. I think it could be a community center, it could be a fine arts center, and like I say it’s downtown, and I think it could serve the community in this capacity. Where you could bring people in, and also it could be a place for genealogy and all these other kinds of things that... you know, what has happened in the past, and so people could go there and study the history of Charlottesville. All this could be a part of that facility.

AS: Yes, there has been some discussion of having a kind of museum there, with the history of the black community in Charlottesville.

CR: And hopefully it would be one that is interactive. Not something where you just go and look and remember, but something that is interactive where you, you know, whether it be
a technology where you could go and ask questions, you press a button, you get the answer, these kinds of things. People could get involved this way.

AS: Right, right, very good.... very good. What other classes were there that you might have had at Jefferson High School that would have been of particular interest to you. You've mentioned your interest in music. Is there something else?

CR: Yes, I liked social studies classes especially at Jefferson. You know, I have not traveled a great deal. I have been to Europe, England and some other places, you know, and we are getting ready to go on a cruise now. But I think knowing something about the world you know your social studies, you know, and then...

AS: Who taught that, do you remember?

CR: I don't remember who taught that class, but I...right off the top of my head, who would be one of the social studies teachers. I do remember Mrs. Bryant who was an English teacher, and Mr. Henry who was an English teacher. And, I also enjoyed writing. You know the poetry and things that we would do. And so I enjoyed...so I guess history and English, history or social studies and English were some of the courses that I really enjoyed. And it was, it was a time of, like I say, a sharing, and so, you know, you got a chance to be creative, and the teachers were there to help you, and the parents were there to support you. And it was just a...I enjoyed going to school, very much.

AS: What about the library facilities? Was there a library?

CR: Oh, sure. Mrs. Faulkner was the librarian.

AS: Mrs. Faulkner.

CR: Yes. And I can see her face now. She was the librarian, and I, at, I thought we had adequate materials, you know, you go to the library to do your research and there was at least a period every week where you would go to the library. You know, and then teachers would send you to the library to look up various things and to do research.

AS: What about the hallways? Were they crowded?

CR: Oh, no, it was a two-story building, and it was sort of like in a rectangle, and in the middle as I remember there was a space where we used to go out and play. There was an open space in the middle of the building. But it was not crowded, you know. Not at all. People were not knocking each other down, and then we had a gym, a teacher—Mrs. Pleasants and Mr. Smith—Mr. Smith was the gym teacher ...and the physical education teacher, and also a coach. He coached just about everything. And so, these were wonderful times. In fact, I tried to play football my freshman year. I guess I weighed about 100 pounds. And I gave it a good shot, and I was brave, but after that you know I decided, well I gave it...because all of my uncles played football, and so, but after that you know, I decided well may-be I should be in the marching band. [they laugh] But I
can remember when my friend Lois Price, I could hear her at one of the football games, you know, and she said "Look at Charlie Rogers out there, what in the world is he going to do?" [they laugh] And we still remained friends. But I, you know I gave it my best shot, I got in the game once, but um, after that...you know, I thought, "Well, I got away unscathed." So I thought may-be I'd play that trombone, and play for the football players instead of playing with the football players.

AS: Right, right! Were there other sports teams like basketball, baseball...?

CR: Oh, yes. Basketball, baseball, yes, yes, the whole spectrum, yes.

AS: And the courtyard that you mentioned, was that just an empty space, or did it have any kind of play equipment in it, or was it just a play space?

CR: It was empty space, and we would go out there and play some game, soccer, or maybe something like that.

AS: Sort of pick-up games?

CR: Yes, pick-up games, yes, on the inside. Yes.

AS: How about lunch, did you bring your lunch? Or buy your lunch? Did you have several options?

CR: I don't think you had too many options. I brought lunch.

AS: You could have bought it? Did they have...

CR: They had lunch. Cafeteria, yes. The cafeteria, they had a cafeteria, and you’d go up and get your lunch and go up to the end of the line and give them your, I don’t know how much it was, but you know, a quarter, fifteen cents or whatever it was at that particular time. But yes we bought lunch. We purchased lunch at the school. And they cooked it right there at the school.

AS: What about report cards, do you remember, did report cards go home to your family?

CR: Yes, oh, yes. I don’t remember whether they went home or not, but your, your parents, your family was very aware of what your grades were, you know, how you were doing. I was fortunate enough not to have to repeat a grade, thank goodness, or a course. You know, and I am glad I didn’t because at that particular time if you had to repeat you had to answer, and you may not want to know what the answer was going to be, you know? What is wrong with you? Why can’t you do something? But like I said, parents were supportive, and parents, um, were really, my parents and a lot of parents would come to school. And they would come to school unannounced, you know, they’d just walk in.

AS: I see.
CR: You know, and they’d tell the teacher, “you let me know if so and so…if Charlie’s not doing what he’s supposed to do, you let me know.” And we’ll come right in.

AS: I like to hear that. Well now, are there any other teachers that you remember in particular? Or fellow students that you have memories of, that you would like to mention?

CR: Oh, yeah, there were a lot. Floyd Jackson, and Robert Murray, who were real good…Floyd lives in Charlottesville, now. James Murray, at least, he was in art, and he went to…, ended up two years ago…, up until two years ago was a Supervisor of art in the DC public schools. And then there was Frances Coles and John Ellis Henry, and um, we graduated together. Frances’ father was a dentist, and John Ellis,’ I think, uncle, taught in the system. And I’ll never forget that, we all went to Virginia State together. We got on a train, you know, after graduation, and went to Virginia State. And then there was Roosevelt Brown, who of course was all pro tackle. You know he went to Morgan State University. And um, I don’t know? Just, William Gilmore, who is here for this reunion, you know. He and I were very, very good friends. Thomas Inge, a young man who I saw today. And Raleigh Richard. He and I were very good friends. Raleigh also played the trombone. And so, just, Estelle Thomas who we all thought sang like a mocking bird, you know, she sang and she was in the operettas. I don’t know. I can’t remember all the names now. But there were just a lot of friends.

AS: A real feeling of community in the school?

CR: Yes, that’s right. That’s right. Leodene Edlo, her name is now, and Phyllis Whiting, I think her name now is. Driscilla Hollins, people that I remember seeing the last couple of days.

AS: A good reunion?

CR: Yes. We were very, very closely connected. Very tightly connected. We, you know, at that time, there were basically may-be four, may-be five churches in Charlottesville that we went to. So that’s a small group. And we all went to the same high school so we were very, very closely knit. And I don’t remember a lot of friction, and you know, but there’s always, as far as the school is concerned. We were very happy.

AS: Were you here when there was integration? Or, had you…left Charlottesville.

CR: No, I left Charlottesville. I left Charlottesville. I was here when it was segregated.

AS: What about World War II. Were you in school?

CR: I was in school then, yes.

AS: What are your memories of that time and how it might have affected life at high school that you personally would have been aware of?
CR: Um, at that particular time, there was a lot of stress. You knew that there were men who were going away into service, and unfortunately some of them didn’t come back, and you would know your friends’ families and so forth would, were in the war, and you know, and that there was a lot of grief.

AS: Did the school do anything patriotic, I mean, were there any kinds of activities within the school to build patriotism?

CR: I don’t know whether...I think it just there. I think at that time we did the Pledge of Allegiance in the morning. You know, and we would sing the National Anthem and things like this and you just felt, even though you were segregated, you felt a part...you are an American and living in America, and you were still proud of that particular fact.

AS: You mentioned churches a few minutes ago. What church did you attend if you don’t mind my asking?

CR: Yeah. Mount Zion Baptist Church.

AS: Did you participate in the music there?

CR: Oh, yes, yes.

AS: I would think that that would be a natural.

CR: At that time, Mr. Page who was the band director at Jefferson, was also the minister of music at Mount Zion. And we used to have tremendous festivals. We’d have anthems, spirituals, gospel, various groups, children’s groups, they would participate in these big festivals, so, and I had an uncle who sang—my uncle Robert, Bob, uncle Bob we called him. And he...I could read music, you know, I...we had music theory classes and so forth. So I thought I was a real upstart because I could go to him and help him with his choir music, you know, and he would say “come on Charlie,” he’d say “help me!” And I would help him sing bass. So I would sing the bass line, I would help the teacher with his music. And I thought I was a hotshot. And I would, we would sit up in church and a couple of other of us, and we would, um, you could read. We’d sing the bass line. You know everybody else would be singing, we got the hymn number. We would be sitting up there singing the bass line, or we’d sing the tenor line, you know, we thought we were...we were just showing off. [laughs] But I am very happy because when I went, because of the experience I had at Jefferson, when I went to college to major in music, I was not behind in things like theory and sight seeing. You know, and whereas some kids who had the talent, but they had not had the theoretical training that I had, unfortunately, so they had to take may-be 00 course, where I started right at the... what they called the collegiate courses in music.

AS: Well, Janice, have we forgotten anything?

JR: Well, I don’t know. There’s so many wonderful things that he has been involved in...
AS: What has he told you from time to time. Do you have any stories that you remember?

JR: Oh I remember him talking a lot about Charlottesville. This is about my sixth year coming down. I have been coming down to the family reunions and this is the second class reunion that I have attended. So... I have been on a tour of the city, several times, and I think the area—your city is beautiful. I have also talked to other people about the city of Charlottesville, and how famous it is. And we have toured the campus. And we’ve done a lot as far as his family reunions are concerned. But one of the things I think about, and I can see, in this reunion is the cohesiveness of the people. I’m excited to see all these classes, and I look at the years they graduated? And I think this is just tremendous that they are able to do this, and the excitement that they have, and all of the energy that they are putting into these reunions. His mother, and this is one of the things that I wanted to emphasize, his mother, Mrs. Lulu Wicks Rogers, was a graduate of Jefferson, and when they were having the class reunions, she would always call him and ask him “Are you coming home, are you coming to Jefferson?” I also remembered the last time we were here, we attended Jefferson, I was impressed with the school. We had a chance to visit the school and we had the church service there. So, it’s been a tremendous experience for me. He also probably didn’t mention much, but his uncles graduated from there. His uncle Carter Wicks, Reverend Carter Wicks, who was here today. His uncle Daniel Wicks is still here. He’s still living. And he had his uncle Randolph and Robert. That’s two different. And Jessie. Ok. So he had a lot of uncles who graduated, yes, from Jefferson. So I’ve seen a lot of the pictures of the school, of the activities in the school, I’ve seen the yearbooks. And I’ve also seen some of the productions, you know, from the yearbooks, and other memorabilia that Mrs. Lulu Wicks Rogers has had. But one of the things that I have thought about... when we were here for one of the reunions, they were talking about the Paramount Theater being renovated, and it was open. So we were able to go to the theater. One of the things that I remembered most about it was that Charlie went to the back door of the Paramount Theater. He had never been in the back door, I’m sorry, he had never been in the front door, so he went to the back door, which is the area he normally would attend. You know he always had to go in that door. And that, it just amazed me that he just automatically went to the back door. So we went to the front of the building, and the members of this committee who were restoring the Paramount Theater talked about the theater, what they were going to do, and they told us how long the theater had been empty. We went in the theater, they took us down in the auditorium part first. They showed us one part of the stage area where they were renovating the walls and they were showing us what it would look like once it was restored. The paint...and how some of the building was being restored with the different types of textured paints and the different type of whatever it was to restore the building. So I was very impressed with that. The other thing that I was impressed with is when we went to the second floor, and we were visiting the balcony area. Well, during their day at the Paramount, and when they were going to the Jefferson School, they were only allowed...African Americans were only allowed to sit in the balcony. And the people on this committee explained to us that they were going to dedicate this balcony area to the African-American children from Charlottesville area once the Paramount Theater was restored. And it was, you know, completely renovated. And they also found that the balcony had the best seats! So...[they all laugh] And I was really impressed with
that. But one of things I thought as we toured that building, the little African-American students from this area who had to sit in the balcony, who had to come in the back door, I'll always remember how a lot of these people are professionals now. And the impact that Jefferson has had on their education. We had someone there who was an architect, engineers. They were able to tell this committee how to restore this building. He was able to share a lot about how to get funds to restore the building, and how to get people interested. He shared with them the Grand Opera House which we have in Wilmington, Delaware, and how we were able to get funds to restore the opera house. So he was able to put them in contact with people in Delaware who could tell them how to do, what to do, and how to get funds.

So I thought it was really awesome to see, these little kids, now they are professionals, they are adults, they have businesses. And they are able to tell you how to restore this building. How to raise funds to get the building renovated, and also they were able to share some of the professional things and the culture of that building. And I just thought that that was just fantastic. I really enjoyed my experience coming to the reunions, and also the people here. We were just in the church across the street, which is Mount Zion, and we were able to see so many other members of Jefferson High School who were unable to be here today. And one of the persons was Tom and Lillian Inge. And they said to say “hi.”

AS: That's a familiar Charlottesville name! Well I believe that concludes our interview unless Charles has anything else he would like to say before.

CR: No, I just want to thank you for the opportunity to do this. And looking forward to seeing the results of this. And I just hope we can keep the reunions going. Charlottesville is a dear...it's a wonderful place. Like Janice says, some of my friends... I went to a meeting, a Delaware State Arts Council meeting the other day, and Janice was in another meeting, and I was saying we are going to Charlottesville for the weekend, for a school reunion. And they would say, “Oh, Charlottesville, I've been there. It's a wonderful place.” It's wonderful, so, Charlottesville, Virginia is not just known to the people here. It's known far too. It's good to come home. And now, you know, it's the...the time that I went to Jefferson, we were in segregation. We are no longer in segregation, but we have not lost the warmth of being a multi-cultural city now. That we work together. And I think that's wonderful, too. That, you know, we don't fight about what was...what we are doing now is making sure that Charlottesville grows, and all of us, all cultures, all ethnicities, everybody is helping, whether you make $20,000 a year, $40,000 a year, or you're in the six figures or more. We are all interested that this community stays moving forward. Thank you.

AS: Thank you Charles and Janice. We are glad that you came back and appreciate your speaking to us.

End of interview.
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, Charles Lawler Rogers Sr. ...........................................(name)
of 1005 Firethorn Lane, Newark, DE, 19713 .........(address)

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Interviewee: Charles Lawler Rogers Sr. Date: 08/11/02

Interviewer: ........................................ Date: 08/16/02
Interview Consent Form
Jefferson School Oral History Project
Preservation Piedmont, Charlottesville, Virginia

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Interviewee: Jamie Rogers
Date: 8/31/02

Interviewer: Ashton W. Smith
Date: 08/31/02
Interview with Helen Sanders

Interviewer: Lindsay Nolting
Date: August 31, 2002
Location: Omni Hotel
Charlottesville, Virginia

Transcribed: May 2004
By: Liz Sargent

LN: Can you tell us your full name, address, and connection to the Jefferson School?

HS: My name is Helen Sanders. And I live at 1607 South Street, Durham, North Carolina, and I am a 1948 graduate of Jefferson High School.

LN: And you know the neighborhood well, I gather, from our previous conversation.

HS: The neighborhood?

LN: The Jefferson School neighborhood.

HS: I can’t say I know it well. But I know landmarks. I can tell you, I know where I am by certain landmarks.

LN: Which grades did you attend Jefferson School?

HS: From the first to the eleventh. We only had eleven grades.

LN: Did you walk to school?

HS: Walked to school, down Page Street, up Eighth Street, to...well, we used to call it the jail yard. It is the, I guess it is the city public works area now. I noticed that they have a fence up there. That would, that would be our short cut. That we would go instead of having to go all the way around Main Street and come that way.

LN: Give me some names...you probably greeted your family’s friends on your way.

HS: Do I remember the people that I would greet?

LN: Yes.
HS: Oh, the Lightfoots, the Hendersons, the Morrisons, the Beyers, Bayers, Wilsons, these were all people in my neighborhood.

LN: When you got to school, did you stay in one homeroom all day?

HS: In elementary school, we did. Stayed there, and most of the time we only had one teacher. But as you went up, you know, to the higher grades, sometimes you had a different teacher for a different subject. Most of the time you stayed in one room all day. Once...

LN: Was there recess?

HS: Yes! Oh, yes. We always looked forward to that.

LN: What was the playground like?

HS: Awful, awful. There was no... it was just red clay. My mother would fuss all the time, because we would go out there and play, and then when we’d come home it would be all in our hair, everywhere! In our socks, shoes.

LN: Iron oxide in the mud here.

HS: Bad clay here.

LN: Very tenacious. A lot of skinned knees I guess. Um, was there a school library.

HS: In grammar school, no. Yes, yes, yes! Outside, you know because you had to have one room that was the principal’s office, and a sort of a hallway going into the principal’s office and there were books, limited of course... in that small building right here. The whole grammar school and everything was in that small building. I think it went from the first through the fifth grade. And then we went to that building that we have now from sixth and seventh, you were on one side of the auditorium, and the high school in the new addition on the other side.

LN: What did you do in the auditorium?

HS: Everything! You know you had all of your extracurricular activities, your practicing, you didn’t have music rooms and drama rooms, but everything actually we would be in the classrooms adjoining the auditorium, so we could hear them practicing, for the Glee Club and all of the different things all of this is going on and then when in that one area. We had all of the proms and all of your assemblies, uh, even your internal assemblies and special assemblies.

LN: Now if you had proms there, the chairs were moveable, so you could dance.

HS: Yes. Right.
LN: Who led the Glee Club?

HS: The music teacher most of the time. We had two, I think. We had two music teachers, and that was a great thing to be a member of the Glee Club as we called it then. And you didn’t have to audition. Because once you auditioned, once they required that you had to audition, I would have never been in accepted!

LN: But you were in the Glee Club?

HS: I was a member of it.

LN: I’m a singer in the heart. [they laugh] Did they harmonize? Was it fairly complicated music?

HS: In later years. The early years, anybody who wanted to sing could sing. You could be in the Glee Club. But it got to be an audition, and they got very good because you know every year we would go to the music festivals. The drama festivals and the music festivals. Those were things you looked forward to. The band festivals, most of the time they were at Virginia State College. Petersburg. We’d go and compete with the other schools in the state. And we always won a ribbon. Always.

LN: Congratulations!

HS: We always did.

LN: Got you a chance to see a wider world?

HS: Right, right. We’d look forward to it. They tried to...we went on field trips. They tried with the limited, you know, being a segregated school, they tried, the teachers were just really wonderful. Because they had, they were responsible for their classes, then they had the extracurricular activities, you know they were really busy.

LN: Did they take you in their private cars?

HS: No you went in a bus. They had a bus. They had a school bus

LN: Not a school bus.

HS: The city had a bus. The school would rent a city bus, from the Trailways Bus Company. And that’s how we would travel.

LN: Is it your recollection that most of the children at the high school walked to school?

HS: To school? Oh, most all of them. Very few, maybe on a rainy day, the parents would, somebody would get somebody in the neighborhood, or if the child had an injury or
something. But most of them, everybody walked. Not only walked to school, walked everywhere.

LN: I’d understood that some children came from outside the city in order to attend Jefferson, and then they would board or stay with cousins.

HS: I am not familiar with that.

LN: No. That would have been the minority.

HS: I’m not familiar with that. I can imagine it would be. Because it depends on how far they were from the county. Schools...I’m not familiar with that.

LN: Most people you recollect then came...

HS: From the city.

LN: So you had known them all your life?

HS: Uh, huh. Right. We knew each other...everybody knew each other, you know. You might not know them well, but you knew them. And especially where they were from...

LN: What street their family...

HS: You would almost, most of the time you would know the kids, the class below you and the class above you. You’d know those people better than the seniors, or you know, somebody two or three classes below. And then you always had sisters and brothers that were coming along. So they knew them. So everybody just about knew everybody.

LN: You’ve anticipated my next question, did you have brothers and sisters yourself that went to Jefferson?

HS: I had two brothers and a sister. And my oldest brother and I went to Jefferson. The youngest brother started out, but I think he went to Burley the latter years. But see I was gone then.

LN: Did you do further schooling somewhere else?

HS: Yes, see I went to college in North Carolina, as you can see by my address, once I left Charlottesville to go to college, I was only here one, that first summer. And so I’m really...

LN: Didn’t you say through the eleventh, did you do the twelfth grade somewhere else, or...?

HS: No! That was all there was for us. We only...the State of Virginia had only eleven grades, well for b.. b..in our school.
LN: That's a detail I wasn't aware of.

HS: But I think it was a couple of years when they switched over. Cause I was there...see Jefferson closed in '51. And I think when they started Burley, they started twelve grades. I was fifteen years old when I graduated ...

LN: Ready for college...

HS: ...for college. And I was fifteen that May when I graduated from high school. And turned sixteen just that June and went away then. First time I'd ever been away from home.

LN: So, tell me, was it college in North Carolina that caused you to settle there?

HS: Yes. Well, it's interesting. I wanted to be a nurse. And at that time the State of Virginia schools were segregated, and at that time, there was no state school for, as they said, Negroes. So what you...what I did was took my nursing entrance exams at UVA, and the school of my choice was [Mahari??]?? in Tennessee. But they would only take you in med...in nursing school, when you were eighteen. This is why I went to North Carolina, because my family was poor and I couldn't go to the University of Virginia. I did not want to go to Virginia State in Petersburg. So, I decided to go to this small church school in Salisbury, North Carolina. Livingstone College. So I was to go there for two years until I turned eighteen, but then we had a family conference, and my mother said, "I'd rather that you go on and get your B.S. Because if something happens, with money or whatever, then you still wouldn't have had your degree. And then go to nursing school." But I never did go to nursing school.

LN: Oh...

HS: I'm glad, though, I'm glad I didn't. I was not...

LN: What a loss for the nursing profession.

HS: I was not suited...that would not have been a good career choice. I found out later that I was not made to be in patient care. But I am in the field; I turned out to be a microbiologist. So, that I like much, much, much better. [she laughs] 

LN: I couldn't have guessed. [HS continues laughing]

HS: You wouldn't have?

LN: I certainly hope this thing is working.

HS: You wouldn't have guessed?

LN: A laboratory scientist?
HS: Yes, that’s what I did my whole career. I’ve been retired for two years now. I worked for the federal government. I was with the federal government for over thirty-six years. So I left there and went to New York. That’s when I found out...I tried working in hospitals, and when I found out I couldn’t do patient care. So that’s when I got ... became a laboratory technician, and trained for that. I worked at that for two years, I worked as a laboratory technician, and then moved back to...down...got married, and moved to Washington. And that’s when I got my masters at George Washington University... In microbiology. Well, I did start my career there.

LN: This is fascinating information.

HS: I then...Scientists don’t make much money, unless you have a Ph.D. And, uh, so, the last two years of my career I was an administrative assistant. You have to get away from the bench to...really make any money.

LN: Was that in Washington?

HS: That was back in North Carolina.

LN: Well, to leave this, and return to Jefferson School, after a great detour, did you have a science teacher that inspired you.

HS: Yes! That was how I got into science. He was wonderful!

LN: He? Describe him, his manner, his appearance, and his classroom demeanor...

HS: He was dynamic, just dynamic. I mean he grabbed you. And he did all kinds of experiments, you know, we always thought he was a magician when he would you know do things and make the colors change and the smoke come out of the test tubes, and all this. He really just made it fun. Easy.

LN: Was science an elective?

HS: Science was an elective...

LN: Something was required.

HS: Something was in...you had to take something in science. You had to take something in mathematics. You had to take a language. Yeah, I had Latin. And, uh, then you had, you had sort of a collo...scholastic track. They...my class, the class of ’48, where the first class if I recalled college just about everybody went to college. This was after World War II and things were, the economy was booming. So, we had, our class had some bright people that did some wonderful things.

LN: Mention some others.
HS: Our teachers were just wonderful.

LN: Mention some of your classmates who went on to do great things. Interesting lives.

HS: In my class, I’m trying to think, you had people in real estate...Most, see back in those days, most African Americans went into something, went into a field if they could make money. And the fields that they could make money in, really, on a professional level, nursing, because that was my field, teaching, those were the...they never thought about law, even a doctor.

LN: The livelihood was not to get rich...

HS: No, it was to have a profession, to have a regular salary and a regular job with some job security.

LN: What sorts of businesses?

HS: They didn’t go into business. They mostly...

LN: Laundry.

HS: Unless your family had a business, it was mostly professions. And those were the major professions. You know, girls didn’t even go into secretarial because there weren’t that many jobs open to African Americans. Teaching was the main one. I never wanted to teach. That’s why I went into and being science oriented, I wanted to go into nursing.

LN: Tell me about the Latin teacher. It interests me that that was a standard subject.

HS: Well, I can’t tell you really, because I don’t know what her background was. This is another thing. Our teachers taught so many things, some of them, you know.

LN: She perhaps taught English, too?

HS: Uh, huh! You see...

LN: So it was...structured.

HS: So I can’t say that this person, you know, and I’m not, I don’t know enough about the field to know if they really knew it, you know, knew their subject matter and had been trained in it. But, there were a lot, that was the major profession of most college trained African Americans at that time.

LN: Did they discuss the, um, situation of having segregated schools and the inequity of it?

HS: Oh definitely. I got that more in my, I’m trying to think, I think it was about even, because in my household, my father was the person who knew about politics and world
affairs and that kind of thing and for some reason, my mother didn’t like to talk about segregation. You know, we just knew things were the way things were. Like, when we would go downtown and see people sitting at soda fountains. I’d, you know, being a kid, you say, I want to have a soda. She would just pull, you know just take, just jerk you away. For a long time we didn’t know, for a long time I don’t know about segregation. Again, they tried to keep that from me. I never rode a city bus. You know because we had to ride in the back of the bus. That’s why we walked everywhere.

LN: Your mother’s stance was rather walk, prefer to walk, than...

HS: Right. My father’s. But that was a family thing. In order that you would not have to face this kind of thing. I have a joke that I always tell about.. at the Fourth of July, and the big holidays, you know, they would advertise come and swim at the park and have hot dogs, and everything. And that’s when I found out that come one come all didn’t mean black people. And I would say, “I want to go to the park!” Mom said, “You can’t go there.” And that was the end of it. Because they, really the crux of it, of segregation was not taught. And I was very disappointed when I found out that ‘come one come all’ did not mean Black people. Because we, and they, they tried to shelter us from it. There were certain parts of town we just didn’t go to. There are certain parts of Charlottesville, I was saying on the bus [tour as part of the Jefferson School reunion events] that I’ve never been in, because we hadn’t... because we walked everywhere. We knew where the church was, where the school was, then we went downtown twice a year. That was to shop for school clothes and shop for Easter. And the only reason we went then was because you had to try the shoes on. They really sheltered us. We had everything in the Black community that we needed—grocery stores, everything. So we didn’t have to face it.

LN: At Jefferson High School, was there any, how did they teach you about the man for whom the school was named?

HS: They told us that he was the president of the United States. You know the president, you got that. We all, we knew about him.

LN: Did they use the word ‘slave-holder’?

HS: Oh! No, no, no. We knew nothing about that. The history books didn’t even have anything. Because we had what we called the White history books, and they were sanitized, so we didn’t know that he had slaves.

LN: How did your teachers incorporate, I don’t know ... your African-American history into the curriculum?

HS: The only time we had African-American history was in February. You know that’s the great African-American...thing of the month now. But when I was coming along, there was only one week. We had several Black newspapers. And, we were bored. Over the years, over a years’ period of time, every Black newspaper see, we were poor. But we didn’t have newspapers and magazines.
LN: You'd pass the newspapers around.

HS: We'd pass them around. We would hoard them.

LN: For the record, would you name the newspapers you remember.

HS: The Amsterdam News I think and News I believe. Because they would come out in New York and Chicago and come on to Virginia, you see, and that's why they were so scarce.

LN: How about Black literary figures? Like...

HS: We were taught Paul Dunbar?

LN: We have a school.

HS: Sojourner Truth was a poet, Phyllis Wheatley, these ... all of us, Frederick Douglass... these are the people we read. And maybe a few people of the day. I can't remember now...

LN: Anne Spencer is a Virginia poet.

HS: Don't know her.

LN: There's a wonderful poem about a girl doing a high dive.

HS: Uh, huh.

LN: Leroy Jones was a little bit later.

HS: Right. We were really insulated, it's amazing. For travel, like I said, I had never been out of... I had never been... the only places I ever went were either through school trips or family visitation with my grandfather or grandmother. You know, things like that. We were really sort of insulated.

LN: Did your grandparents live in Charlottesville?

HS: My father's parents did. My mother's parents lived in Ashland. So that's as far as we, which is right outside of Richmond?

LN: Yes.

HS: That's as far as we would go for family.

LN: I imagine Ashland was a pretty protective little town, too?
HS: As you say. We felt very sheltered...very insulated...And of course we all knew about the University of Virginia, but it was like nobody...we knew our boundaries. We were taught our boundaries.

LN: I didn’t occur to me...

HS: Huh?

LN: It didn’t occur to me that I could go to the University of Virginia. That I should be able to go.

HS: Right. And the other thing was how we used to play. This was always so interesting to me. White and Black kids played together until puberty. And then they stopped. And they went to school that way, and we went to school this way. We were separated.

LN: Did you reunite with any of your friends from young childhood who were white?

HS: Never. Its interesting, it seems like--the boys did, because they had sports as a sort of common ground. But girls, never. We never saw them again. Never did.

LN: Are you glad its over? That part?

HS: Its not over.

LN: Right.

HS: I have a daughter who is 48 years old. And the...I remember the year when they had the Supreme Court decision...I said, well, my daughter...

LN: ’54.

HS: My daughter won’t have to go through this. But it hasn’t changed that much! Really. ...only in pockets.. And it won’t change until the hearts of people change. And I think this is what you have to deal with. I thought education would do it. But it hasn’t.

LN: Much earlier, you mentioned your church. Was that in the neighborhood?

HS: Hm, hmm. Well, not in the neighborhood. Because Mt. Zion Church is my church. You see we walked all the way. And most of the churches...if you’ve noticed the church and the school, are in the downtown area.

LN: So, Mt. Zion...friends from there also attended Jefferson I’m sure. Friends from Mt. Zion church...

HS: Yes, oh, yes. ‘Cause all the black...that’s the only one we had, we only had that one school. All the Black kids went to the same school.
LN: So you knew each other all week long.

HS: Right. And we would...we’d divide at church. We had about six churches. Mostly all of them...we only had one Episcopal Church, black Episcopal.

LN: Trinity.

HS: Uh, huh. The rest were Baptist.

LN: My sister goes there now. I don’t want to leave out anything. Let me see what we’ve got. Tell me about graduation.

HS: Ah, that’s the best time of the year. You know we put the yearbook together, and you had to take all the pictures, you know, everything led up to that. And we were laughing because ... we just thought there was Mt. Zion Church, and First Baptist. And so they were the biggest places...And could hold a number of people.... So one year we’d have graduation at First Baptist, the next year we’d have it at Mt. Zion because that was the largest congregation. I remembering walking down the aisle for commencement, and baccalaureate, you just thought you were in this huge huge place. And now when you go into these little churches, they are so small as when I was a child! And I mean everybody was so proud!

LN: Pomp and circumstance?

HS: Right, see because education was again something in the ‘40s when I came along, my people were just beginning to...to...the masses, to educate the masses, because before that time only the well-to-do, because a lot of the kids had to work. So they didn’t get to go to school. And there was a lot of illiteracy in the Black community. But after the ‘40s, everybody was expected to finish, at least finish high school. And most of them were expected to go to college, or to learn a trade or something. So, education became very important. And it made the teachers here, they just did such a good job. I marvel at how well they did with what they had to work with. The library...

LN: They had the total respect of their students is my impression.

HS: They did.

LN: Tell me about...do you remember the name of a favorite English teacher?

HS: Mrs. Sellars. Ah, she was marvelous. We had some of the best teachers, because, I was a little nervous when I went to college. Because I wasn’t quite sure how I was prepared. You know how you feel “When I get there, I’ll be the dumbest person?” But I had a well-rounded education. I mean we had labs, I mean they just...they took nothing and made something out of it. Because they exposed us, and we read, Mrs. Sellars, the juniors and seniors in high school. When you walked in there, you had a list, these were the books
that you were to read. These were the essays, you had your whole sheet. You had to memorize poems. We had to read...we read Chaucer.

LN: It’s very true to life, isn’t it?

HS: Right.

LN: Chaucer...

HS: We read Shakespeare. We put on operettas. I mean you just got a well read...I was so proud of that. Once I was out in the world and met kids who went to one-room schools. They were still going to one-room schools in North Carolina, and Virginia, was ahead you known in education at that time, you know we had a...you had to have your language, your typing...A little bit of everything.

LN: What would you like to see become of the Jefferson School building?

HS: It has to...it should be here. This...things are moving so fast. I can appreciate it. When I come back now, there are very few things that are here that were here when I was growing up. That’s like I was saying, I went to Mt. Zion Church. They are going to tear that church down! But I talked to the minister and he said that it is so old, and in bad condition. And I said, “Will you be able to save anything to take to the new church?” Like in North Carolina, they saved the stained glass windows.

LN: What was his answer?

HS: And he said...the architect is already tested, and they can’t even do anything. So, they’ll take out may-be pews, or something of the internal decorations to put into the new church, but unless...The one common denominator in this camp of the Black community is that school. This school is gone, this building is gone! Washington Park is there, but it’s not like the Washington Park that we went to. This is the...that school is the only...

LN: How would you put life in the building?

HS: Use it as a community center. I don’t mean to make it a shrine! Make the building useable, but don’t change it, as much keep the architecture. They are doing it all over the downtown, the historical residences...But don’t tear it down.

LN: I’m glad you’ve put that on the record.

HS: Right, right. Exactly.

LN: This is kind of putting you on the spot, I want to ask you something to finish...Is Mrs. Sellars still with us?

HS: Oh, no...
Imagine she was watching you from Heaven, and recite, just give us a verse or two of something she made you memorize.

I don’t… I’m seventy years old and I can’t even remember… I can’t remember… Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth in this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and blah, blah, blah. I can’t remember it!

Anyway, ok.

I mean, we knew it! Because you had to sit there and hear everybody say it! You know. I was an “A” though. She went alpha… she was so strict, and so methodical. I always knew… my name was Alexander.

Oh! In that sense an “A.” I thought you meant an “A” student.

I was an “A” student, too! But I’m talking about… you knew if your name was an “A,” you would sit in a certain place, you know they were very strict that way. And so I would…

You didn’t hear it 30 times until it was your turn.

I didn’t, but the other person did! And some people who didn’t know it the first day, by the time it got to them, they knew it, see, because they had heard it so much. Same thing with your multiplication tables. Everybody had to… there was one thing that I… Another thing that I liked, see we would learn to speak.

I’ve noticed that.

You learned to speak.

You should carry well on the tape because of your elocution.

That’s because we did it so much.

Is there anything you’d like to add before we close?

I’ll just make a plea to the community not to tear that school down. I mean we ought to have the creativity, the know-how, to make it a… still a viable part of the community. I mean we’ve done it all these years that they used it for something interesting, to just sit there and rot. I know that’s a valuable piece of land, and a lot of things could be done with it, but I think it would just be a great loss. And… ’cause even now in some of our conversations within this group, you see, the young children of today don’t know about the school, and that’s tragic.

Good! I think you’ve done a lot of good.
HS: Oh! I hope so.

End of interview.
Jefferson School Oral History Project

The Jefferson School Oral History Project was developed from the interview with Helen Sanders, who attended Jefferson School in the 1950s. The purpose of the interviews was to create a oral history record and create a museum of local history. The interviews will be shared with current Charlottesville residents and others interested in the history of the school.

Helen Sanders, 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, __________ (name), of __________ (address), hereby 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: 6/30/2002

Interviewer: ____________________________ Date: 6/30/2002
David Saunier, White, was a student at Jefferson School for his sixth grade year in the early 1970s.

DS: I remember being in the hallway and hearing over the loudspeaker that Spiro Agnew had resigned his vice-presidency. I was in a classroom on the second floor, the side closest to the gym. I was in Mr. Otto’s class. I went from Venable to Jefferson. I didn’t have the feeling that I was going to a Black school. It wasn’t until I was an adult that I had the knowledge of the role Jefferson School played. To me it was where all 6th graders went. Being the kid that I was what was outside was important. So I used to enjoy that green grass area that was in front of Carver. We used to play Smear the Queer --whoever had the football everyone would tackle. We’d play with Mr. Otto. Persecute the Pussy. I feel these are terrible names. At the time I was oblivious. It was just the way it was. When we ran the 440 we ran on the parking lot. We’d play kickball on that big asphalt platform.

Informal fun. In my mind’s eye it was the same way it is today. Vinegar Hill was a field and I was completely ignorant that anything had ever been there. I took the bus. I played in the band taught by Mr. Cage. He was a long-term music teacher. We’d break out our instruments on the bus. We’d have fun. Ed Gillespie would play the trombone. We’d entertain people on the bus.

I have certain memories of a concussion from running into people.

I had my first girlfriend -- I ran into her at Bodo’s recently and she introduced me as her 7th grade boyfriend. You gave your girlfriend a St. Christopher medal. When you broke up, she had to give it back.

I had a Black friend, a girl I’d hang out with. We’d flirt with each other. As a kid it was just another school. That everyone was there was kind of fun. You didn’t have a hierarchy of kids. At the time everyone there was in the same situation. Sex Ed for the first time in public school. I had received it at the same time from my church. All the girls
went into one class and all the boys went into another to watch videos and a slide show. What did they watch? We wondered about the girls. I have the memory of races intermingling. Consistently integrated school settings. I didn’t fully understand integration in the schools. I did understand tensions. My interest in Jefferson came as an adult.

What I wish my city to be. What a city chooses to commemorate, memorialize, says a great deal about what a city values and what sort of place it aspires to be. Jefferson is important for two principal reasons for me. It’s the site where a group of people who lived in America but were denied their rights and opportunities took greater control of their own lives through the form of education... The other aspect that’s so important is that it’s the site where Charlottesville moved towards fulfilling the promise of this country. It’s the place where we came together as a community, a whole complete community for the first time. All little eleven-year-olds and twelve-year-olds came together at this one place and spent time together and learned together, both in the classroom and just by being there.

It’s important to me that Jefferson be recognized, the symbolism that is the preservation and the recognition is important. Communities construct statuary to commemorate events. We see Lewis & Clark statues, the commemoration of fearless exploration, which is a worthy value. To me Jefferson is a monument to the city living out its promise of being an inclusive community.

End of interview.
David Saunier, March 2003

(photo by Alexandria Searls)
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: Alexandria Searls
Interview with Susan Cone Scott

Interviewer: Jacky Taylor and Liz Sargent
Date: May 18, 2004
Location: Charlottesville, Virginia

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

JT: So if you could start by telling us your full name and address, and your connection to desegregation in Charlottesville, or the school system in Charlottesville...

SS: My full name is Susan Warner Cone Scott. My address is 217 East Jefferson Street, Charlottesville, Virginia 22902. I came to Lane High School in 1966, and taught there until January of '69. And that's when I got really involved in integration.

JT: Hmm. How do you, what do you mean when you say you got involved in integration. [they laugh]

SS: Ah, ...I will give you this much background. I had left Virginia when I was 21 and swore I would never come back to the South, I was just so appalled about what was going on, about the closing of the schools, but also I had grown up in Richmond in a West End debutante setting, and the only Black people I knew were servants, and I knew something was wrong. I'd always felt it, I'm one-quarter Jewish, and had experienced a lot of discrimination in Richmond about that. So, when I got the opportunity to go to Lane, it was like a realization that it was where my roots were and I needed to stay here. I didn't want to go back to New York City.

JT: So you had been teaching in New York City?

SS: No, I was doing editorial work, and I came back here to get a Masters degree in English literature.

LS: At the University of Virginia?

SS: Uh, huh.

LS: And where did you do your undergraduate...?
SS: I went to Sweet Briar for three years, and Barnard for my last year.

LS: So that’s how you got introduced to New York?

SS: Yes.

LS: Yes.

SS: And, at Sweet Briar, I was involved in some Civil Rights work...

LS: And where did you get your teaching certificate?

SS: You know, I never ended up getting certificate. I taught...with a Masters degree, you could go into teaching...I got a Fellowship to go to Oxford in England, one summer, and got six graduate hours ...and the school system would not accept that for my education requirement, and I was angry enough that I...I took one education course, but as a result I was never certified. I was officially qualified by my college experience to teach French and English. And that’s how they took me into Lane, because they didn’t have anybody who could do that dual...

LS: And did you teach both those courses?

SS: I did one year, but I read and wrote French very well, and I had never lived in France and I am not good with accents, so as soon as I could get out of teaching French, I did.

LS: So mostly you taught English?

SS: I taught English. I taught...at that point they had a tracking system, or a level system, and I taught mostly fourth level students, which means that they were reading on a fifth to seventh grade level, they were given books with Sir Gowan and the Green Knight in it for tenth grade. And they were mostly Black.

LS: And did you have, ...were there any books that were banned, or was the School Board steering away from books at all that were question...you know?

SS: You know if there were, I’m not aware of it. But, I did not, I’m not even sure that year I had any college bound students. And basically, most of my students I had to fabricate a curriculum for, and get materials from outside the school that they could use.

JT: So you were teaching English in tenth grade, and it was the, they were mostly Black...did they come from...

SS: A lot of them had come from Burley. The first year that I taught, which was '66-'67, Burley was still open, and it was sort of a mix. Lane was already overcrowded, and I forget the figures, whether it was 300 students or 500 students. They needed to build a
new school, but under those circumstances, there is a lot of close physical contact because you are so crowded.

JT: So how many students did you have in a class?

SS: Each class?

JT: Uh, huh...average?

SS: Thirty. My first year I had 144 students a day. And I was not, I was what was called a traveling teacher. I didn't have one classroom. Between classes I had to put everything in a brief case and take it to a different room. So I was out in the halls with the students.

JT: Teresa I think did that too. She mentioned something about that.

SS: It was fairly brutal. You had no time to go to a restroom, I mean it was just amazing.

JT: And you had to carry all of your stuff with you all the time? What about the students, did they have places where they could go and... like locker areas? Or...did they carry their stuff with them all the time.

SS: I think they had lockers because they weren't burdened down with a lot of books. I mean you might, if you had two or three periods in a row, you might have all those books, but I don't remember where the lockers were, if they had them.

LS: So at this point, you had Black students. Were there also Black teachers at Lane, or was it predominantly White?

SS: Well, it was predominantly White! And to be really honest...

JT: Who was the principal?

SS: The principal was a man named Nichols, Mr. Nichols.

JT: OK.

SS: The first year for the pre-school conference, there was absolutely no mention of integration, except, "We're going to treat them just like we treat anybody else." Next year, by the next fall, I and several other teachers who were interested in what was happening, had asked that we devote that pre-school conference to integration, and once again their answer was, "We're not doing anything special."

JT: So they just allowed the students to arrive, and for you to get on and teach them? No preparation, or...?
SS: None whatsoever. . . .this fierce kind of sublimated anger at what was happening, so we're going to treat 'em like anybody else. And no instruction to the White students who were there either. So that my attitude that we were going through a historically good and exciting thing was by no means transmitted into the school.

JT: Interesting. Did...how did some of your White students react? Were they nervous do you think? Or were they...

SS: I am sure they were. The...I did not...I think I so quickly became known as someone who was pro-integration and was not going to be unfair, that anyone who wanted to be anti-...the segrega...you know, in favor of segregation, would not have come to me. But again, I want to tell you, I was 26 years old, I had always been to school with girls and I had never set foot into a public high school. So, I was learning a lot, and I could see which students were shy, but I don’t think at that point, I would have picked up a great deal on nervousness.

LS: Do you think students were pulled out of school by their parents once this started happening, and sent to private schools...or did you notice that?

SS: That was even going on when I came in '63 to go to graduate school, because one woman in the graduate program in English was teaching at Rock Hill, which was formed to avoid integration.

JT: Where was that located, do you know?

SS: You know I think it's over where the...

JT: On Cherry Avenue, may-be?

SS: No, I think it's over here off the by-pass, but I could be wrong. I think it...I really don’t know because...

LS: Oh! Where the YMCA site is? Is that what that is? OK.

SS: On this side of the by-pass, though? Or is that an elementary school, now?

JT: No, that's... it used to be Covenant School.

SS: Yes.

LS: I was thinking across the way.

SS: No, it’s where Covenant was because the Y used to be over there.

LS: Oh, OK. All right.
JT: So... you mentioned earlier something about you wanted to tell us how it really was. That’s probably hard to do.

SS: It’s not very hard. Some of what I’ve got to tell you is really ugly stuff. My first year of teaching, a young woman in one of my classes who was fifteen and lived up here in the projects, the...what’s the name of those projects?

LS: Garrett Square?

SS: No, the other one. Westhaven. Came to me and told me that she was pregnant. And that she didn’t dare tell her parents...because they would kick her out, because otherwise they would be kicked out of the projects. And I said, “What about the father?” And she said, “I can’t ask him.” I don’t know whether he was married, I don’t know if he wasn’t available. I don’t know what. And I was just stricken, I had very little experience with this. But I went to the principal, and asked him if there were homes for women like this, where they could go and have the baby and give it up for adoption. And he said, “Is she Black or White?” And I thought he meant there must be homes for Blacks and homes for Whites. So I said “She’s Black.” And he said, “It doesn’t matter, they’re all like that.” And my blood ran cold, and I never went to him for anything again. ...so, let me get the horror stories out of the way.

...Some Black students came to me one day, and they’d been in a study hall with a very long-time established teacher. A sort of elderly woman, who was...I think never had married, was very kind of an uptight person. And, but very well respected in the school system. And she was having trouble calming the study hall down. Study halls could be awful, because they put ‘em in the cafeteria. I was in the cafeteria the last period of the day with 167 students by myself. This woman in her study hall had had particular trouble with a group of young Black girls at one table. And they kept giggling when she’d get indignant. And she turned to them and said, “If you could see how ugly you look with your thick lips when you’re laughing, you would stop. And I don’t think these children were making this up when they came to me. They came to me because I was somebody they could talk to.

One day, in a teacher conf...in a teacher meeting, [sighs] a girl from either Georgia or Mississippi, cause she had a deep Southern accent, said...we were talking about some of the troubles we were having, and she said “I just don’t understand it, we have always in my state not had any trouble, and we have always treated our Negroes fairly.” And one of the Black teachers got up and went to the blackboard, and he was a big guy, and I really, I mean and his back, you could see, was about to explode. And he wrote “Negro” and said “This is how it’s spelled, this is how it’s pronounced.” Again, the administration, nobody, did one thing to prepare us. And one day, the second or third year of my teaching, some guys in my class were acting up. And I turned around and said, “You people get quiet.” And they said “What did you mean you people? We are tired of being talked to that way. We are tired of being called son by White men.” And, and they just exploded with all the language stuff that was distressing to them, and I always had my desk in the back of the room, and a bar stool at the front so I wasn’t sitting behind a desk when I was working.
with my students. And I went back to my desk, and they were doing something at their desk, and I was sitting down trying to look at a paper, and the tears were just streaming out of my face. And...you know, I'd always heard don't cry, don't show any emotion, and I'm just back there with tears rolling down, and when the kids in the classroom saw me, they totally softened up, and we, I'm not sure if it was that day, or the next day, we followed up on the fact that I hadn't meant anything by "you people" except this group of people over here, and that I was trying as hard as I knew how to learn different language. And that when a White man called a boy "son," he wasn't being patronizing. That my father called all my brothers' friends "son." So neither side was given even the basic linguistic tools that might have helped.

LS: When that happened, and you all dealt with it the next day, or later that day, did you all acknowledge what was going on? Were there discussions within the classroom about, here's this problem, we've all got to work together? And how did the students...[still would like to hear about what might have been said in such an exchange]

SS: They were wonderful about it.

LS: Do you think you were one of the only teachers who was doing that? Or were there other teachers who were working with the students?

SS: There was a small group of us, about seven of us, who clearly, may-be not even quite that many, were in favor of integration. We got, we got a lot of hostility from faculty. One of them, a man named Russ Henley, who I don't know where he is now, he's not in Charlottesville, came up to me one day and told me that the coaches had been talking about me, and saying I was sleeping with my Black male students. And Russ had said to the two coaches he was talking to, "Well, oh really? What have you heard?" And they said, "Some Black student with a big Afro that she's been seen driving around town with." And Russ said, "Would, would that have been Ba-Ba?" And the coach said, "Yeah, I think that was his name." Well Ba-Ba was my Black standard poodle who liked to ride on the front seat of my car! [all laugh] And Russ knew Ba-Ba, I mean that's why he said "would that have been Ba-Ba," so we just howled with laughter, over the fact that...

So obviously anybody...in those days there was no prohibition about physical contact. As I walked down a row, and talked to somebody, I'd often put my hand on his shoulder to comfort him, or sometimes to say "Hey, you pay attention here." And I did that with my Black students as well as my White, and...I think they were appalled. I think they were.

JT: Who were appalled?

SS: Most of the, most of the other faculty.

JT: They saw you do this?
And I think the White, some of the White athletic students must have gone back to those coaches and said, "You should see her with her class..."

Now if you felt hostility, how did the Black teacher feel? How were they treated? Did you ever get a chance to talk to anyone...?

Well, Loraine Williams and Teresa Jackson, she was then, Teresa Price and I were very, very close. I mean, and we would talk. They were, God, they were wonderful. They were...they kept their sense of humor, they kind of held their own dignity, and they did not tell me much about what was going on. I was probably going to them and babbling about what was going on. But, an example of the humor, which is so delightful...I had...we had lunch duty. Some...one or two teachers had to always be in the halls during a lunch period. And I was on lunch duty, and I can't remember what the two boys did, but I caught 'em at it, and I tried to stop 'em and they ran away. And they ran past Lorraine's classroom, so I poked my head in, she didn't have a class, she was sitting at her desk, and I said, "Lorraine, did you see two White boys just run by here?" And she looked at me, and she said "Susan, you know all these White people look alike to me." [all laugh]

And, um, so their humor was wonderful, and no, they did not complain once. We...

You were a friend to them, were any of the other teachers a friend to them, or were they pretty much isolated, or were they...?

I suspect they were very isolated. I suspect that's why Lorraine was in her classroom rather than up in the teacher's lounge. Because some of the most long-term, senior teachers who had made sure they taught in the basement schools, were now facing Black teachers in their schools. And I suspect they were none to...if not outright rude, I'm sure they weren't cordial. They didn't know what to do with me, these White teachers, 'cause here I am, this West End Richmond debutante, who's...my children say I'm a Richmond debutante gone bad. [all laugh] And I had, you know, I had crossed a line and they didn't know what to, they thought I was liberal. I was liberal.

Sounds like Patty Boyle's experience, ...the woman who wrote The Desegregated Heart. Such an interesting story. But she had a rough time, you know, having crosses burned on her front yard...

I used to have a copy of that book, and I don't know whatever happened to it. It was quite a book. I will say that by the last year of my teaching, they hired an assistant principal--and I know I'll remember his name—and you can imagine by then that I am totally, totally discouraged about administrative people. ...they hired this man, and by then we are having a combination of...we had a lot of bomb threats, we've got White boys with tire chains in their trunks, and Black kids with switchblades or straight edge razors. We're having walkouts in the school. We are having protests, that was actually by my second year. ...two things I want to share with you, one about the assistant principal. But, he came to me one day and he said, "They're about ready...the police are coming, they're about ready to get so and so," who was a sort of a firebrand young Black man. He said,
“Does he trust you?” And I said, “I think so.” And he said, “Go get whatever weapon he’s got and get it off of him, because if the police catch him with it, we’re going to have a riot.” So, he found his...he knew the boy’s schedule, so I went up to the boy’s class, spoke to the teacher and said “Excuse me, but I need to speak to so and so.” And got him out in the hall. And I said, “Give me whatever you’ve got in your pocket right now.” And he said...he looked at me and I said “You have got to give it to me. Trust me.” So he handed me this thing, and I put it in my pocket, and as I’m walking away the police are coming to his classroom. And I had never done anything like...breaking the law like, well I wasn’t breaking the law yet I don’t think. But, it probably saved us having a major riot in the school. And...I began to realize that this man had been in this very difficult position of trying to work with the administration, but that he was aware of the dynamics of what was happening.

You know it’s hard, but at 65...and I stopped at Lane when I was 29. I cannot remember his name.

JT: You’re talking about the assistant principal.

SS: Uh, huh...and...

JT: Had he come from out of state, or out of...?

SS: I think originally he probably had. But up till then, I thought he was just like the rest of the administration. I remember respecting him because it might have been not totally cricket behavior, but it was by far the wisest thing to do. ...earlier, when we started having walkouts, the Black students would go up to a church that’s on the corner of Gordon Avenue, and I believe its 14th Street. The church is still there.

LS: Oh, yes. I know that one, a white frame one.

SS: Uh, huh. And, ...the first time they all walked out, they came and got me. And I...it happened to be my free period and I went up there, and they kind of welcomed me to the meeting.

JT: What did they say when they came to get you? Do you remember?

SS: Aah, yes. [laugh] There was a general mispronunciation of my name, so instead of being Miss Cone, I was Miss Corns. [laugh] And I’m not sure I want you to...it makes me sound racist, but it was all Black kids who were calling me Miss Corns. “Miss Corns, Miss Corns, you’ve got to come, we’re going up to the church. We’re having a walkout.” I think they, you know... And we did not have permission to leave the school on our free periods, and I went. I, I was just, I was a rebel. I was furious about what was going on, and I did it. Within the next couple of months, they gathered in the main front hall of Lane, and by then it was mostly Black, but there’d be a few White students in a group like this. People who believed that what was going on was wrong. And Mr. Nichols came out, and it must have been either my first or second year, because the last
year I think they'd gotten a new principal. I can't remember, ...I feel so stupid...and he came out, and they got a box or something for him to stand on, and he was trying to talk to them, but he really had a gift for saying the wrong thing. And they would roar and yell and interrupt. And he looked over at me, and he kept saying: "I'm a fair person, I'm fair to everybody," and he looked at me and said "Tell them, Miss Cone, tell 'em!" And I said "No, sir." I just said "No, sir." And, you know, when I look back on it, it took a lot of courage to say that, but...

LS: Did you experience any retributions?

SS: I don't think he dared. I don't think they dared. And I began, as all this is going on, this is only a three-year period, I began to meet people like Eugene Williams, who would say, "Yes, I know about...I've heard about you." And you know, so, it was a quiet recognition that I was beginning to get.

JT: Where would you meet people like Eugene Williams?

SS: I was a Democrat, so Democratic Party...you know he's a very active Democrat. Um, I used to go some to a nightclub called the Brenwana, and that was owned by Teresa Jackson's brother and sister-in-law. Brenwanna stood for the names of their two children—I think their names were Brenda and Edwana.

JT: Oh, right.

SS: And yet, know...

JT: Wasn't Edwana a student at Lane?

SS: Yes, yes.

JT: Did you teach her?

SS: No. I think she was in my homeroom my first year, but I may be wrong about that. I also did something that teachers were told not to do, and that was "Don't ever go visit them. Don't ever go to their homes."

JT: Specifically the Black children's homes? Or in general?

SS: It was kind of in general, but it was implied. It was implied. And a second fourteen or fifteen year old was pregnant, and wanted me...and actually the sister of the boy who had...well it turned out not to be a switchblade...it was a straight edge razor, and my friends howled because I didn't know the difference, but anyway. She brought me this invitation to a shower. Baby shower, and I looked at the invitation, it had a little pink and White baby on the front, because there were no greeting cards in those days for Black people, there was nothing! You know, it just like broke my heart. So of course I went.
Now, I tell my next door neighbors I'm going to a party in, in, at Westhaven in the projects, it's Saturday night, if I'm not home by 9:30, come get me. Well, I get to the party about 8:00, and there's not a soul in the house. And they tell me that there's another party going on, so everybody's going to that party first, and I sit and wait. I think the children, I saw that the children, the mattresses had no sheets on them, I mean I saw things that as a really privileged young woman I had never seen. But finally the party came over, and the party came over about 10:00 to the house, so I'd had to call my neighbors and say "I'm just fine, but this thing is going on a little longer than I thought." And all of these people came. Husbands and wives. The wives sat around a table, and the husbands all stood. And they got out the bourbon. Now they get out a pint of bourbon in a paper bag, and they all have little tiny Dixie cups and they pour a splash of bourbon in their Dixie cups and drink some ginger ale, and they all say, "Oh, my, I think I'm beginning to get a little tipsy." And I thought, dear God, the people at Farmington, or the...or you know the Virginia Country Club of Virginia be like they hadn't even begun to have a drink! So this was my introduction to what a wild night in the projects was like. And the baby shower was very sweet, and after that, you know, if I was invited to something, I tried to go. And I began...the noise level in that house was astonishing. Just with the children. And I began to stop being afraid in the halls when I heard noisy groups of Black kids, because at least at that time and in that setting, there was a tolerance for a noise level that I as a middle class White kid would have been smacked on the bottom for. And it made me realize that the years I lived in New York, many in the Hispanic community have the same ability to be very close physically, and to talk very loud. Again, if they had had this team that you are talking about in, I have a feeling...

LS: Well, we heard that the team was asked to come, but it may have been later since the center was open until 1980, so it might have taken Charlottesville a while to ask for help.

SS: It probably did.

LS: Yes, and George Tramontin set the stage by you know forcing all the sixth graders to go to Jefferson School and to force Burley you know to integrate with Lane, but he got driven out as well. I mean he was threatened with a law suit, so his leadership was kind of forcibly removed and there was a long time in there where things kind of had a push-pull effect, and there wasn't a lot of support.

SS: Absolutely.

LS: I'm curious about... were there violent actions going on? Did anyone get hurt? And how was discipline handled? Was there a difference between how...you know how Black students were disciplined than White? Or... Because back then there was a lot more acceptable punishment/behavior.

SS: Well, I only went to Mr. Nichols once for violence in my classroom. And...a big tall guy had jumped on a smaller guy, both of them were Black. And, this is the time I will say that anybody attacked somebody else in one of my classes. And he got him on the floor and he was strangling him. And I ran...that classroom was right near the principal's
office so I ran and said “Come, come quick, come quick.” Ah, and he came, and... the
guy was still strangling the young boy, and the young boy was starting to get kind of blue
in his face! And, there were students beating on his back trying to pull him off, and I was
beating on his back trying to pull him off, and he finally stopped. And I told everybody to
go back to their desk and to work in their journals. I’ll tell you about the journals in a
minute if you want to know. And I went outside the classroom and Mr. Nichols looked at
me and he said “It was a good thing you were in your classroom when that happened.”
Meaning I would have been held responsible, and sometimes we did leave. If we needed
to go to the bathroom, we’d put ‘em to work and go to the bathroom.

But basically, we weren’t supposed to do that. I don’t know much about the violence. I
can tell you that when you’re teaching that many students and you only have one free
period, you’re not out in the halls, you’re in the lounge, or...you may be grading papers,
as an English teacher I had a lot of papers...

LS: But you don’t remember anything even covered by the press, like a student was stabbed
at Lane...Because you were talking about tire chains and you are talking about knives
and people having sit-ins, and it seems like it’s ripe for...you know...something terrible
to happen.

SS: Well, I think things probably did happen...what I felt more was this just explosive
quality, this tension. All the time...If you can’t get up and down the stairs in your school,
you’re brushing up against people anyhow, that’s irritating, and under these
circumstances where there was anger... I do remember one thing, I can’t remember what
she did, I remember the girl’s name, a White girl whose name was Susan also...said
something ugly right out in a classroom.

JT: About a Black student?

SS: I know what she did. The White students walked out for some reason. Something had
gotten through that the Black students were not sanctioned for something they’d done,
and so the White students left, and I gave her a “D.” And she said, “You can’t give me a
‘D’ for not being in class.” And I said “I can ‘cause you were in the school and you
weren’t doing your work.” And her mother called me that night and started screaming at
me that “Whenever those people acted up, her daughter was going to leave,” and that I
better not give her any more “Ds.” And, you know, you didn’t have anybody to go to say
what’s the right...I think the principal told me I could not give her a “D.”

JT: Really. So they were allowed to react.

SS: So I’m not sure that he did the same thing for the Black students, but I’m going to check
it out.

JT: So the White students would walk out as well?
SS: They did at least once! It was so volatile, you never knew what would happen. And sometimes I would just take the class period and let ‘em process it. I didn’t know the word process then. I just knew that there was no way anybody was going to learn anything that day. And...

JT: Well they learned different things. [laughs]

SS: They weren’t going to learn a lesson about English. Yes.

LS: The journals, were they a place where people could write about...

SS: Well, there’s a wonderful book called Hooked on Books. It was a little paperback book, and here I am with these, all these low-level students, and I mean low-level on their reading abilities, and they weren’t all Black. There were White kids in there too. And this textbook that was just totally inappropriate, so I, I don’t know how I found Hooked on Books, but it was about two psychologists who worked with juvenile delinquents, I think in Michigan, and their teaching techniques, and this was one of the teaching techniques. So I went with my own money, and bought everybody in the class a spiral, a thick spiral bound notebook. And I gave them out one day and I said, now this is the deal, if you write a page a day, and it’s just copying, you get an automatic “A.” If you write your own stuff every day, you might have gotten two “As” or three “As.” And I put them in the grade book. The idea is that writing for most students is painful or for many students is painful. They get papers back with red marks all over them, and it’s just a way to expose yourself to criticism. But writing the way I was letting them write... is like practicing scales on a piano. And I wasn’t going to say, “Oh, you made a mistake here.” So I wrote in a different colored ink, and I’d say, “That must have been hard,” or “This is really interesting,” or you know, just something really positive. And as they predicted... that out of every class of twenty to thirty, you would have a couple who would copy the whole time and think that you were an idiot, and that they were getting away with something. Little did they know they were getting practice with their handwriting and with writing. But what happened, was occasionally I’d give them an idea to write about, and one day I said, “Do you know what reincarnation is?” And I explained it. “What would you like to come back as?” And my Black male students, there was a preponderance in every class that they wanted to come back as a poodle. And I don’t think it’s just because I had a standard poodle. And they would say “Because the poodle is loved, and brushed, and washed, and...” I mean it was mind-blowing. Often, it was the toughest, meanest boys in the class who would say this.

JT: Do you think they were being honest? They weren’t...?

SS: I think they were being honest, yes. Nobody could see these books but them and me. Now, I did tell somebody in the guidance office, and she said, “How did you ever think of that?” You know, because they... and this wouldn’t come at first, this was later on after they’d been doing it for a while and been... understand, I would never mark spelling, I would never mark any grammar, that wasn’t the issue.
JT: So, they were really writing...

SS: They loved it. They loved it. You gave them their own book. It didn’t cost any...I mean it was such a minimal technique. You know I got the newspapers, the Progress would give you free newspapers, so I told them to read classified ads. I think they do this now with many students, it may be it kind of replaced Home Ec. And how to write a letter of application, and... just tried to do stuff that made some sense to them.

JT: Did you ever see any of those students later on after they had graduated?

SS: There were years where I’d go into a restaurant, and people’d be popping their heads out of the kitchen saying “Hi, Miss Corns.”[all laugh] Some of them called me. Some of them wanted money. Some of them...because when I was married, I was married to a very wealthy man. Yes. I did. And, and one of them, I kept up with a lot, in my later life in my 50s, I went to massage school and became a massage therapist, and he also became a massage therapist. And he and I have always had this kind of special friendship and we would have lunch. I remember having lunch somewhere on West Main and walking down the street with our arms around each other’s waists, and seeing people just stare at us. He was a precious boy and he’s a very handsome man, now, with silver in his temples, and he’s just good looking, and great body, you know, it was almost worth it just to walk down the street with our arms around each other’s waists and see people looking at us. But, anyway, those are some of my outstanding memories, so you can...

LS: So did you finish in ’69 because you got married, or what was the reason?

SS: I got sick...it was the begin...I got a series of viral infections I couldn’t get over them. And I don’t know whether it was the stress, because it was extremely stressful, but I also throughout my life have had problems with viral infections and they later found out what was wrong and I have an allergy to flour. So I was aggravating things all those years, so I don’t know what did it, but after being out for over six weeks, I decided it was better to retire, you know because, or resign because I had been away from my classes too long by then. And so I stopped and I got married about half a year after that. ...I was, at the time I got married, which was ’69, I began, I had begun interviewing. I met a man named Maurice Dawkins who was later considered as a Republican candidate to run for the Governor of Virginia. He was a very bright, capable, attractive man, and I met him at the Federal Executive Institute because somebody asked me to come over there and talk the way I’m talking today about what it was actually like to be in a classroom and to...I had never heard anybody say “Motherfucker,” or “Fuck” out loud, literally, never. I just grew up in a world where it wasn’t done, and so they were very interested in the Federal Executive Institute and he kind of took me under his wing, and when I, after I stopped teaching, he got me an interview at the Executive offices at the White House, and...also some in Atlanta where they were going to start, I don’t whether it was, it wasn’t Head Start, it was Teacher Core coming into Atlanta I think. Anyway, I had some really good opportunities come up, but I was, I was thirty and I decided I wanted to get married. And...and married a man who said I couldn’t have any of my Black friends on the farm, so it wasn’t a very good...the marriage only lasted ten years. Ultimately he let me have my
friends on the farm, and his mother and father entertained them and these were people who had never, ever done anything like that! So Teresa came to the farm, and my father-in-law, who was a kind man, had her up for drinks, but my mother-in-law was only in there under protest. [laughs]

LS: I’m curious as well about the support network, and whether there were any forums, any places where, we’ve heard about something called the Council on Human Relations which was a group of local citizens that would have events, social events and planning sessions for how to get Whites and Blacks to relate to each other, because the more, you know, you could come into contact in this segregated community, the more you would learn to understand and accept the different ways that the cultures...

SS: I think that must have come along afterwards. Because I started in ’66, and it wasn’t until the fall of ’67 until we had full integration, and something I’d like to say that they did do, that was just such a part of the problem...When they closed Burley, they took away their football team, their band...what’s the thing in the fall, the Black history day, except at Burley they would have two or three days of celebration and commemoration and they took every bit of it away. They did not attempt to integrate it into the school curriculum at all! So that the whole curriculum and activities were slanted towards the White middle class.

LS: We heard that from this man who ran that center. He had done his dissertation on this and how the activities were one of the biggest problem areas, because you had students who were involved in activities in the White school and students in the Black schools, and the Black students came over and they had no standing. There were advocates, there were no Black coaches, or heads of anything, so they didn’t get picked for things, and then they just went away. So you saw that as well, you saw that as one of the flash points?

SS: Oh, it was horrible, it was horrible! They were disenfranchised. And here at a time when young people really. [end of side one of tape.]

[begin side two of tape] I was saying they were disenfranchised at a time when they needed role models and...it was just, the message was we have to do this, and you don’t count. And you have to assimilate, and your way of speaking is no good, and your way of talking loudly is no good, and your club and school activities aren’t valuable enough to give them a place in our curriculum and our after school activities. And the only place that was different was like football, baseball. If you were a good football player, Mr. Nichols paid attention to you.

LS: Some schools, we heard, had...sort of had co-chair people for like the student government? Did that happen at all? Was there any attempt to give the Black students a place in the running of these groups?

SS: I don’t know. I was...the club that I was the sponsor of was the Afro-American Club, and by my last year of teaching, what happened to all of us White rebellious teachers is that as more radical people began to advise the young people, they began to push us out too.
Because they didn’t want some good-hearted White person being the sponsor of the Afro-
American Club. They wanted an African-American. They were beginning to think that if
you weren’t Black, you could not comprehend the Black experience. Now one of the
ways I had related to my students, and I did this from day one, when...my Black
students... when they first came into the classrooms were angry and sullen and difficult.
There’s no doubt about it. And I don’t blame ‘em. And I finally one day said, “What is
my last name?” And they said “Cone,” or “Corn” whichever they said, and I said C-o-n-
e. And I said “When I was, ’til I was six years old, it was spelled C-o-h-n. Do you know
why my father changed it. And I said, “I grew up in Richmond. Do you know why my
father changed it?” And somebody would usually raise his hand and say, “They didn’t
like Jews.” I said, “You got it.” And I said “I don’t have the experience you have because
my skin color supposedly fits in, but I can tell you at St. Catherine’s School, and at
debutante parties, I was among the only dark-headed, my hair was real dark, brown-eyed
people. And they talked about me, I heard ‘em talk about me. That there were people who
were coming out, making their debut who shouldn’t be. That kind of thing.” And I said,
“Every joke I heard that was anti-Semitic made me cringe and hurt me and made me feel
like I was being judged unfairly.” And I was real open with them, and I think that’s why I
was able to relate to them. And why they related back to me, why they let me in.

LS: And how did you feel when things started changing, when there was a movement to take
control, you know, take control of that club?

SS: It was painful. Luckily I knew enough about rebellions to know that this often happened.
But it’s kind of like your husband saying “I’m tired of you, I want another one.”

LS: Right.

SS: It’s like, huh, now I’m nowhere. The White staff and faculty don’t like me, and now
you’re doing this. Now I never felt it with the Black teachers I was friends with. But...I
will never know whether that had something to do with how sick I got, I got really sick.
But...

LS: Yes, I can imagine how that...

SS: It was painful. But later on it seemed to get dropped. I mean...

JT: Did anybody ever, did you talk to your Black friends about that? Did anybody ever try to
console you or explain or make you feel better?

SS: No. But I was also a very... I just was very private about it. It wasn’t something I wanted
to reveal to anybody. You know, when I was at Sweet Briar, one of my good friends got
called into the President’s office. She was a year younger than I and we had all done
some mild Civil Rights protesting, and the President of Sweet Briar had said to this friend
“Do you know where you are going to get for all this?” And my friend said “No.” And
the President said “They’re going to cut your lily White throat.” And I, as liberal as I was,
or as open minded as I was, I was constantly battling all of these things I had been told
throughout my childhood and adolescence about how dangerous it was, and how you know...So when that began to happen, I just kind of thought I can't fight this.

LS: Unfortunately we’re still playing these things out today. You know, we’ve been hearing from people like Eugene Williams that he feels like things have actually gotten worse rather than better. And teachers are still having these problems at Charlottesville High School, and I don’t what it’s going to take to change things.

SS: You know, the sad thing is what it takes is contact. And I had this moment, and it was the first year. They were all taking a test or an exam, so all these kids are hunched over their desks and they’re writing, and its you know like May, and we didn’t have air conditioning in the school. And...this guy who had very, very dark skin, was sitting to my left, I remember it vividly, and he was writing, and I looked at his arm, and I thought... I must have been headed toward massage therapy, I thought “God, I would just like to stroke his arm, because he had really good muscles, but the texture of his skin and the color were just like Godiva chocolate. And I thought, I realized that I had just broken through a huge barrier, personally, even though I had been acting as if for a long time that everybody was equal, that I had seen him at a level that I had not done before. You know how when you look at your babies, and they’re just beautiful to you, that’s how he looked to me. And I don’t know how to get anybody to do that except voluntarily. I don’t know how we are going to do it. The...

JT: Were there any mixed relationships? I mean high school is the time when people explore relationships. Was there any attempt by...?

SS: If they were, I think they were fairly hidden. I mean these were days when if you were Black you didn’t go into Belmont because you might get beaten up, and if you were White you probably didn’t go up on Page Street late Saturday night. I mean there were places where it wasn’t safe, and I think there was such hostility towards inter-racial dating, and now living in downtown I see it, all the time. My children have had no inhibitions about dating people who are of different backgrounds. My son’s girlfriend is Asian. Asian American. And her skin is definitely a different color. And...

JT: But you as an adult, said that you mixed with people like Eugene Williams. And you had Black friends. Was it just different for adults, because..?

SS: Well, now Eugene I didn’t see socially. The only one I saw socially was Teresa. And once I got married and then as my life went on I ended up being a single divorced mom when my children were four and six. I didn’t see her. I ran back into that student I told you I was so fond of... at Tandem. He had a daughter at Tandem who my son was real good friends with. Socially? It’s very seldom I’m in something where there’s any Black people.

LS: It’s still very segregated here in Charlottesville.
Yes. I mean...and my life...my life went a different route. I do different kinds of things now. I do a lot of volunteer work and...[the tape is turned off.]

[the tape is turned back on again as the conversation returns to the intended subject.]

You look at what goes on. There are Black sororities, because one time I saw Lorraine and Eugene at the Omni, and I don’t know, I... the manager of the Omni is a friend of mine, I was going up to her office, and this thing was going on at the Omni which was some kind of reunion...

Jefferson School has their reunions there.

It might have been Jefferson School, you’re probably right.

Usually its the end of August they have it.

It very well could have been that. But in any case, one of the elderly teachers at Lane had a reunion luncheon and you bet your sweet bippy Lorraine and Teresa weren’t invited. And it wasn’t all the teachers, it was a fairly, it was a group that this woman’s wanted to get back together with. She would not have made friends with them. The Kwanza festival, the thing they have up at Washington Park, it just seems like Americans, White Americans will go to Europe to look at the culture to try to absorb it, but they are prejudiced that Black people are inferior and their customs are inferior. It’s still so prevalent. They just don’t get it. I mean, I don’t know much about Black art. but there are some amazing Black primitive artists. Amazing. And I think I will go and hear drumming music any time I can. I just don’t know what it is, why people aren’t more curious even about each other.

I had a really enlightening moment when Hank, the man who ran that center, would explain how he tried to get the faculty to deal with integration. And he said what it took every single time was to get everybody together in a room, and he said it was very important that the Whites felt in the majority in the room, there couldn’t be more Black faculty than White faculty in the room because Whites don’t feel comfortable in that setting. And he said he would let them talk and he would try and foster conversation but they would always talk to him, they would never talk to each other. And so after a while he would draw a diagram, and said you’re talking to me, and I’m talking back to you, and you’re talking to me, and I’m talking back to you. [laughs]

He’s Black.

Oh, he’s Black.

But he’s the facilitator. And he said it took this whole process to get people to actually learn how to talk to each other, and it wasn’t that hard once he was able to get them in a room, a small enough group, not feeling threatened, that they could learn how to talk to
each other, where they started to learn respect for each other. And he concluded that it was respect that we don’t have...

JT: And trust.

LS: And trust.

SS: And trust! The trust is a huge issue.

LS: That we need to foster these small groups.

JT: You can’t achieve that until you get to know somebody, and if you don’t talk to somebody, you don’t get to know them. So there’s constantly that tension and barrier. And misunderstanding.

LS: And we have no forum like that in our community. We have no way to bring our cultures to the table. To talk and exchange information, and so I don’t know...

SS: See and what it takes to my mind, is a very politically incorrect admission, which is people are different, cultures are different.

LS: And he said that as well, you have to recognize that we are not going to become one, we are going to stay different, but you have to respect the differences.

SS: And...so we moved into integration with little to no preparation, with much hostility and distrust on both sides, and...the school system to my mind... failed these young people. Failed them miserably.

LS: Like you said, a whole lost generation.

SS: Yes, yes. And I don’t think any of us, whether we were White or Black who were in favor of integration understood how difficult it was going to be culturally.

JT: I wonder about...I mean high school in this country is four years. In England we start at eleven. Which is a very different experience because you are very young still, but you are learning about what the older kids do, what they can do, and it’s a much more drawn out process. My son has just started high school and I keep thinking he’s only got four years to do so much before he goes to college because college is such a huge step, and he’s already thinking how am I going to go to college. And I think he’s only just a baby, you’ve no idea. And when I think about these kids going to a segregated, sorry a desegregated school and they have four years to become adults, basically, and they are in a climate that is constantly stopping them from being who they can be or want to be, what happens when they leave, or how do they really achieve adulthood...I don’t know if I’m expressing that very well, but... Did they have their own clubs?

SS: Well, the Afro-American Club was probably the only one you know when I left in ’69.
JT: What did they do in the Afro-American Club?

SS: We were...we were kind of interested in Afro-American writers.

JT: Oh, really?

SS: Yes, Langston Hughes, people like that that...

JT: Had you studied African American literature?

SS: No. I mean, I wasn’t even very exposed to it. And I was a philosophy major as an undergraduate.

JT: Did you start reading more African-American writers after you were teaching at Lane?

SS: I did, I did...but you know it was such a busy time. I can’t tell you how busy it was. It was interesting to me. Some of the most successful English teachers, and this had nothing to do with race, gave short answer quizzes they could grade in fifteen minutes in the lounge. Grade, I mean grade the whole class in fifteen minutes. And they had college-bound classes. So, I mean I was getting people to write, I was always behind in grading, always! You know, it just was massive amounts of work. But I don’t think there was anything else. They used to put on kind of a talent show. And I remember they played one song, and it wasn’t something like “let me tell you about the birds and the bees,” and this wonderfully funny, two or three Black women students came out and they were dressed as bumble bees. And they were, and one of them was a really big girl, and they so were so cute and so funny everybody was howling. And of course they could dance, they could move. And... you know I don’t know whether that got better, whether people began to see some of the neat things that could be done. I have no idea, and I didn’t go to anything like a prom. I just...I have to tell you after my early months as a teacher there, I did anything I could to avoid staff and faculty—meetings, gatherings, I mean I went to what I had to, that was it, you know. And I kept my head down.

LS: That’s sad.

JT: It must have been such a strain as well.

SS: Well it was hard being polite to somebody who I know had said to these students “You should see what you look like with your big fat lips when you laugh.” And I was expected to work beside her and be...

JT: Be civil?

SS: Be civil. And so there was huge tension. If there was tension for me, a grown up who wasn’t getting graded, can you imagine what is was like to be a student? And I’m sure that that poor White girl whose mother called me was just as miserable as any Black child.
LS: Did you have any seniors, or were they mostly tenth graders?

SS: I think the last year I taught I had some seniors.

LS: Were any of them going to college, were people helping them to decide if they, you know, wanted to go to college?

SS: I think they were college, I think it was more like a level two or level one class.

LS: And were they getting any help from the guidance people? I mean was there discrimination in the way the...?

SS: I don’t think these students were Black except for...no they were not Black. My students became hairdressers, truck drivers, and delivery people. There’s actually one guy I see around a lot, I’m trying to think of what he does. He travels a lot in his business, so there are some of them who went on to become professional, but I don’t know whether he ever went to college.

LS: I am just curious because Jefferson School was so targeting getting those students to go to college, and they really emphasized that and it was very important despite the fact that there were no jobs that they could have beyond you know...

JT: They had to go north to get.

LS: They had to move away basically to find employment in their professions. But...that probably was a big loss, that there was no one emphasizing going to college within the school system.

SS: Probably not, if they didn’t...if their parents didn’t push them... they probably did not get much help.

LS: That’s what we heard at the reunion, is how much their teachers supported their education and how important it was.

SS: There was one woman whose last name was Whitten, Nan Whitten, and I don’t know whether she came from Jefferson, but she was a Black guidance counselor, and...because mostly my students weren’t college bound...I’m not good on talking about...

JT: But that doesn’t mean there weren’t other students, Black students who were college bound?

SS: That’s right, I wouldn’t have gotten them. I mean as the new man on the block, I got that floating job the first year, where I went from classroom to classroom, and I got what they called low level, and that’s where they...and then, here I’ve got a Masters degree in English, nearly went on for my doctorate, and I found out I loved teaching those kids.
They were interesting, they were fun, and they needed help. And I was very happy teaching them.

JT: Wow, well you’ve given us some wonderful stories, and been very candid...

SS: I know...

JT: We really appreciate that.

SS: Some of the people are dead, which is good.

JT: But it’s a story that needs to come out, and the sooner it comes out the better in many ways. No matter how much people won’t like it.

SS: Yes, you know, at Sweet Briar, I still get the alumni journal. At one point the treasurer of the college went to the boy I was pinned to here at the University, and said “Can’t you do something about her?” And when my boyfriend came to me and pretty much said that without indignation, is when I knew I was never going to marry him. [laughter] And, that man is now honored in the alumni magazine as one of the people who helped integrate Sweet Briar. Well, the reason they integrated Sweet Briar, is that they couldn’t get federal funding if they didn’t integrate. So that’s when they broke the will. But when I was on a council, which was students, and alumni, and faculty, and administration, and I brought it up, they said, “Oh, we can’t break the will. We can’t break the will.” They founded Sweet Briar as a school for young White ladies. And so I read the alumni magazine, and I swear fire is spurting out of my eyes because it is like, this is not the truth, this is not how it happened. And, so, clarity, as much as we can get, at least different points of view, because I am sure my point of view isn’t always clear, but the clarity comes from hearing from a lot of people.

LS: We’ve been trying to get a cross, a wide cross-section. We span...we have a woman who graduated from Jefferson High School in 1933, and we’re talking to people who, we’re going to be talking to people who ran the pre-school up until 2001.

JT: That’s a lot of history to cover.

SS: Well, I just think its wonderful that you’re doing it, and...

JT: What do you think about, I mean I know you weren’t necessarily involved in the Jefferson School itself, but you have sort of connections to people who have gone there. What do you think you know, they’re trying to figure out what to do with the building. What do you think should happen to the building?

SS: Well, first of all, historically in this town, if the White hierarchy could, they ran a street through a Black neighborhood or razed it. We have a shameful history in this town; Vinegar Hill is testimony to it. The Black people who lived there would own some very valuable land if they had not been displaced. On those grounds, I think, we ought to do
something, first of all I think Jefferson should stay. Its beautiful, I mean look at how they renovated Lane! Its possible to take...

LS: And McGuffey...

SS: Its possible to take an old building, yes, and I would just love it if it were in some way useful to all of us, but predominantly celebrating the Black experience...I don’t know what it should be, I’m not very clever at that, but I’m very clear that we owe the Black community a debt for what has been done in the past, I really believe that, and that doesn’t mean that I think I should pay for retributive taxes, or that kind of debt, but morally and ethically, I think it would be wonderful to have it used in some way, maybe a partial museum? I mean look at what Live Arts and Second Street Gallery have done down there. Why can’t we do something like that? I don’t know?

JT: Susan, thank you so much!

End of interview.
Susan Scott, May 18, 2004
(with Liz Sargent below)

(photos by Jacky Taylor)
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, Susan Cone Scott, (name)
of 217 E. Jefferson St. Charlottesville, VA 22902 (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: Susan Scott

Date: 5/18/04

Interviewer: T. Sargent

Date: 5/18/04
Interview with
Grace Tinsley

Interviewer: Alexandria Searls
Date: March 19, 2003
Location: Charlottesville, Virginia

Grace Tinsley is a Jefferson High School Graduate, class of 1950. She lives in Charlottesville, Virginia. When asked about her experiences there, Mrs. Tinsley replied:

GT: I graduated in 1950, the class just before we left. I met Robert at Jefferson. [Robert, her husband, had fought in World War II and had attended Jefferson on his return. He was in the same class as Florence Bryant.] I was playing basketball and Robert was attending the game. We had these really short shorts. We played half-court. My buttons on my pants popped, and I needed a safety pin, and of all the people I asked, only Robert had one. [motioning to his picture as a young man] He was handsome!

AS: Where did you grow up?

GT: I lived on 4th Street and Robert lived on Preston, and we used to call that the Heights—it was miles away. We had never met before that game.

AS: Tell me about your husband.

GT: [talking about Robert’s experiences in World War II] When you’re in the army, anyone from the same state was really friendly with each other. All Black and White soldiers. Then the closer you came to the U.S. border, the more distant the White boys became... In World War II, they’d line them up by color and march the White guys in to have dinner and gave the Black guys a brown bag. There were one or two White guys who refused to eat and asked for a brown bag.

[On racial strife in Charlottesville] A carload of White guys once threw a coke can at me. I was scared. Once they didn’t have the openings and closings of the schools at the same time to avoid interaction.

Mrs. Tinsley, who was in poor health at the time of the interviews, had recently been named Charlottesville’s Woman of the Year at the Virginia Women’s Forum, 25th Anniversary. At the award ceremony, Mrs. Tinsley spoke about her experiences growing up in Charlottesville. Excerpts of the speech are reprinted here to supplement the material gained through the personal interview:
Friday, March 31, 2000  
Boar’s Head Inn  
Charlottesville, Virginia  
Grace L. Tinsley Named Woman of the Year by The Virginia Women’s Forum’s 25th  
Anniversary Celebration

...With the closing of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, like many of you, I seized the opportunity to reflect on my life experiences; experiences that influenced my life and helped to shape my values.

In 1996 Hilary Clinton wrote a book and chose as its title an old African proverb, *It Takes a Village to Raise a Child*. Webster defines a proverb as a wise old saying. Well, that wise old saying has become very popular in recent years and is being used worldwide. The 9th Annual African-American Festival chose to use it in 1998 as its theme, and I just love it, partly because it reflects the atmosphere in which I was raised.

I am a Charlottesville native, a product of Charlottesville public schools. I grew up on 4th Street N.W.—right across from Jefferson School, where I gained an appreciation for community, for being part of a community of people who shared their lives with each other and cared for each other; a community where people are known, recognized, and valued. And I had such wonderful role models.

My first and most important role models were my parents, Curtis and Ruth Kenney. I was an only child and felt fortunate to grow up in a two-parent household. My father was a blue-collar worker. He worked in a dry cleaning plant. My mother was a domestic worker and made five dollars a week, probably could have made more, except she refused to work past 2:30 p.m. to prevent my becoming a latch-key kid. She was always there when I came home from school.

Church was an important presence in their lives. My father was a deacon and my mother a deaconess, which meant that I was expected to be in church all day on Sundays, 10 a.m. Sunday school, 11 a.m. morning worship services, 6 p.m. (BYPU) Baptist Young People’s Union and 8 p.m. evening service.

One of my favorite pastimes as a child was listening to them tell stories about their life before I was born—the hardships, the joys, and the funny stories about family, friends, and neighbors. They constantly reminded me of the many advantages I had compared to their generation. And they encouraged me to take advantage of those opportunities.

They were known for using old sayings to illustrate a point including these examples:

1. An idle mind is the devil’s workshop.
2. Rules were made to keep, not to break.
3. Money doesn’t grow on trees.
4. Never put off for tomorrow what you can do today.
5. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
Of course, back then, they were silly sayings to me, but today I realize that I learned some of the most important lessons of my life from them; above all, what it means to have unconditional love and support.

Another special role model for me was Mr. George P. Inge. In 1891, he opened a grocery store at the corner of West Main Street and 4th Street. Besides being a successful businessman, he and his wife were successful parents. They had nine children, four were schoolteachers, two medical doctors, one college professor, and two businessmen. He was active in civic and community affairs.

He turned the operation of the grocery store over to his son in 1946, and because he was so much admired by me, a few years prior to his retirement, without telling him, I adopted him as my grandfather and found many excuses to visit the store.

My mother would tease me by declaring that I was the only child in the neighborhood who saw the need to dress in her Sunday best to go to Inge’s store to buy a loaf of bread. What my mother didn’t know, I was positioning myself to receive some positive strokes, words of wisdom, and some tasty treats.

The Inge’s family living quarters were above the store, and although retired, Mr. Inge visited the store each and every day, he said, to remind the children that he was still the boss, still in charge.

He appointed himself a one-man welcome committee. He greeted his adult customers with a smile and wholesome conversation—and the neighborhood children with a smile, praise, words of wisdom and a treat. A typical scene, upon my arrival to the store on a cold winter day, I would find him at the rear of the store, seated in his rocking chair, pipe in hand in front of the wood stove. His greeting to me would be, “There’s my girl. Don’t you look pretty today.” (That was my positive stroke.)

Words of wisdom on any given day could be:
1. Young lady, when you grow up, be sure to register to vote. Those politicians have a say in your life, from the cradle to the cross, they can decide where you are born and where you can be buried.

2. If you don’t know nothing, want to know something, be around people who do know something. Choose your friends well.

My visit would end with a piece of fruit or a candy treat. Worth dressing up for, I’ll say.

Indeed, my parents had a lot of help from “the village” in raising me. Neighbors were extensions of the family.

My neighborhood was an area of mixed economic backgrounds. There were blue-collar workers who made poor to good wages, and a large number of Black professionals (the largest in the country I thought at the time) who made good to excellent salaries. We had medical doctors,
dentists, a school principal, a number of schoolteachers, a music teacher, barbers, beauticians, insurance agents, tailors and a number of other businessmen and women.

My mother would joke that she could go to Inge’s store for her groceries, stop at T.J. Sellers for the Black newspaper, let Dr. Johnson or Dr. Stealton take care of her medical needs, get Dr. Jackson to clean her teeth, buy some insurance from Mr. Edwards, get a haircut from Mr. Hank Jones, let Sarah Jones do the finishing touches to her hair, take music lessons from Mrs. Hescall, cross the street, take a history course at Jefferson School, stop by Mr. McGinnis’ to have her suit repaired, go up the street to Mr. Jackson’s to advertise by billboard, come back over to Zion Union Baptist Church to hear Reverend Kennedy preach, and collapse. All in our neighborhood!

There were many other village keepers: Nannie Cox Jackson—Jackson/Via, a city school, bears her name; Otelia Jackson, George Ferguson, Imogene Bunn, Owen Duncan, Dr. Garrett, Mrs. Pauline Garrett, and many others.

Some of my most remembered schoolteachers are Cora Duke, Rebecca McGinnis, Peachie Jackson, Marion Wyatt and Florence Coleman Bryant, my high school teacher. All but Mrs. Bryant lived in my neighborhood.

I can’t forget some of my church folk—the folk I spent all day Sunday with. Mrs. Kennedy the preacher’s wife, my BYPU teacher, Sarah Walker, Vander Burks and his daughter Zelma, our church clerk, George Gross, Wilmer Jackson, Festers Jackson, Joe Gilbert, the Grangers, and Hattie Lightfoot Deberry our church organist. For most of the people I have mentioned, there are family members here tonight. Would you please raise your hand.

My neighborhood, my village if you will, was far from perfect, but however imperfect, it was unique. For regardless of educational and income levels they were united in a common cause—to do their best to see that all of the children in the community were getting the attention and experiences they needed and I thank them. For family and communities shape our futures, our early experiences heavily influence, and to a degree determine, how we forever think and behave.

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: Alexandria Searls
Interview with
George Tramontin

Interviewers: Jacky Taylor, Liz Sargent
Date: December 10, 2003
Location: Jefferson-Madison Regional Library, Central Branch
Charlottesville, Virginia

Transcribed: May 2004
By: Liz Sargent

Proofed: June 2004
By: Jacky Taylor

JT: For the record, would you mind providing us with your full name, date and place of birth, and your current address.

GT: My place of birth?

JT: Yes, date and place of birth, just for the record. So, your full name, your date and place of birth, your current address.


[The following was prepared by Mr. Tramontin after reviewing the transcription of his interview in the hopes that the salient points of his interview be as clear to the reader as possible. This written text is followed by the word-for-word transcription of the interview.]

How I came to be in Charlottesville

I was on the staff of the University of Chicago when I received a phone call from the Superintendent of Schools in Charlottesville asking me to come for an interview for the position of Director of Instruction. I had been recommended by a friend of mine who was the head of the Superintendent's organization in Washington, D.C. After insisting over and over that I was not interested, he pleaded that I consider it a paid vacation and to bring my family along. I was perfectly happy in Charlottesville in those days, my wife was impressed and thought it would be a better place to raise our kids than in Park Forest, Illinois, and so we agreed to come.

Arriving in Charlottesville

My sole responsibility was to improve the curriculum and instructional program from Kindergarten through the 12th grade. I soon discovered that the Superintendent had not underestimated the seriousness of the problem because it was badly in need of repair. By now the schools had reopened with token integration at Lane High School and Venable Elementary
School. While there was constant integration controversy at the local level, there were ongoing problems at the federal level. The Superintendent insisted on handling these problems by himself which meant that I had no responsibility for anything to do with integration. However, in the spring of 1963, the Superintendent, tired of the constant integration problems, resigned abruptly to take a position with the Virginia State Department of Education. The school board asked me to accept the superintendency, but I refused, agreeing only to Acting until they found a replacement. I immediately advertised for the position and set up many interviews for the board to consider. They kept rejecting all these candidates and continually kept pressuring me to accept the permanent position. Since by early summer they were not going to hire anyone else, I made some unreal demands, including a $2,000 raise over what the previous superintendent was making. I felt certain that this would force them to settle on someone else. However, they immediately handed me a contract, agreeing to all my demands and also proof that they had managed to get my state certification without my knowledge.

Assuming the Superintendency

We were now completing the building of the two middle schools and while I was still trying to focus on trying to improve the instructional program, the integration problem was hanging over everything we did. Knowing that total school and staff integration was not far away, when we received an application from a black speech correctionist with excellent credentials, I persuaded the school board to hire her, assuring them since speech correctionist was not mandatory any parent who objected could refuse to have their child in speech correction. With great trepidation, the board agreed to her hiring. We made no public announcement about this. Once school opened, I received angry and threatening phone calls from parents insisting their child would not be taught by a black person. They demanded another speech teacher be assigned. After I explained this was just not a possibility, many of them pulled their children out of speech class, even recognizing how important it was their kid’s welfare.

While there was a prevailing uneasiness about integration and its future, and while we were sometimes in court, there was not a lot of visible rebellion. One of the advantages we had was that the segregationists had begun a segregated elementary and secondary high school which removed some of the die-hard parents who might have been mostly ready to cause trouble. While I deplored the concept at the time, I now realize it did help us to obtain total integration of students and staff when it came.

The Federal Government Makes a Decision

Shortly before the start of the 1965–66 school year, the federal government, disgusted with the Virginia approach: "with all deliberate speed" that Virginia kept promising but not delivering declared that all black schools would be closed and their students and faculty be assigned to former white schools immediately. While some parents barely tolerated their kids sitting next to a black child, they were not about to accept their kids taking direction from a black person.

At the school board meeting held at Venable School to explain the new federal directive and how we planned to implement it, the audience was so huge some had to stand in the aisles. When I explained what the federal government was forcing us to do and that we had to reassign all the students and staff from Jefferson School to all formerly white schools, there was a loud, noisy
dissent. One man stood and in a loud and belligerent voice said “I’ll tell you one thing, Mr. Smart-aleck superintendent, the day a white student is going to be told what to do by a black teacher, this town will explode.” When I announced that we already had had a black speech teacher in several elementary schools the previous year without any instructional problems, there was a stunned and sullen silence. This explanation did not satisfy them but it certainly deflated their dire prediction...The resentment was now even greater and more evident and directed against the board, but mainly towards me.

Now that the staff were going to have to integrate, I needed to assign white teachers to McGuffey where Booker Reaves was going to be the principal. The one advantage that we had was that Booker Reaves was an outstanding person and one of the very best administrators we had. Since some of the white staff had criticized me for not doing more for integration than I had to, I naturally went to them to have them form the nucleus of the white staff at McGuffey. To a person, they not only absolutely refused, but were angry and hostile that I would put them on the spot by asking them. And then something even stranger happened. A group of about six white teachers (elderly) came to me and offered to remain at McGuffey. They said they had spent most of their teaching careers there and were only going to teach for a few more years and they would like to remain there for the rest of their tenure. They said they knew and respected Booker Reaves over the years and would be happy to work for him.

What to do with the Jefferson School

A remaining problem was what formerly white school to assign to Jefferson which had been a black school since it was built. It was obvious that no former white school would readily transfer to Jefferson, so I solved the problem by placing every sixth grader in the system at Jefferson. This did not please very many, but it prevented the white parents from any former white school from claiming we were discriminating against their child.

Although there was great condemnation of the federal government for this radical and hasty ruling and I criticized it because it gave us no time to plan any in-service programs or ready students, staff and community, the state of Virginia had only itself to blame. It had used every means it could think of to avoid integration as long as possible. The real heroes and the ones who suffered the most were the black students and black teachers who were thrust into this totally new situation without days, weeks, or even months to prepare for it. We had not time for orientation, for groups to work together, to anticipate problems, and pursue solutions, and no in-service or human relations to sensitize everyone involved on how best to adapt to this entirely new situation.

While dealing with this integration problem was consuming most of my time, I was still trying to improve the curriculum, open the new middle school and prepare for the reorganization of the different class levels. I was aware for a long time that there was resistance from many at Lane High School to any of the curriculum changes we were working on. I did not have the time left after all the other responsibilities to address the threat they were becoming. I knew they were working in conjunction with some in the community that were opposed to integration. I believed they had contacted the Virginia Senator McCue and were meeting with him. What I did not realize until I read in the local paper that McCue was quoted as saying all the problems in the
country were because of the blacks and the Jews that he was using the high school staff to ensure that I would not be able to lead a successful entire school system integration.

It was now obvious that with the agitation of the high school teachers, people in the community who did not want integration to succeed and politicians such as McCue, that someone other than I should take over. I was more than ready to leave, but the few remaining members of the school board that had hired me insisted on buying out my contract. While I had several offers before I had begun to think of another position, I accepted an offer of an Assistant Professorship at the University of Rochester, New York. I doubled my salary in two years.

Several years later when I met the superintendent who succeeded me at a national meeting, he told me he had tripled my central office staff, and had just gone about implementing the programs I had started. So, in the end, the important thing is that we totally integrated all the schools and staff without any violence or revolts and that the curriculum changes we had hoped for were actually taking place.

[Return to transcription]

JT: What was your address at the time that you were Superintendent of Schools in Charlottesville?

GT: It was on Bruce Avenue. But I have no idea what number.

JT: And finally, what other positions did you hold in the City School system, or did you come to Charlottesville to take up the position of Superintendent of Schools?

GT: No, I actually didn’t plan on coming to Charlottesville. I was with the University of Chicago, and I got a call from the Superintendent of Charlottesville asking me to come out and talk to him about the position of Director of Instruction, which was tantamount to the position of Assistant Superintendent. And I said “Thank you, but no thanks. I am very happy here.” He had gone to the Superintendent’s Association in Washington and asked them to recommend somebody. And, um, one of the fellows who was in my carpool at Washington before he went there recommended me and I really kept saying “I am not interested,” and he kept saying “You must come, we’ll pay your expenses, if you can just use it as a long vacation.” And so I got tired of saying no, and so we came. And of course that is what everybody does, once you come to Charlottesville you decide this is a great place for kids, and my wife said oh it’s much better than Park Forest which was the organization (???) so we came. And I was here three years. And the integration thing was merely bubbling up. They had already closed the schools before I came and had reopened them. But it was still festering.

JT: So, I’m sorry, what date was that that you came?

GT: I came in 1960. The fall of ’60. I don’t remember September or October. And the Superintendent of Schools who was a very fine, gentle old Virginia gentleman, really
didn’t want to deal with this very much, so he left. He left very suddenly. So I got talked into being the Acting Superintendent, which I agreed to. But I never wanted to be the Superintendent of Schools because I don’t like budgets and I don’t like meetings, and publicity. I really want...it’s bad enough being away from the classroom when you’re an administrator, but at least you’re involved with the teachers, and you have direct (?) on improving education, which is all I wanted to do. So I agreed to do it temporarily. But they asked me if I would accept the position, and I said “No.” And I set up a whole series of interviews with everybody, with everybody who applied. And they came and they interviewed them and then they would come back and say, “Are you sure you are not going to do this.” And I would say, “I am sure that I’m not going to do this.” So then after about four or five months, it was getting to the point where, you know, I couldn’t do everything, and I kept thinking... my wife always wanted to live in Connecticut, so I should may-be think of moving there. So anyway, um, Dick Meade, who was president of the School Board, who was on the staff of the University of Virginia, came and said “Would you come and meet with the board for lunch?” And I said, “You know, there’s no point to this. We’ve been through this.” And he said, “I only asked you to come and have lunch!” So I sat up the night before, and I made up two legal pads of conditions, under which I would take this. And that would mean that I could hire people to do such and such, to do these things, and I would be the instructional superintendent. And so I thought with all of those qualifications that would end it once and for all. And I left, but within—an hour they were back with a contract and they had already gotten me certified in Virginia which you couldn’t do today, and I don’t know how they ever did it.

Anyway, so now I am the Superintendent of Schools. Well at this time, there were not only, I am not only trying to improve the curriculum, but we are building two middle schools, which I was really having to be very closely involved in, because that is part of the instruction, and way back then, this was radical. Now, everybody is doing it, but we built them of course round the learning center which was a library and the individual classrooms all around it so you could have large groups or small groups and the rest of it. Well, of course, I am still trying to with one hand trying to run the school system, trying to work with the junior...building these junior highs, which is still one of my top priorities, and then the integration thing came.

JT: So the junior high schools that were being built, was that Walker and Buford?

GT: Yes. And we started, we hired architects from Texas. Who were specializing in education. They did, I think, a marvelous job back then. Anyway, um, what was apparent was that full integration was coming. How much of this do you want me to go through?

JT: As much as you’d like to tell us.

GT: Um, we used to get, one of the reasons we had trouble keeping a cadre of teachers is because so many student wives came who were very highly qualified and because we had such a pool of them, we couldn’t raise the salaries very much, because of course if you can get them cheaper that’s what you do. Um, but anyway, we knew integration was coming, so we got an application for...from a black speech correctionist, and we checked it out and she was absolutely perfectly qualified. So I went to the board and I said, “I
really think we better do this. And she’s not working in the black schools, she’s working in the white schools.” And very...the board was very honest. They were not...they were not intent on integrating things, but they weren’t throwing up roadblocks all the time. They were doing what was right, but without major enthusiasm to do this. And, I’m...you know I didn’t come here to integrate all of the schools. I believed in it, but that’s not...that wasn’t the goal that I was doing. But it was obvious...first of all I believed in it, it was the right thing to do, and third we didn’t have much choice with what was coming. So what we did was...and I went to the board...and they said, “Yes, you can hire this black speech correctionist.” So we did, and we put her in...Buford wasn’t open...what is the elementary school up by Buford? Clark? No, not Clark...

LS: Johnson?

GT: Yes, Johnson. And one other school after that?

LS: Jackson-Via?

GT: Yes. And, um I got phone calls from parents saying there is a black teacher and speech correctionist. We won’t have this. And I said, well, speech correction isn’t something that you have to do legally. And there is nobody else assigned there, so you know, I am just afraid that this is what this has to be and all I can do is tell you that this woman has marvelous qualifications. As far as we are concerned very highly qualified...Well, they didn’t want to hear that, may-be they didn’t care about that, and the screaming!...All on my home telephone...And they said if you do that I am going to take my kid right out of speech correction. And I said “I think that would be a big mistake. You don’t penalize your own kids, I think, because of the matter of how you feel. And you have the right to feel the way you want, but this is...we don’t have a choice, this is way things have to be.” Well a lot of them did. I could not believe that some people felt so strongly.

JT: So this was the first African-American teacher to work in Charlottesville Schools?

GT: In white schools. The black schools all had black teachers. Yes, that was the first one. And, because...and, once we got going, and once the teacher was there we had no problems, because she was so talented it worked out fine. That didn’t mean that they were excited, and thought this was a great idea. But there was no more fussing, but it was that original thing where “you must not” “you can not do this” “you can not” and pulling their kids out. Well I tell you this because what we knew was going to happen did happen the next year. Because the federal government was so angry because of this dragging of feet and they were saying “you’re not doing this, you’re not doing what you said you would do...let us do this gradually, so there’s no fussing...so we are telling you no more black schools.” Period. They are all integrated. So...

JT: They set a date by which that would be done?

GT: Yes. The next school year. The next September.
LS: So do you feel that that was referred to as token integration, that period where there wasn't really a mixing yet...

GT: Yes. A few kids came to Lane High School. And a few came to Venable. But basically... So, here I am the curriculum Superintendent, not only building these two middle schools, and trying to improve it, but now I've got this integration thing. Um, so I had two problems, one of them is Jefferson School is no longer black, but we have to have it.

JT: The building?

GT: The building. We have to have it because there is no room to put all of these people. So what schools go to Jefferson School? Because it's all right to do but its not my school...so we put the whole sixth grade there!

JT: Was that...

GT: That meant every school went there. And we avoided this "not my school" comment. Now, remember, we had a safety valve because some of these segregated schools opened up, which took off some of the people who felt very strongly. But we got by with...we passed that part of it where no one school felt that they were penalized by doing this.

JT: Just sixth grade?

GT: Yes, just the sixth grade moved in.

LS: Do you remember what school year that was that the whole sixth grade ended up there?

GT: I'd left in '66, so I imagine it was '65 or '66, but I don't remember. Um, but now I've got a black principal, who must work with.

JT: Benjamin Tonsler was that?

GT: No, this was Booker Reeves.

JT: Oh, that's right.

GT: Who must be over white teachers. Again, the good Lord smiled on us, because Booker Reeves was one of the best principals in town. Really, as able or more than anybody else I had. So, at least we had the basis of saying if you don't want to work for him, it's not because he is a lousy...and he did have respect. But that is very different from getting...so, and nobody is going to believe this. They don't believe it when I tell them...but we had a group of teachers who were really pressing and pushing for integration. We had a librarian in one of the elementary schools that got up at a board meeting and chastised me for not doing more with integration than we absolutely had to.
LS: You had parents complaining about it and teachers complaining about not having integration.

GT: Yea. Well not all the teachers did, but some of them did. So, obviously, what did I do? The logical thing to do is to go to those teachers who have been saying you haven’t been done enough and you ought to do more. And you say “thank God I’ve got you, because of course you’ll go over to McGuffey now because the teachers of Principal McGuffey moved out to Greenbriar, so Booker went over to McGuffey. And they said, “Why are you suggesting that?” And I said “you know why I am suggesting this. You have been criticizing me publicly, you want to do this.” They said, “I am not going to be penalized because...” and not one of those people agreed to go and work under Booker. So now it is a case of I can’t put all new teachers over there, so I have to find some resident teachers...And this is what nobody can believe either...You talk about the good Lord smiling on you. There were a group of about six elderly white teachers at McGuffey who came into this room, and they said “I am only going to teach for another two or three years. We have taught at McGuffey for years and we know Mr. Reeves, and we would be glad to stay at McGuffey and work with Mr. Reeves.” The last people I would have gone to ask...were these elderly white teachers who were born in Charlottesville, all these years, and at their age to do it. So I guess when things get tough sometimes it works out for you. So anyway, we got through that part of it fine. And that worked out perfectly fine, because as I said, Booker really was very good. But we had a school board meeting before the September meeting and of course we explained all of the sixth grades were going to go to Jefferson, and that the black teachers were going to be disbursed to the other schools. This was at Venable School, and they were standing on the sides and around the back of the room.

JT: These were parents and teachers?

GT: No, these were all parents. A lot of them weren’t even parents, a lot of these were old people who were in power all over the place back then and who really were against any kind of integration at all. And, so, they got up one by one by one saying why this was wrong. And we kept saying it isn’t that it’s right or that we think it’s right, it’s the law. Why are we arguing if we have no choice? Then this one man got up and said, “I’ll tell you Mr. Smartaleck Superintendent, the first time you have a black teacher teaching a white student, this school system is going to explode!” And I said “but it didn’t explode last year!” And he said “Of course not, stupid, you didn’t have any black teachers teaching white kids.” And I said “Yeah, we did. We had a black teacher out at these two schools teaching speech correction, and there were no problems.” Can you imagine how that man hated me from this point on? And I had to do it! But publicly what it did to him? But, anyway, this whole thing was just boiling up, just getting worse and worse. And then the School Board changed. And I’ve never quite understood exactly you know what happened with all this that went on. One of the things that caused a lot of problems was that it came from the staff, much of it at Lane High School. And some of the worst instruction going on anywhere where I’ve ever been in my life was going on back then.

JT: At Lane...
GT: Yes, and they felt threatened by me. When I first came, they felt obligated to each department to invite me to sit in on their staff meeting, which I did. And I sat in on the English Department meeting, and the whole thing was done in about ten minutes. It was all rehearsed, it went by, and it was almost over, and one of the young teachers, a University wife, natural Virginian, said, “I have a question. With these slower students who are having trouble why do I have to teach Silas Marner, why can’t I teach something else? She asked this of the head of the English department. And the head of the English department looked daggers at her as if “How dare you... this wasn’t rehearsed!” And so she said, “I don’t know. Mr. Tremontin what do you think?” And I said, “Well, before I can go any further, what is your purpose of teaching Silas Marner, what’s the goal of that?” And there was dead silence. And when no one spoke up, she said “We will have an answer for you by the next meeting.” And that was the end of that. There were hundreds of these. I am saying this because it so indicates what the level of instruction was. So, I forgot what... to go back, before I took the job, there was a petition started to get me to accept the job. And not everybody signed it, but a good many of them did. Well, then, obviously I became a threat, and so this started internally that you know “nobody can get along with this guy, this is not going to work.” And because the board had changed and most of the board members weren’t around at the time this just grew. A lot of people claimed then, but many of them even more now, said that probably would not have gotten anywhere except that the integration thing bubbled into it, but nobody would admit that. You know I was identified with, not only, integrating it, but not I personally, but the few people that had worked with me and some of the principals, for making it work. And so it just got to the point where there was no point in my staying any longer. And so I said, “I’m leaving,” and a couple of the board members said “you’re not leaving without money.” So I said, “I really don’t care, there are plenty of places I can go.” But they insisted. So they bought out, you know, my contract. And I went to teach at the University of Rochester. But to get back to Jefferson School. That was some really... there was really good instruction going on there. And you have to be careful when you say this because ... and I had to tell you this where I was coming from before I could say this, so you aren’t going to think that I was in favor of keeping it the way it was, but its only natural that they knew their kids better, they knew their situation, and not only that, they relate better, but it still had to go. I didn’t know until I became the Superintendent, and you know, I thought, Booker Reeves and I were really good friends, I know we were good friends, we had them to our house, and we exchanged Christmas cards, and all, even long after I left, but he didn’t tell me until after I became the Superintendent that Jefferson School did not get the same supplies and equipment that the other schools did.

LS: We have been very interested in that idea, that they actually had different sets of books even. Not even the level of the supplies, but the actual education was different.

GT: Yes.

LS: And we didn’t know who made those decisions...
GT: And I should have been aware of this, before then, but yet if nobody is going to tell you, and you are not prying into...you have to be careful when you are a central administrator that you are there to help, and you are there to evaluate. But you must not overstep bounds. Had Booker come to me, had he felt comfortable coming to me, and I am sure the reason he didn’t was because of the Superintendent that was currently making decisions, which really bothered me, which really, really upset me. But I was also upset by the fact that that building was really substandard. It was dark, the classrooms were not conducive to anything. It was...the noise levels...just walking down the hall. They had the worst excuse for an auditorium. And these other places had these gorgeous places. It was totally unfair to have that. And so, I would love to have done away with the building, but you know when you are building middle schools, and then after that they had to build a high school... Um so there’s...you can’t say you’ve got the luxury of doing it justice, it still needs to be stated that it’s sub-standard. But anyway, it really bothered me because I thought you know Clark was old, Venable was not new, but they were nothing in comparison. And, you know, I’m sure don’t have to be an educator to know that surroundings are very conducive to learning. You could put the best teacher in that situation, and she can not do nearly what that same teacher can do where learning is much more conducive than before.

LS: Did you know that the same architecture firm designed all three of those buildings?

GT: No.

LS: Within a few years of each other?

GT: No.

JT: Clearly it was deliberate.

GT: Oh my God!

LS: Isn’t that surprising?

GT: Appalling! That they would deliberately do this.

LS: We don’t know if it was a funding issue, or....

GT: Regardless of if it’s funding, it...they put more...I probably was the last person that should have been doing this because I was born and raised in Ironmountain, Michigan...and there were no blacks there. And I went to the University of Michigan, and the blacks who were there had more money and cars than I did. This is my orientation to this, and then to come to this thing? I know the first week we moved here in September or October, so nobody had done this before, and I thought this is kind of strange, but you know we ought to have something social, so we invited all the principals, and, um, a few administrative help that was there in the central office to a Christmas party at our house. And, Booker Reeves called me...he never could call me George...to
the day he died he never could call me George...he said, “I want you to know that we really appreciate being invited, but if we come, several of the others will not come. And I think you ought to have that choice.” And I said, “Look, that’s their decision. I don’t care who comes and who doesn’t come. We are not changing our...” And three of them did not come. They refused to do this. They absolutely refused to come where any...and it wasn’t Booker. Everybody got along fine with this guy, and really respected him, but I didn’t understand prejudice, because I had not been around it enough I guess to...I can’t see denying your own kids...hurting your own kids because you feel so strongly about something. A really dear friend of mine, loved her ‘til the day she died, and she and Booker were good friends. But when Booker went to her house, they talked on the porch. If he delivered something. And I must say before she died, she did get rid of that, which made me think it is possible. You are not asking something impossible. Her family went back for generations, and she did get to the point where they were socially together and everything else going on. So it was possible. But...

JT: On that note, when the schools integrated, and um, a certain number of African-American teachers went to teach at Lane, how did you choose those teachers, and how did it work? How did you integrate them into the system, and get those teachers to work together, and cooperate? Was there any kind of structure or ...?

GT: No. Well, you see Lane stayed the way it was because it was the elementary schools. Burley was still going on because we owned that with the county, so that wasn’t affected. So we didn’t have to do anything with...well you see before these schools were open the kindergarten through eighth grade I think or something, and then ninth grade on, although I am not quite certain of that any more. So it was the elementary. What I did was that once I had that cadre of these white teachers who agreed to work at McGuffey, I could put new teachers, when they were hired, they were hired with the understanding now, “make sure you know this is where you are going to go. And I guarantee you this principal is good, or better than any we’ve got, but you’ve got to know this.” But the saving grace was to get that group of resident white teachers so that I didn’t have to put in... you know how unfair that would have been to hire only brand new, well not brand new, but only outside teachers to come in and do this thing.

JT: So, Booker was the only black in McGuffey. I mean principal.

GT: Yes. We did put some black teachers there. Oh, yeah. And what I did was, I took them and put some in each of the other white schools.

JT: Now how did they respond to that? The black teachers?

GT: They seemed to...you see when you look at where they are coming from, I am sure, and I wasn’t close enough that I would be able to talk with them about it, I’m sure they had divided feelings. They believed in it, they thought it should be done. But again they were comfortable where they were. Things were working fine for them, and to be put in a new situation where you weren’t sure... Now some of the principals, I had two or three, who really welcomed it, they believed in it. There were two or three others...long time
elementary principals, who would just as soon never have this happen in the first place. But I left, remember, shortly after all we did...I had one year when all this worked out...So I can’t tell you from that point on how it worked out, but I had no evidence that anybody was deliberately...in fact I suspect that people bent over the other way, to be fair. But again, I had great empathy with those teachers who were displaced because you know they were put in a brand new environment. I forgot to tell you too that one of the reasons we did all of this with no upset, no marching, no revolting of any kind was that Eugene Williams, you know Eugene?

JT: Yeah.

GT: He was the head of the NAACP. And the former Superintendent, I don’t...I don’t think had anything personally against him, but really found it difficult to...well, he did not agree, he did not see why things couldn’t be the way they were. But, when I got along all right with Eugene, and I forgot to tell you this too. I don’t like being called Mr. Tremontin. Never did. When I was teaching high school, the kids couldn’t call me by my first name, but they used to call me Big George. So that was half way. It wasn’t George. And they never once said George. But Big George. So, anyway, I told my...so I use first names with everybody. And I said when I came, you know, if you tell me not to I won’t, but otherwise it is just natural for me, and I’ve got to do what’s natural. And so, um, I call you by your first name, too. And, I was hear for a year, and Booker came to me and said, “I don’t want you to be upset, because it is alright, but you know, white people never call black people by their first names. And I said God Booker, I’ve done this for a year and you’re supposed to be my friend and you didn’t tell me, and he said its not a problem because they know you’re doing it to everybody else. And its not showing disrespect, in fact if you did something different with them than what you did with other people, he said I’m not telling you this so you’ll quit but I just want you to be aware of it. But you know here’s this Yankee coming in and doing what comes naturally, and finding out that one doesn’t do that down her. But back to Eugene. We worked together extremely well, he trusted me and I trusted him. I’m sure he was under great pressure to push me work faster, make me move more, and do more things. But I kept him informed of everything I did and why. And asked him to help me and asked him to give me ideas, which he did. Had I not had the support of him, to handle, because he obviously had relationships with these people that I never could have or anything and they didn’t know me and rightly so, they’re history would not have said this guy comes in he sounds good but there’s no saying in what he’s going to do. So I credit Eugene as much as anybody in the whole city with making integration of the schools work.

LS: Do you remember any other groups or assembled people that had an impact one way or another that came to you... positive or negative on the issue rather than individuals but organizations or groups?

GT: No, not groups but there were individuals who did.

JT: Were they both black and white or just...?
GT: No, the black, I think there must have been some kind of agreement in the black community to let Eugene handle that. I do know that just before I resigned, Eugene came with another four or five black men and said, we don’t want you to go. What can we do to make you stay? But we can’t make it worse for you, to come out publicly and do this. And I said, its really at a point where there really is no point in my staying, I really do appreciate this, but its better for all of us if we don’t do this. I don’t remember their names at all, but it was a whole delegation of them who came. There were also, you know it wasn’t the whole staff either, Marian Trevilian who taught first grade at Venable for a 180 years wrote the student newspaper and everything else saying you know this is ridiculous what he is trying to do. The principal of Burnley-Moran came to me and said you know, I have absolutely no complaint, I’m not going to write letters to the newspaper, I will talk to anybody on the board and say the job you’re doing and how I approve of everything you’re doing... and there were a lot of individual people who came. I’ll tell you something else. It’s so strange, you just don’t know where people are coming from. There was a teacher at the high school and he kept coming to me complaining because he was ding more things out of the system because he was new and young and excited and doing this and was under great pressure to curtail that. And I said well you know you’ve got to deal with the principal and he said I’ve been to him and nothing’s happening and he won’t do anything and he won’t listen to me and I said let me see what I can do, working through him. And so I did, but I might as well have saved my breath for all the good that it did, but at least I followed through on it. So when all this broke lose, he made an appointment, this teacher did, and he came to see me and he said I want you to know that I have no quarrel with anything you’ve done at all, you’re doing perfectly fine but its what you’ve done to all these other people that makes me oppose you. And I said, I can’t believe what you’re saying! You’re first hand experience is not what you’re using as a basis? You’re listening to people with other agendas? And I said thanks I just don’t need it, goodbye. It was a twilight zone because nothing was logical, you couldn’t go on the basis of what’s sensible to do in this situation. It wasn’t sensible to ask those white teachers to stay, it was sensible to have the people insisting on doing this, to be so glad that they’re part of it now. All the way along it was a very weird time and God love her, Lucille Michie who is no longer alive, never forgave me. She kept baskets of stuff from all of this. She said you’ll have to write a book, you’ve absolutely got to write all this stuff down. Well, I’m raising kids and I’m teaching and … this is just an aside to show you how weird this world is. After teaching at the University of Rochester, a friend of the gal who was in charge of placement called me and asked me to come down to Long Island and I went as the Superintendent of Instruction and stayed three years and he quit and moved and now I’m the superintendent again for nine years with the Board insisting, they didn’t hire anybody for nine months and I said, look, this has happened to me before I’m not very bright but I’m bright enough to know that once burned you don’t do this again. And most people in school administration would give ten years of their life to have one opportunity to do this, but I suppose if I’d wanted that job then none of this would have happened. But anyway, I wish I had now, kept some of these things and made some sense of this as it went along. Had Lucille been alive longer — she was still alive when we moved back here in ‘85, 5 or 6 years — because I’m not sure that many people would believe this, a lot of it is pretty unbelievable.
LS: Well, that’s partly why we feel strongly about interviewing people who were involved at the moment because I don’t think that a lot of the people who were born in the ‘70s and 80s have any concept of how different the world was back then. And don’t know how hard this was and if we don’t know history we’re bound to repeat it, you know if they don’t understand how entrenched these values were...

GT: I don’t argue with those who say we have a long way to go, but I frankly never once believed that we would be where we are today with what happened in the middle of the 1960s. I truly didn’t and I think much of it has to do with, Charlottesville is not anything like it was in 1960, nothing like it was, I think it’s the growth and all these new people coming in and to diminish the power of all these other things and plus people had been used to living like this, but it was a very close knit, politically socially and everything else city and you know, I never knew why did this Superintendent want me? He knew I was the University of Chicago, that I believed that all kids have the same right to learn and they can do it if you arrange it so that they can do it at the pace that’s right for them. It’s not impossible. You know, later on I had class group instruction, third fourth fifth sixth grade teachers in one big room, they could shut doors and open them up and the kid was in reading in the third grade and did geography in the fifth grade. And would like math, you see would not have kindergarten to do this. It’s not impossible. I just don’t know why it was so hard of them to understand something like this. It was like stepping back in history. In fairness there was some plusses. When we first came and the downtown mall was a main street and we went into one of these stores and my wife was looking at something and these not elderly but middle aged white ladies could sense that we were knew and would come up and say “Is there something we can do?” and when you’d ask directions they’d say... oh! let me show you... the graciousness...and today? [laughter]

JT: Looking back from today’s world would you have done things differently? How do you feel about the difference between the possibility...err... had things gone the other way and African Americans had had a more equal education but in their own system, how do you think that would have worked compared to desegregation? Do you think that would have been a possibility?

GT: The only thing I would have liked was to have been given more time, because I was proving, I would like to have had a few more black teachers, that I was so sure would work perfectly that they were that talented that I didn’t have to use this poor one speech correctionist to prove my point. And I’m not talking about ‘all deliberate speed’ like they were doing, to drag this out. I wish I’d had two or three years because I really think it could have come about much better. I would not, given the circumstances that I had, I would not have done anything differently, even knowing the outcome, no. It doesn’t mean that we did everything right, but we planned it we involved people, when we built these middle schools I said to the architects, “You’re going to have to sit down with all the librarians, they’re going to tell you what they need, you’re going to sit down with the janitor, with the custodians, you’re going to sit down with the secretaries, don’t ask me. I’m not sitting there working day by day. So it’s not a theory of involving people it just made sense to do it. No, I wouldn’t have changed any of that and I would not have gone
slower with trying to improve the instruction, because it was going to come to a point anyway where these people who had been in power were not going to give it up. Umm.

One of the things, I had some English teachers coming to me saying, D’you understand I have five English classes? And I’ve got like 30 kids and I have to have a study hall?

Whereas the band director teaches three classes a day and not one study hall. So I went to the building principal and said how do you justify this and he said you don’t, but I can’t ask them to take a study hall, but why not if the other teachers are teaching all these kids! And that band director was one of those who went to his church, who went to the state superintendent who said this guy’s got to go. And did I know that when I did it? Yes I did, and would I do that again? Yes, I would do that again. Because, either you join them, or you fight them.

[Tape, Side B.]

LS: I was curious if anybody who came into the second round of School Board while you were Superintendent of City Schools ran on a platform of opposing integration?

GT: No. They were opposed to that. What they...the new school board that came in, their wives had, were very close to the teachers at Lane. And so they came in with the idea that I was doing all kinds of things at Lane High School that should not be done. Because their wives told them that they were friends of all these other people that were over here, and again, as I said, there were a lot of people who would have defended me but they are not the kind who will do this publicly on the radio and all this other kind of stuff, they would do it behind the scenes kind of thing. But there was a fairly large group that was opposed to it, but I would say it’s probably not a majority. Because three years earlier, you know, they had a petition to give me this job. But you asked me to say something earlier that I didn’t say, which was that when we left, neighbors said “we have stayed up nights to make sure that there was no cross burning, because we were so worried during this time that it was going to happen.” And, when I came back in 1981, a great many people said, “we really feel now that much of your problem was not just this group at Lane High School, it was your identification with making integration work. And that um you were so identified with it,” and I didn’t do this it was Eugene Williams, and all the principals and teachers who supported it, and parents before I came here did this, so it wasn’t that I did all this, but I got identified with it, primarily because of the title. And, you know, you can’t hate ideas, but you have to hate people. And I think this is what they felt was that.

LS: Perhaps this is why no one else wanted the job?

GT: Yeah,

JT: Do you think also being a northerner had anything to do with it?

GT: Yeah. There are no questions. None at all.
LS: That you were an outsider doing this. Things that a Southerner wouldn’t have done the same job either.

GT: I think a Southerner who wanted to do it, would have been under more pressure than I was, and not able to do this. Um. When I came, because I had all kinds of job offers after I left here, it wasn’t the end for me. I could go any time, I had nothing to loose. So I could go ahead and do some of these things. But again, I felt justified. I did not ask for this job. Remember. They called me. He knew, you know the University of Chicago is not a very conservative institution. And I am not way off the where those guys were by any means, and I was not spouting something way, way out. Because I went to Harvard a couple of summers and stuff and all these people from other countries, they were doing this individualized stuff, they were doing group teaching. So I wasn’t coming with a brand new idea, I was simply bringing what was on the forefront in the educational world. With the understanding that if I came, you are going to support me. I have to be fair to the Superintendent, who hired me, he did support me until he left. He did not turn around, but he also didn’t stay to see the thing through...

JT: Did he leave town?

GT: He left. He went to Richmond, and became… worked for the State Board of Education.

JT: He didn’t retire then.

GT: He’s retired, well he’s dead now. But he didn’t retire for some years after that.

JT: I was wondering about the relationship you might have had with the University? You’d come from a university. So did you have, in your offers to make integration work and make it acceptable, did you lean on people at the University, or did you get support from them? What kind of relationship did you have?

GT: That’s a whole new ball game. Which I have frankly almost forgot. Dick Meade, who was chairman of the board who hired me, worked for the education department. I was fairly close to some of the staff of the education department. They were supporting was I was doing in the instruction line. They asked me to teach during the summer. You know, and I taught one class, but I couldn’t manage more than that, with all that I was trying to do. I hired a person who was not very adequate, and I am not going to name names, and he didn’t work out but he was a pet of the chairman of the education department, who was determined to get him a job, he was working on a Ph.D. And not only was he ineffective at board meetings, which put me in all kinds of bad spots, but I got a call one night from the police department saying “we’ve arrested him on drunk driving, will you come down and bail him out?” I was at a dinner party, and I left to go down and bail him out and try to keep it out of the newspaper, but the reporters went and picked it up anyway. I mean all of this was breaking loose. Oh! I am forgetting a lot of stuff! When all this was breaking loose, they decided, they went to the state education association, and some of the people appointed…they had an investigation. And some of the people, the superintendents they had appointed to do the investigation were people who had applied
for my job and didn’t get it. So they decided to have a mass meeting, and...at Lane High School, and anybody could come and say anything. Well, people got up and said he did this and he did something else. Well, Lucille Michie got up and defended me, but the rest of them...and a lot of the people there were not there to damage but to see what was going on, but this person got up and said “he’s incredibly impossible you have no idea what I have to put up with every day!” And that was just unbelievably bad, you just can’t do it. This is the guy who got me in all this trouble with the board. And bailing him out...Anyway, the dean of education got somebody to come in right away to be the Acting Superintendent, but not a shot, he did nothing to support me. And part of the reason I think was because I wasn’t hiring everybody, every student wife that he wanted. But a lot of his staff were not very fond of him. Didn’t think he was all that great either. And I was much more compatible with all of them. Um. Lillian Hearst was the head of the local education association. Who was a very strong supporter of mine. Great teacher. And she said when this was boiling up, “we have got to go to the NEA because what they are going to do we can’t handle here. Locally, we know the Virginia people are going to fight us on it.” So, she and I went to the NEA. And she said “you’ve got to come in and stop this.” And they said, “Well, we’ve never had an opportunity for the Virginia education association to handle it so we’ve got to force them to do it, because they’d not done this before and we want to see them do this.” Well, of course, you know what happened with this. When the NEA found out what happened, they said, “we can not believe this. We can not believe this. We can not tell you how sorry we are and we’re paying half of your legal fees.” The NEA paid half of the Superintendent’s legal fees against the local teachers’ association so that if you want proof that maybe he’s just making up a story, how...what proof can you get...But and they said, we should have caught it earlier. I could have stopped this. There were between...you know, Eugene, between the supporters I had, insisting the NEA, there was a point at which I could have stopped this, but there was no point in doing it. Because after a certain point...plus the fact that I didn’t want to have to associate with these people any more. Um, that would have been a false victory. And, not only that, but by this time, now. They took a picture of me during this time and put it in the paper and, God help them, they better not use that in my obituary. When I came back, people said “we can’t believe you, you look half of the age you were.” And not that I look young, but when you look at that picture, my God! And my wife got really worried. She really said “you have got to go, this job is killing you. If you stay any longer.” And my kids aren’t going to have a father. So could it have been stopped? Yes. Would I stop it if I had it to do again? Absolutely not. I really think as I look back, there is a reason for everything. There really is. Because you know after I left the association(?) I doubled my salary the first year I was away because we were so underpaid here. So that wasn’t a problem. And you know, a few of my supporters when we did move back, said to me, “Why would you do this? Ever think of moving back?” And I said, “Well, for one thing, I had a whole lot of friends here, really strong friends who went through this thing with me, and the whole city wasn’t bad. I’m not going to live where there aren’t some idiots anyway, so...when I come back, I don’t have to put up with the people any more that I did, but some of them said “I would never go back to a city that did that.”

JT: Well, we’re very happy that you came back so that we could interview you.
GT: Well, I don't know how much help I've been.

JT: No, it's been wonderful. Thank you so much. Sorry we took so much of your time.

End of interview.
George Tramontin, December 10, 2003

(photos by Alexandria Searls)

Jefferson School Oral History Project
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)

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Interviewee __________________________ Date: 12-10-03

Interviewer __________________________ Date: 12-10-03
Interview with
Priscilla Whiting

Interviewers: Jacky Taylor and Liz Sargent
Date: June 9, 2003
Location: 10th Street
Charlottesville, Virginia

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

JT: Can you tell us your full name and address?

PW: My name is Priscilla Whiting, I live at 404 10-1/2 Street in Charlottesville, Virginia.

JT: And, can you tell us where you were born, the date and place you were born?

PW: I was born March 8, 1931 at the University Hospital.

JT: In Charlottesville?

PW: Yes. The University of Virginia Hospital, in Charlottesville.

JT: OK. And how many were in your family growing up?

PW: Seven.

JT: Seven. Boys, girls?

PW: I had five brothers and one sister.

JT: And where did you fit in that family?

PW: The oldest.

JT: You’re the oldest? [nods] And did they go to Jefferson School?

PW: Let me see. I had two brothers that went to Jefferson High School, and one of them left the year it closed. And then I had another brother that went to Jefferson Elementary School. And then he went to high school at Burley.
JT: And how did you, sorry, what years and grades did you attend school at Jefferson?

PW: I spent from First Grade through Eleventh Grade. I started school, I was five, so, it was 1936, and I graduated in 1947.

JT: How did you get to school in the morning?

PW: Walked.

JT: Did you walk with your siblings, or friends, or...?

PW: Yes. Everybody walked to school. Except if it snowed or it rained real hard, my mother would get a taxi.

JT: Oh.

PW: And we would get in, and then as many of the neighborhood kids could pile in.

JT: That’s nice!

PW: They’d pile in! We’d ride to school on top of each other. [they laugh]

JT: So how did you know who was going to call the taxi? Did you...

PW: Oh, my mother called the taxi.

JT: She always was the one to call the taxi...

PW: Yes, she’d get a taxi. For us...

JT: It wasn’t like someone else’s mother would take it in turns, and...

PW: No.

JT: It was always your mother.

LS: What street did you live on that took the taxi from?

PW: Oh, I lived... I grew up on the corner of Tenth and Page.

JT: That’s right. I remember seeing that house. So the kids that you walked to school with, would you call them and say, hey, we’re getting a taxi and come over, or...

PW: Oh, they just knew. Everybody...

JT: They were just walking in the streets...
PW: No, OK, right behind us in the apartment there was four kids going to school.

JT: Wow.

PW: And then my girlfriend in the next-door apartment, she would be going to school. And most of the time, they were in the taxi with us. And sometimes the kids across the street might come and hop in the taxi.

JT: Did you know any high school children who had cars?

PW: No.

JT: No? Do you remember if the city provided any bus transportation?

PW: No.

JT: No. What about for trips or anything?

PW: Oh, for trips, like we would have to pay to ride the bus. If we went on football trips or basketball trips.

JT: Then you'd have to pay?

PW: Yes. We'd have to pay.

JT: Do you remember how much it was?

PW: No I don't.

JT: No. Do you know about the other high schools in town, the white high schools, did they...they had buses did they? To take them to school?

PW: I don’t think they even had buses at Lane when we were going to school. Some of the kids rode the city bus.

JT: Did they? But otherwise they would walk as well?

PW: Yeah. That’s as far as I remember. They didn’t have buses. We didn’t have school buses.

JT: Did you walk with any of the White kids?

PW: No.

JT: Were they coming from a different direction, or...
Well, Venable is right up here, Venable School. And some of the kids going to and from Venable walked past our house on Tenth Street to get up here. Did you get to know any of them?

Well I didn’t really, but my brother did. He and the little boy that used to live off of Eighth Street, off of Eighth and Main up in this section, he’d come by and some days he and my brother would fight. And some days they would play nicely. And, they just had a, I guess an agreeable relationship to an extent. But it would only be after school. Oh, I see, right.

When you’d be going home.

So, you’ve already mentioned that you had friends in the apartment behind you and one across the street. Was the neighborhood filled with kids when you were growing up?

Yes.

What about any businesses near the high school that you might have gone to during recess or anything.

The only building or business that I remember was Scot Dean’s across the street. And he sold food. But my mother didn’t allow us to go over there and buy food, because she… well, my father would give us $.25 a day to buy lunch. And lunch was $.20 and milk was $.05. So that’s what we would have for lunch. And I remember when we were in elementary school, my mother made our lunches.

And we took it. And then sometimes, after we got in high school, we would make our own lunch, and take our quarter and do something else with it.

Oh, clever. What sort of things did you have for lunch?

For lunch? We’d have sandwiches, my mother would make us sandwiches and fruit and have cake or cookies, or something like that.

So, was there anywhere at the school, like a um, what do you call it?

A cafeteria?

Well, I was thinking more of the little place to buy snacks or whatever.

No.
JT: But you could buy food in the cafeteria?

PW: Yes. They always had hot lunch. You’d get hot lunch for $.20.

JT: Twenty cents! What sort of hot lunch, what did they give you?

PW: You’d get vegetables, and cake and everything like a regular dinner.

JT: Nice. And they’d serve a variety of juices or milk, or?

PW: Yes, they’d have juices and milk. You had to pay five cents extra for that.

JT: Do you...getting back to the businesses that were in the neighborhood.

PW: Oh! OK, Scott Dean’s was over there, and then the barbershop was there, and the barbershop is still there.

JT: Oh, right.

PW: Joker’s Barbershop? Yes, that was there. And, my hair was real curly. And I didn’t like my mama to comb it, so I’d go to the barbershop to get my hair cut. She knew the barber, and she’d tell him I was coming and when it was time, I’d leave school one day, and go and get my hair cut.

JT: Oh, that’s nice. And then you’d come home afterwards? She wouldn’t be there?

PW: No!

JT: Because you were in high school!

PW: Yes. Walking was a way of life.

JT: Yes. What about, wasn’t there a pool hall over there as well? I seem to remember seeing it on a map.

PW: I remember the pool hall being down further on Vinegar Hill.

JT: Was it? Did any of the boys go down there and hang out, do you know?

PW: Yes. Oh, Doctor Jackson’s office! You entered it from across the street. You know his house sits right on that corner? OK, the barber shop is here, and...

JT: Is it the white one?

PW: No. It’s the big house that’s right on the corner. The back of it is right next to the barbershop. And the front of it is on Fourth Street. And you used to enter the dentist’s
office on the Fourth Street side. And I went in there one day. And I didn’t want to be stuck with the needle, but he stuck me. And then I got up and went home! [they laugh]

JT: He didn’t do anything to you?

PW: No. By the time I got home he had called my mother and told her she should get me back real fast before the first needle wore off. And he’d give me another one and then he’d do what he had to do. So she carried me back. And she held me in the chair.

JT: Oh, no.

PW: While they stuck the needle in my mouth and then he did what he had to do.

JT: Well, did you get some kind of special treat for having gone through that, or?

PW: Not really, ’cause my mother was upset because I didn’t stay there the first time. [they laugh]

JT: So, um, somebody told me that they used to come home from Jefferson because they lived right around the back of Jefferson and then get twenty-five cents and walk down through Vinegar Hill to the Paramount Theater in the afternoon sometimes. Did you ever do that?

PW: No. We weren’t really allowed to go to the movies during the week, you know, during the school week. Sometimes in the summer time …we would go to the movies, but during those days we’d go to the Jefferson or most likely to the Lafayette. Because they had the cowboy movies and things there. And they kept a serial running. So at the end of each serial episode, they’d leave something to make you want to come back and see it.

JT: Oh, that was clever.

PW: Somebody’d be hanging over a cliff, or…So, during the summer we did that. But, during school time, we only went to the Paramount on Sundays.

JT: On Sundays?

LS: Where was the Lafayette?

PW: It was on Main Street, down there near where the Jefferson Theater is.

JT: What was the…the way that the school looks now, it’s got a big paved parking lot in front. Was it always like that, or was it a lot greener, were there more trees around?

PW: It was more green there, but, see, at first there was a building there. There was the elementary school.
JT: Right.

PW: And when I went to school, that’s...I went to the elementary school. And then the playground...that was where all of that stuff is paved around in that area.

JT: Oh. So the Graded School had a playground? In the back, or?

PW: Uh, huh. I guess that was in the front of it.

JT: On the side may-be?

PW: Yes.

JT: What kind of equipment did you have, do you remember?

PW: Not very well, we had some swings I think, and may-be a see-saw...something like that.

JT: So was the ground dirt, grass, or?

PW: Grass.

JT: Was it?

PW: One thing I remember is in May we would have this exercise, and we would have May Day.

JT: Oh, nice.

PW: And we would wrap the Maypole. And what would happen is, the girls would be given a color and the mothers would go to the store, and buy the crepe paper. And make you a crepe paper dress.

JT: Oh, wow!

PW: And then the strip that you had to do the May pole with, that was the same color as your dress.

JT: Oh, how lovely.

PW: You’d take, well, my mother used to take a slip, take one of your slips, and put this paper on it. And ruffle it up like this.

JT: Do you have any pictures of that?

PW: No.
JT: Ah, that would have been so cool. What about the boys though? Did they participate in that? Or was it just a girl thing?

PW: I just remember most of the girls doing the Maypole.

JT: The boys didn’t have to wear little colored shorts or something that matched.

PW: I don’t remember what it was, but we were in something, and the boys they all wore paper sashes.

JT: Oh, did they?

PW: I don’t know what it was.

JT: Sounds wonderful. Getting inside the school, can you remember your classrooms or did you have a homeroom? Do you remember what it was like inside the building?

PW: Uh, huh. OK. First thing, we were not allowed to go in the front door. You know that’s the door that’s on Commerce Street. We were not...only teachers, and visitors and parents could come in the front door. We had to go in the door...you know right where the parking lot is? We had to go in those doors that were downstairs. And everyone had a homeroom. You had a homeroom, each year that you went to a different grade, you had a different homeroom. I think, I don’t remember who my home room teacher was my first year, but I do remember my senior year, Mr. Howard Johnson was my home room teacher. And his room, we were up on the second floor, when you leave the auditorium area and you go around the hall its on the right. The room, the last room on the right side. That was his homeroom, and that was my homeroom during the senior year.

JT: And then, so you were all kind of gathered in the home room and then you went to the specific classes.

PW: That’s right.

JT: What was it like in the hallways, did they have lots of schoolwork on the walls?

PW: No. You did all your lessons in the classroom.

JT: But did they have pictures up and that sort of stuff?

PW: I really don’t remember.

JT: Were there many people coming and going in the hallways?

PW: No. You had to have a pass for that. A little wooden block that was shaped like a football. And it had “Pass” on it, and if you didn’t have a pass, you better not be caught in the hallway.
JT: What would happen if you didn’t have a pass and you were caught in the hallway?

PW: You would get punished. Some kind of way. Probably write something a hundred times, or stay after school, or do something.

JT: Stay after school in your homeroom?

PW: Depends...no. You stay with the teacher that was punishing you.

JT: So the bathrooms were down the hallway, were they?

PW: Yes.

JT: So you had to get permission to go out and...What about if you were late to school?

PW: If you were tardy? In high school? Well, I don’t even know what they did, because I was late every day when I took physics...I didn’t like my physics...I liked the teacher, but I did not like the way she was teaching me physics. And so that was my first class...

JT: Every day?

PW: Yes. I guess I was a junior that year. Because you took biology...then you took...no you took general science, then biology, then I took physics. I took four sciences. I would just be late for her class every day. I would keep up with the lessons, you know, but I just didn’t like the way she taught...She had to read everything out of the book, like that.

JT: Oh, no. Did she not punish you for being late? Or she kind of understood?

PW: No, she didn’t punish me.

JT: Were there many people who were late?

PW: Very seldom people were late. People didn’t come into school too late.

JT: So there was never any problem with...you know when I think about high school, I think about when I was in high school we used to go out at lunch time and often come back late, and Ooops! You know, I forgot the time, we were shopping, or hanging out at a candy store, and...

PW: Well, we weren’t allowed off the school grounds.

JT: Oh, really! Not at all during the day?

PW: Uh, huh.

JT: Gosh, that’s amazing.
PW: If your parents wanted you, they had to write a note for you to be excused.

JT: So it wasn’t like you could...if you forgot your lunch, didn’t have any money, you couldn’t just run across the street to the store or something, or you weren’t allowed. What happened if you did do that?

PW: I don’t even know, because I never did it! Never got caught!

JT: Never did it and never got caught is two different things! [they laugh] OK, so who was your favorite teacher, then, if you didn’t like the physics teacher?

PW: My favorite teacher taught me sixth and seventh grade. Miss Janie Johnson.

JT: Janie Johnson?

PW: She was a real sweet ticket, she was an old maid, but she was a really good...she taught English.

JT: OK.

PW: She was really a good teacher, and had patience, and I think everybody just loved her. She was a good little teacher!

JT: Was she there a long time?

PW: Yes. She was there before I went, and when I left she was still there.

JT: So that was fifth and sixth grade? What about high school?

PW: In high school? Who was my favorite teacher?

JT: Or, what was your favorite subject?

PW: I always liked math and science.

JT: Did you?

PW: I guess Mr. Page was my favorite teacher, because he was the band instructor. He did a marvelous job with the band, but he taught biology...I took biology under him. And he was different from the other teachers. He could stand in the room, and just like all of it would be in his head. He didn’t need any books.

JT: Didn’t need any books.

PW: Yes. And he was a very good teacher. I liked him.
JT: So he also taught the band?

PW: Yes.

JT: Was that during the day, or did they do that after school?

PW: It was at six in the morning sometimes.

JT: Six o’clock in the mornings?

PW: Six, seven o’clock in the morning. He taught, and then he’d teach it after school. If they were going into something real big, he’d do it in the morning before school.

JT: Like if they had a concert you mean?

PW: Yes. Or they had to go on a trip or something.

JT: Right.

PW: He taught, he taught those kids, OK. We played our football games at the Washington Park. And there weren’t any lights or anything there, so we couldn’t play night games. So then they decided, Coach Smith came and Jefferson had a very good sports program, and they decided to let us have some night games, at Lane field. Mr. Page taught the band to play in the dark! The kids would have flash…you know one of those little small flashlights on their head and they’d have one on each shoe, and they would have them all around the big horns.

JT: So they could see the music?

PW: No! And then they’d do formations. The lights were for the audience.

JT: Oh, so that was for the performance!

PW: Then they played in the dark.

JT: So they must have memorized the music? They obviously knew the music?

PW: Yup.

JT: Sounds wonderful!

PW: A lot of people would come to the football games just to see the band.

JT: Did they have to pay?

PW: What?
JT: Did they pay to come to the football games?

PW: Uh, huh. What we used to get in school was...at the beginning of the school year, you’d buy a season ticket. And that would let you into football games, basketball games, the plays at school, you know you’d have enough tickets in there for all the activities.

JT: Oh, that’s great, so you’d come home and your parents would send you with the money and get a whole...

PW: Yes. Then the next year, they’d had to buy another season ticket.

JT: What about people from outside, say you had somebody visiting who wanted to come to a football game, could they just...?

PW: Oh, they could just buy a ticket for that game.

JT: Did you ever go to the White high school football games, or anything?

PW: I never did.

JT: No. Did they come to yours do you know?

PW: Yes. A lot of White people came to our games.

JT: Did they?

PW: Uh, hm.

LS: So all the parents got a season ticket too? And they came to the games? Was it a big family event?

PW: I don’t think they bought season tickets, because season tickets were not only for the football games but they were for all...

LS: For everything, yes?

PW: Yes, but a lot of the parents, the parents really supported the sports activities.

LS: So it was like a big event? Football games?

PW: Yes.

JT: And they had uniforms, and...?

PW: Oh, yes. Uniforms.
JT: What were the teams that they played?

PW: They would play Maggie L. Walker, they came from Richmond, Armstrong from Richmond, Parker Grey from Alexandria, Addison from Roanoke, Carver from Salem, probably some more, I can’t remember.

LS: And there was a team from Lynchburg, too, right?

PW: Oh, Lynchburg was Dunbar.

LS: Dunbar?

JT: And they would travel here, and then you would go over there sometimes too?

PW: Yes.

JT: When the football team traveled, were they allowed to take extras with them?

PW: Sometimes they would have a bus...that was when we would have to pay to ride the bus.

JT: So were there a number of seats that you know, the fans could...?

PW: Yes. Well, we’d, we’d... they would have a bus separate. We wouldn’t all ride with the football team. They’d have a bus separate. And, sometimes people went to games, but when they had tournaments a lot of times, we had two or three busloads go.

JT: Really? Wow. Did you have to...so you paid for those buses as well?

PW: Yes. You had to pay to ride the bus.

JT: Was there ...what do you call it? Cheerleaders? Was there a cheerleading squad?

PW: Oh, yes. They had cheerleaders!

JT: You weren’t a cheerleader?

PW: No.

JT: Do you know anybody who was a cheerleader?

PW: I think Ida was a cheerleader!

JT: Was she? I could see Ida as a cheerleader.

PW: Ida and Josephine. They played bas...girls’ basketball.
JT: Did they? So there was a girl’s basketball team as well?

PW: Yes, we had a girls’ basketball team. But they played different in girls. Then they played half court.

JT: OK.

PW: Your forwards were at in one end of the court and your guards were in the other. Half court.

JT: I see. So would they travel with that too?

PW: Yes. With the basketball team, because usually what happens is the girls would play first, and then the boys would play after the girls.

JT: Right, so they all went together.

PW: Except when they had tournaments. They would have separate tournaments.

JT: In different places? Or...

PW: Sometimes they would be in the same place. But they were different.

JT: What other sports did they have at Jefferson, basketball, football...?

PW: I guess that’s about all.

JT: Did they play baseball?

PW: I don’t think we ever really had a baseball team. They might have had it...have you talked to Carter Wicks?

JT: Not yet, no.

PW: Yes, they might have had one when he was in school, but I don’t remember a baseball team.

JT: ...You talked about your favorite teacher, Miss Johnson, do you remember how she taught. Did she also walk around, and she had it in her head like Mr. Page, or...

PW: Oh, she had it in her head. She was a good teacher. She’d walk around...See because we were sixth and seventh graders...and we were still bad, so she would walk around and check on us, and tell us to be quiet and everything.

JT: Did you get much homework?
PW: We always had homework.

JT: So you came home and...

PW: Didn’t always do it.

JT: Hah! What happened if you didn’t do it?

PW: One day Mr. Page caught me coming home with no books. I had left all of my books at school in the locker. And the next day, every question that came up, he asked me.

JT: Hah! He knew you hadn’t done it!

PW: But I knew the answers.

JT: Did you? Well that was good.

PW: Yes, I had a fairly easy time in school.

JT: Did you? So you didn’t find it too difficult, or?

PW: Uh, Uh.

JT: But it was rewarding?

PW: Yes. I liked to go to school. One year I didn’t miss a day. And if I did miss, when I did, if I did miss a day it was because I was sick and then my mother was a diabetic. And sometimes she had to go to the hospital and I would miss some days.

JT: So, if she went in the hospital, what...did you, were you...?

PW: I stayed at home. And, took care of Shelane and Ursie. My little brother...because I am thirteen years older than Sheelie. So I would stay at home.

JT: So was he going to the elementary school by the time you were a senior? Not quite...

PW: Yes.

JT: Was he?

PW: No, Shelane wasn’t. Ursaline either. Because I graduated when I was sixteen. So Sheelie was still three and Ursaline was five.

JT: Did your mother work?
PW: No, she went to... My mother got tricked. After the... she said after everybody’s done with school, she wanted a job. But she said she had to be at home when we left every morning and be at home for everybody when they got home. She had to be at home when we left, and she had to be there when you came back. So she had to have a job with certain hours. So I don’t think she was really expecting to [laughs]... but then she got a job at the University. She worked for Dr. Minor and Dr. Drake. They were lung specialists. She worked... she would go and, like she would stay in the office while the secretary and everybody went to lunch, she would be like the lunch reliever, and maybe do a few other little things. It’s a go get???

JT: Right. So she just worked a short number of hours.

PW: Yes. She worked from 10 to 2.

JT: Oh, that’s great. Nice. We’d like to do that. Were most of the mothers, did they mostly do that sort of thing? Or...

PW: Most of them worked.

JT: Did they?

PW: My girlfriend, her father had died, so her mother had to work. And then, one of our girlfriends, her mother worked at the Paramount Theater.

JT: Oh, really? Who was that?

PW: Tula, well we called her Tula. Her name is Harriet. Oh, she’s in that picture over there.

JT: Oh, I’ll have to have a look.

LS: Did you or your classmates work, because some of the people we’ve spoken to actually had jobs at different places.

PW: Yes, some of them of them worked. I went to work when I was a senior. It was a dress shop downtown called Smart and Thrifty. And I worked in the... me and Grafton Payne. He was the class behind me. But Grafton and I worked down in the store. We’d unpack the clothes, and put them on the hangars. Most of them you had to put the tags on, and that’s the kind of stuff you’d do if you went to work after school.

JT: So you’d just, you’d go straight from school? What did you do with all your books? Did you have books that you brought home every day?

PW: Sometimes I brought my books home, sometimes I didn’t.

JT: So if you went to work, what did you do with the books?
PW: Oh, I’d carry them.

JT: You’d just carry them with you. Did you have lockers in school?

PW: Yes. We had lockers.

JT: So you could leave stuff. If you needed to. The text books that you had. Did they provide those in the school?

PW: No.

JT: You had to buy them? So did everybody have books, or did you sometimes share with other people?

PW: I think everybody mostly had books.

JT: Did you?

PW: They’d sell them at the school.

PW: As far as I remember, we’d get our books at school.

JT: So there was like a distributor or something that would come at the beginning of the year?

LS: Kenneth’s mother said that someone offered to give her the year ahead’s books for one of her children, and she noticed that the books were different and she was a White lady, and so we tried to get into why were the books different, and where did people get the books. You know we thought that was kind of strange.

PW: Yes. Well I don’t know whether the White kids got different books or not, because I never did see them. But I know we got them new, because my mother didn’t like us to get old books, because she’d feel that some of the pages would be out or something. And so we got new books, and then sometimes...see we were, in school we were all two grades ahead of each other, cause we were all...See because like I graduated in ’47, my brother didn’t graduate until ’49. And my other one he left Jefferson. And so we couldn’t use the books like that. So, but ...most of our books were all...

JT: Brand new. So what did you do with the old one?

PW: Sold them to somebody else.
JT: Oh, you did?

PW: Yes. You used to sell all your old books. Some of them, some of them, like my literature books I liked them, and, because they had stories in them and stuff, so you would keep them.

JT: Do you remember some of the stories in literature that you read?

PW: What is that? The guy with the albatross around his neck? Silas Marner. And then we had Shakespeare, "As You Like It," and stuff like that. It was mostly...you know, and then we had different poems and...

JT: Did you have to write poetry as well?

PW: With Mrs. Sellars you had to write everything.

JT: With Mrs. Sellars you had to write everything? Was she strict?

PW: Yes.

JT: Was she?

PW: She was...I know, she made us learn Patrick Henry's speech.

JT: Wow! Did you have to all recite it in the classroom?

PW: Yes.

JT: Standing up? Or what?

PW: You're standing up, and...because you had to stand so you’d know how to stand and hold your hands and do all of that.

JT: Did she make you do that individually, or were you all...?

PW: Yes, individually, you had to do that.

JT: So was there a lot of learning to speak in front of a group of people?

PW: Yes, we used to learn it in school.

JT: So would you read papers out and that sort of thing?

PW: Sometimes. But...I know we used to write, one year we wrote Christmas stories. And then she had some of the students to read their stories.
JT: Oh, that’s nice. Did she give you an idea of how to start the story or what to base the story on?

PW: No, you had to do it yourself!

JT: Just think of anything you wanted to think of. What about when you read a piece of literature, did you have a discussion in the classroom? Or...

PW: Yes.

JT: And people were quite comfortable doing that?

PW: Yes.

JT: So that was encouraged, to speak up and what about if you didn’t like the book, was it ok to explain?

PW: You just, when she called on you, you better be prepared to answer a question.

JT: Whether you liked it or not.

PW: Yes.

JT: Where was the library?

PW: Do you know that room that we used to have our meetings in, that was the library.

JT: Oh, that’s right.

PW: And the library, as far as I can remember, I don’t know whether everyone remembers this, but when you went to the eighth grade, you had to take a class in library science to learn how to use the library. You learned all about what the numbers represented. So you when you were there you knew where to look for your books.

JT: That’s a good idea.

PW: And then I learned to respect the library …that you couldn’t go in there and play and make noise and stuff like that. Mrs. Faulkner was the librarian.

JT: Mrs. Faulkner?

PW: And, she was very strict about that when you came to the library. If you got, if a teacher sent you to the library for being bad, then you couldn’t just sit, you had to go get a book and read it.

JT: Interesting. So how often did you go with the class to the library?
PW: I think... mostly after you got in high school, you were kind of left on your own. I guess that’s why they gave you the classes.

JT: Right.

PW: So you would know how to use it, and you would on your own.

JT: Do you think ... did the students tend to go often? Did they like using the library? Did you have a good number of books?

PW: Oh, yes. We had books. And then sometimes your lessons required you to use the library.

JT: Right, that’s where you did your research? What about the library downtown?

PW: I don’t remember going to the library downtown.

JT: Really? So the Jefferson School library was pretty well stocked with the stuff you needed?

PW: Yes, we had encyclopedias and books and stuff.

JT: That’s great. Where did you have lunch did you say?

PW: They had a cafeteria downstairs in the basement.

JT: So did you have sessions of different... sort of different grades would come in at different times? And was there a monitor?

PW: Yes, see a teacher was always in charge. Because you lined up in the hall, and the kids would go through the line, and go get your lunch.

JT: Was it noisy in the cafeteria?

PW: Yes.

JT: Did you get into trouble? Because I know here they switch the lights on and off, flashing them if you are making too much noise. And everybody suddenly it’s very quiet. Was it like that?

PW: I guess it was a little noisy, but they hadn’t developed light switching when we were in there. [laugh]

JT: Do you remember which courses were offered and which were elective and which were required.
PW: English was required ... we had to take general science, and I think we had to take algebra. I know the first year in high school they had ... the required classes. And we had to take Home Economics. Half of the term was for sewing, and half of the term was cooking.

JT: Did the boys do that as well as the girls?

PW: No. They took Shop.

JT: OK.

PW: We had a shop downstairs. Boys went to shop.

JT: So they did woodwork and metalwork? Or?

PW: Yes, they made bookcases and different things.

JT: Oh, nice. For the school? Or to take home?

PW: No, to take home,

JT: Did they have to pay for the equipment?

PW: I really don’t know.

JT: What about when you did cooking? Did you bring the ingredients from home?

PW: No.

JT: They supplied them at the school? Really?

PW: We had to buy our material and patterns and things for sewing. Yes.

JT: But not for cooking?

PW: No, I don’t remember that.

JT: But you could take the food you made home?

PW: No, we’d eat it up.

JT: You ate it there. [laugh] What about when there were school events. Did you ever make food for different school events? Or was that brought in from somewhere else?

PW: I don’t think we had many events that we had food.
JT: No? Did you have events where they brought potluck? Families?

PW: That was when they...if something went on and the parents came, then we would have a potluck, but I don’t ever remember having to take food to school.

JT: What about the football games, somebody told me that the economics class would make food for them, and then some of the girls would serve it to them?

PW: I don’t remember that.

JT: You don’t remember that. So it wasn’t that special. Tell me about learning history. Did you learn about African-American history?

PW: Yes. We had...we always had African-American history, especially during February. We had African-American history.

JT: Black history month?

PW: Yes.

JT: Did you have special events that went along with learning different...?

PW: We’d have a probably a thing in the auditorium.

JT: Like a...?

PW: A little play or something like that.

JT: And who acted in the plays?

PW: The students.

JT: Were they chosen or did they volunteer to...?

PW: Volunteered to be chosen.

JT: I like that. Did the parents come to those events, or were they more just for the school?

PW: Sometimes, if they had them at night, the parents could come.

JT: But as an activity to learn a specific period in history, were they just for...

PW: Most of the time they would have them in the daytime.

JT: ...Apart from the economics and shop, were there
I was just asking if there any other classes that were different that girls took? That boys
didn’t take.

PW: Oh, there were no classes different, but the girls had their own physical ed. class, and the
boys had their own physical ed. class.

JT: So there was...did they have it at a different time, or was there a gym teacher for girls
and a gym teacher for boys?

PW: There was a gym teacher for girls and a gym teacher for boys.

JT: Who was the gym teacher for girls?

PW: Miss Pleasance.

JT: Miss Pleasance. Did she teach something else as well?

PW: Probably so, but I don’t even remember what it was!

JT: What kinds of things did you do in gym?

PW: Oh! Jumping jacks. [laugh] I hated it. And then, run. I can’t say it was really track but
we’d run. She’d have it measured off around the school, and we’d have to run.

JT: Around the school?

PW: Yes. Once a year...during the year we’d do exercise and we’d play basketball and
volleyball, or something like that. And then once a year they had the physical fitness
tests.

JT: Oh.

PW: And you had to do so many pull-ups, and so many push-ups...And then you had to run so
far. And do things like that.

JT: So you did the push-ups and the pull-ups in the gym?

PW: Yes.

JT: Where was the gym originally?
PW: I think that’s where they put that ramp and made downstairs to upstairs. It was...See, there used to be two floors over on that side of the building. But now I think you just go in and you’re on the ramp, and there’s only one floor.

JT: That’s interesting.

PW: Yes. But downstairs the boys had their locker room. We didn’t have a locker room. The girls didn’t have a locker room.

JT: Why was that?

PW: Because we were girls!

JT: Different treatment, huh?

PW: Yes. The boys had a locker room, and then Home Ec classes were downstairs. The locker room was there, this way, and the Home Ec room was this way.

JT: In gym, did you have to change into something different?

PW: Sometimes we did.

JT: Where did you change?

PW: In the bathroom.

JT: Were the girls’ bathrooms bigger than the boys’ bathrooms?

PW: I don’t even know that.

JT: I was just thinking if they had a locker room, then...

PW: Their locker room was different from the bathroom. The locker room was...I never went in there so I don’t know what it was. [laugh]

JT: OK.

LS: I’m just going to ask a little bit about grades, I guess. Did you guys get report cards?

PW: Yes, we got report cards.

LS: And did they get sent home to your parents to get signed?

PW: Yes, they required the parents to sign them.

LS: You got to see them too, though before your parents?
PW: We got them home.

LS: And, was there an honor roll or any way of saying that certain kids...

PW: Yes, we had an honor roll. You had to get an “A” or “B” to be on the honor roll. If you got a “C” you couldn’t be on the honor roll.

LS: So all “A”s and “B”s, and then were you automatically on the honor roll with that?

PW: Yes.

LS: Yes, so it wasn’t like there was a percentage or a curve or anything like that?

PW: No.

LS: Did kids actually, did they fail classes, too? Were there “F”s as well as “C”s and “D”s?

PW: There were “F”s.

LS: There were “F”s. Did anybody have to repeat classes?

PW: Yes, sometimes they had to repeat classes.

LS: When did they, would they repeat them?

PW: The next year.

LS: No summer school then?

PW: No.

LS: Did anybody get a lot of “F”s and have to quit school, or drop out of school?

PW: I can’t tell you that because I don’t really know.

LS: You don’t know anybody who had that happen to them?

PW: No.

LS: Were there kids that ...a lot of kids went on to college after Jefferson High School?

PW: Quite a few did.

LS: Yes? What were some of the schools that people...?

PW: They went to Virginia State, and they went to Hampton, and Howard.
LS: Did you go to college after Jefferson?

PW: No, because I was sixteen years old and I wanted to go to nursing school. And at that time you couldn't go to nursing school unless you were eighteen. And so I didn't go, I didn't go to college until I was 40.

JT: Forty? Good for you!

LS: Where did you go to college.

PW: See, I got married and traveled...Fred was in the Army. And I traveled around with him, and then when he retired, then I went back to school.

JT: That's great. Good for you.

LS: Did you go from here? From PVCC? Or...

PW: No, I went, I was in Norfolk, and I went to Tidewater Community College.

JT: Was that hard going back when you were older?

PW: Not...no. For a lot of older people it was, but I think for me, because I had been moving around and associating with different people and whatever, and when I went to school I just got along with the kids. A lot of older people couldn't get along with the kids. But I got along with the kids. And sometimes, they were looking at me like I was still...

JT: One of them.

PW: One of them. [laugh]

JT: Did you have children?

PW: I had a son, but he died.

JT: Oh, I'm sorry. That's a shame.

LS: Did you end up studying nursing there? Or what did you study?

PW: No, I will when I...it was hard to get into nursing classes and they were all full, and when I talked to the counselor, he said, "Why don't you take social services? Because a lot of their classes paralleled." And that's what I did, and then after I took...I just decided to stay with that.

JT: Did you work as ...in your field then later?

PW: Oh, yes. I worked, I mean I worked for social work, I worked for Head Start.
JT: Oh, did you?

PW: Uh, huh.

JT: In Charlottesville?

PW: Uh, huh.

JT: Oh, that's great.

LS: Most of the kids in the school, I know it was predominantly a city school, but did you have county, any county kids at Jefferson?

PW: Well, a lot of county kids came to Jefferson School. When we had our reunion, there was this doctor. He was from Esmont. And he said, but his mother was working for someone living in Charlottesville, so his mother used her employer's address so he could go to Jefferson School, and it was...Fred lived in, Fred's home was in the county, near Crozet, and his brother went to city schools. Quite a few people went to city schools.

LS: Did they have to walk too?

PW: No. Well they had to furnish their own transportation.

LS: Right. Do you think they paid a fee like I know now you can pay?

PW: I don't think they paid anything.

LS: So they just came to the city schools. And that was fine, like it all...

PW: I don't know whether the people knew it, or what, but I just know some of them went to school there.

JT: Do you know why they chose to come to Jefferson instead of going to the county?

PW: Well, the doctor said at the time, he was a going to school, that they didn't have a high school in Esmont. See the county didn't have a high school for a long time.

LS: Because it seems to me this is a very, the school is built on very tight community where a lot of people live close by each other and knew each other very well, and then there would have been these other kids who didn't know everybody as well, and I didn't know if they felt uncomfortable or if they stood out? Or, if you guys even noticed...

JT: Right, that they weren't from the neighborhood or something.

PW: I don't remember that. I know there were certain kids we used to tease and stuff, but.
LS: That’s normal for everybody.

PW: Yes, and it wasn’t because they came from the county. [laugh] See, OK, we used to live, they used to call this area The Heights. And we were up there, and then they...like out on Ridge Street. We used to call Ridge Street – “plum nelly.”

JT: Plum nelly?

PW: Plum out of the city and nelly out of the state.

JT: What?

LS: Nearly out of the state, so far away that it was...

PW: Because it was so far away...

LS: So you all graduated in eleventh grade, not twelfth grade. Was that normal that everybody graduated in eleventh grade.

JT: They didn’t have twelfth grade.

PW: As far as I know it was eleventh grade.

LS: I’ve heard that from other people, I just...now we have twelfth grade and I don’t know when that changed. Or...

PW: Oh, it changed when they moved to Burley, then they added it.

LS: When you graduated, did you have a special ceremony, and...

PW: Oh, of course, we had baccalaureate service, we had class night, and then we had the day we got the diplomas, graduation.

LS: Did you wear special dresses?

PW: We had caps and gowns.

LS: Did you guys have parties, or how did you celebrate?

PW: Oh, we had parties, because, we had the prom. The prom came first.

JT: Where did you have the prom?

PW: In the auditorium of Jefferson School.

JT: Oh, OK. Did you decorate the place?
PW: Yes. We'd take all the chairs out. The year I graduated, we had, no the year before because the juniors were responsible for...

JT: For the next year?

PW: Yes. We had teenie white lights all around and then we made big yellow flowers, and we had streamers and things on the ceiling.

JT: And you had music?

PW: Oh, yes. We had a band.

JT: You had a live band?

PW: Uh, huh.

JT: Do you remember who the band was?

PW: Probably Son Samson, or some of his relatives.

JT: Son Samson, he was quite well known wasn't he? Around here?

PW: Yeah. His whole family was into music, his brothers...And then he was in the band in school.

JT: Oh, he was in the band at school, what did he play?

PW: Trombone. And then he belonged to the Colored Music [????] He taught music at Albemarle High School.

LS: Did others of your classmates come back to Jefferson to teach, or did they teach around the area after you finished school?

PW: Leilia Brown was my classmate, but she went away and she came back to teach. Let me see, who else came back? Mrs. Reeves, and Mrs. Robinson her sister-in-law, and Mrs. Reeves husband, Booker Reeves, they came back, and DuBois Johnson.

JT: He came back and taught? Did he, I didn’t know that?

PW: Uh, huh. And, who else can I think of?

JT: He didn’t mention that when I talked to him. He said he went away and was in the Army. That right? Or did he have a brother? Oh, you’re talking about the brother who coached, right?

PW: Yes, his brother came back to teach, it must be Waldo then.
JT: Yes.

PW: Yes, Waldo. Who else came back? Oh, Miss [????] I don’t whether she could [????] I think she was. I think Miss Fleming was from here too. And she came back. There might be more, but at the moment I can't think.

LS: That sounds like a lot of people actually. Did they, were they able to get a teaching education at Virginia State, or were there other schools?

PW: They could get a teaching education at Virginia State and at Hampton.

JT: And they came back to Charlottesville because they liked the community? Or they had family?

PW: I guess.

JT: Its nice that they all came back, they must have really liked being at Jefferson. Do you think?

PW: Jefferson was a good school. Its...It, we were, we had a chemistry lab, we had lots of things that other Black schools, going around to other Black schools, that they didn’t have in their schools. We had a very good program, and a real good building. That building, the first part from the auditorium, that section, that was built in 1926. And then when the school got so big, that’s when they added the rest of it, and if you go in that building now, you can see where they must have been a long time ago...

JT: Did they, you said they expanded the building when the school grew, so did they have certain grades in one part of the building, or was it certain classes? Or how did they?

PW: OK, when I went to fifth grade, you went to elementary school through the fourth grade, then, when you got to fifth grade, you came over to Jefferson, and the rooms around the auditorium were the grammar school rooms.

JT: So those were grades five to seven.

PW: Uh, huh. Each class had two classrooms. Yes.

LS: How many kids were in your class, like in a grade?

PW: About 50 kids graduated with me.

LS: Fifty, wow, that’s big.

JT: So, how many in a class, like, you know, individual. How many classes in one grade?
PW: Well, it was, if you take the elementary school, each class had two rooms. They had two rooms of seventh graders.

JT: Oh I see. And how many kids in a class?

PW: I guess 50 or a little less.

LS: Would that be 25 in each classroom?

PW: Yes.

LS: That's pretty big.

JT: Did the teacher have problems with discipline at all with so many kids?

PW: Not very long.

JT: No. Not very long?

PW: Because they'd tell on you.

LS: Did you have to go to the principal if you were in trouble.

PW: We had...?? My brother, this one right here. I'm four years older than him.

JT: What's his name?

PW: His name is Henry, when he was in school. [a visitor arrives at the house, short discussion ensues] I'm getting ready to tell you about my bad brother. When he went to school, the only thing he wanted to do was to play football, all day long. So he would, he was in grammar school, he was in I guess the sixth grade. And he would stay out and play football with the high school kids all the time. And the coach liked him, so he wouldn't tell on him. But somebody would tell on him, and they would send notes home. And he knew when the notes were coming, so he'd come and steal them out of the mailbox. [laugh] And then I would write him excuses and sign my mom's name.

JT: No! So your mother never knew?

PW: Oh, he got caught, we got caught. One morning, Daddy was at home, and they called the house, he didn't send them a note, they must of gotten suspicious about the notes. So they called at the house, and Daddy happened to be at home. So he went down to school and he whipped Henry in front of the high school kids, and that fixed that little problem.

JT: He what?

PW: He whipped him, he took his belt and whipped him there in front of the boys.

LS: So, did the principal...did you have a principal of the school?

PW: Yes, Mr. Duncan was principal.

LS: Mr. Duncan. And so when...sometimes kids had to go and visit Mr. Duncan?

PW: Oh, yes, he had to go to the office sometimes.

LS: Did Mr. Duncan have a reputation as, you know, a disciplinarian?

PW: I don't think so, but one thing, when we went to school, the teachers took care of most of the problems.

LS: Oh they did, the teachers did? So it was only serious, really serious cases that had to go to Mr. Duncan. What kind of principal was he do you think?

PW: He was nice.

JT: Did you see much of him in the corridor? I was just at my son...my son just graduated from Buford, and they have a new principal, and he apparently walks down the hallways and stops any kid he sees, and says "Are you motivated today?" So he's very involved with the kids. Was Mr. Duncan?

PW: I guess...well, the times were different. And you knew he was there. We would see him. But as far as doing something like that, no.

JT: What about first thing in the morning, did you have...

PW: Assembly?

JT: Yes.

PW: In grammar school, we had assembly every day.

JT: Did you? Did you say prayers and sign hymns?

PW: Yes.

LS: Salute the flag?

PW: Yes.

JT: So was it the principal that led that? Was he the one...?
PW: Not necessarily. No, sometimes the students led assembly.

JT: Really? Did they read from the bible? Or?

PW: I don't think they did so much reading from the bible. But we sang songs, and somebody would say a prayer. I don't think we...

JT: Was there a piano?

PW: Oh, of course. Mrs. Rosemary Beyers.

LS: Mrs. Rosemary who?

PW: Beyers. Her son, Billy Beyers, he works for Parks and Rec. He's is now a swim instructor.

JT: Oh, I know him, yes.

PW: Yes, that was his mother.

JT: OK.

PW: Mrs. Beyers could play the piano, when she put her hands on the piano, you could tell that she could play, and she would play all the assemblies, and then every year we would have an operetta that she was in charge of.

JT: Were you in the operetta, Priscilla?

PW: Oh, of course I was in the operetta.

LS: Do you remember which operettas that you guys did?

PW: Well, see, you were only in the operetta when you were in high school. So, one year I know we were Russians.

JT: Russians?

PW: Yes.

JT: What about costumes and stuff like that?

PW: Oh, most of the time, um, now when we were Russians, we bought all of our cloth, the parents had to buy it. We bought all of our cloth, and made the boots. See, we made it come over your shoe, and made the boots.
JT: So the people who were in the operetta made the stuff, there wasn't someone else doing it for you, or like an extra group? No. You made your own things.

PW: Yes. And then we had dresses, there was a pattern for us to have dresses. And we made the dresses.

JT: Did you have to buy the fabric out of your own money, or?

PW: Yes, your parents had to buy it.

JT: Were there many boys in the operetta?

PW: Yes.

JT: Really?

PW: Yes. But the boys, they never had to buy anything.

JT: Why not?

PW: Very seldom. You know, because they could just wear their clothes...

JT: They didn’t have much in the way of a costume?

PW: Yes. And then one year we were Indians.

JT: Really?

PW: And then one year, we were a college campus, so we just wore ordinary clothes.

LS: You did one operetta each year that you were in high school? And all three grades of high school participated?

PW: All four.

LS: All four, OK. And so you all got together, and you came up with one operetta, and then you put it on.

PW: Our advisor picked the operetta, and she’d appoint the people that were in the leading parts.

JT: Ooo. Did you have a leading part?

PW: No, I couldn’t sing. [laugh] But the rest of the people, you know, you made up the course, and you handled the part, and may-be a couple of lines to say. Something like that.
JT: So, did you practice during school time, or after school?

PW: After school mostly.

LS: Were there other things going on after school too, did you have to choose between the operetta and band practice or a glee club, or French club, or any other kind of thing?

PW: Well, you probably...you might have had to choose between band and operetta, because Mr. Page didn’t allow you to miss his classes. So, but as far as glee club, the advisor was also in charge of the glee club, so if she was doing the operetta, she couldn’t be doing glee club.

LS: Did you do the glee club, too?

PW: Yes, we had to wear navy skirts and white blouses.

JT: How often did you perform?

PW: I don’t know. Whenever there were things at school, sometimes during the day, sometimes at...I guess sometimes at assembly in the mornings. And then there were times when parents came, cause we wouldn’t put on our blue skirts and white blouses until the parents would come. During the day you would just wear your clothes.

JT: Didn’t want to get them dirty?

LS: Were there other clubs, too, I heard someone else say there was a French club.

PW: Yes. There was a French club, but I wasn’t in that.

JT: Was that the only language you learned in school—French?

PW: I did not learn any language.

JT: You didn’t? So that was an elective.

PW: I was mad when I got to France, and I said, “I should have taken French.”

JT: Whoops! Should have done that. [laugh] So, what did you take instead?

PW: I took, I know I took. I was interested in science and lab and stuff. For one thing I was going to be a nurse, so I followed the classes, like chemistry and biology and physics and things like that. Your electives were related to what you wanted to do.

LS: Did you guys also have a newspaper, or a yearbook?

PW: Oh, yeah. We had the Jeffersonian.
JT: Did you work on it at all?

PW: No.

JT: No? Did you know anyone who did?

PW: I remember... I know the girl that represented [????] represented our class, but she doesn’t live in Charlottesville. [D?/ P?] might know somebody who did.

LS: Was it a pretty free-spirited paper that you guys could publish anything you wanted? Or was there a sense that you had to check with the teachers and make sure that everything was OK before you could publish?

PW: I can’t answer that cause I don’t know. I never had anything to do with the paper.

LS: Do you know if there any controversial point where the paper came out and the teachers were surprised.

PW: No.

JT: Did you talk about segregation very much?

PW: No.

JT: No, it was just the natural...

PW: It was just the way things were.

JT: So the teachers didn’t really discuss it with you or anything? You just got on with it? Yeah.

LS: Did you ever interact with the other schools the other high schools at all? Or was it just a very separate community where...

JT: The White schools?

LS: Yes, the White schools?

PW: See, Charlottesville only had one White school, that was Lane. In Charlottesville, and I don’t ever remember really, except them attending our games, or [???] going to theirs or something like that.

JT: Did you feel OK about that, that they came to the games?

PW: Yes.
LS: It wasn't a big deal?

PW: No. I thought we were in their stadium.

JT: You were in their stadium?

PW: Uh, huh. All our night football games were held in Lane stadium.

JT: Oh, that's right. What about the Albemarle, what was it called, the Agricultural and Technical College, which was a high school in Albemarle County. May-be that was before your time?

PW: I don't remember that.

LS: Did Jefferson serve the community after hours in any way? Did people come to meet there for community functions of any kind?

PW: Truthfully, I don't know. But I think most of the things at that time took place in the church.

LS: In the church, yes.

JT: Which church did you belong to?

PW: I belonged to Zion. That's the church that they tore down.

JT: That was a shame. When did they tear that down, do you remember?

PW: I wasn't here. It was in the '50s.

JT: Was it sort of split between Mt. Zion and First Baptist?

PW: No, they built a church over...

JT: No, I mean the student population. Because I've heard some people say they went to...

PW: Oh, the students! They went to Mt. Zion, to First Baptist, to Ebenezer, to Zion Union, and then to Trinity.

JT: So it wasn't just those two?

PW: No.

LS: I have a couple of questions to sort of sum it up, would be something about what you think made the school so special for so many people, and why it really was an important
anchor in the community? Sort of a place where everybody seems to feel this connection and symbolic or even a physical importance...

PW: For one thing, I think it is really significant that the Black citizens of Charlottesville at the time got a petition and asked the city to build a high school. That they did that, because a lot of places weren't sure to ask the city to build a school.

JT: Do you know who was involved in that? Do you know some of the people? Did your mother talk about it?

PW: Helena Devereaux has the list, and some of them on the list have been identified.

JT: Yes, but I just wondered if in your home environment people talked about it.

PW: I was not born in 1925.

JT: Well, maybe your grandmother talked about it.

PW: I never knew my grandmother.

LS: Did your parents grow up here as well, or did they move here from someplace else?

PW: My father grew up in Ashland in Hanover County, and my mother grew up in Farber. Well, my mother grew up to a certain age...my mother went to school here.

JT: Your mother went to school here? When Jefferson was...on Main Street? Do you know where it was?

PW: Down there by First Baptist Church.

JT: Near the First Baptist Church? Did she talk about that?

PW: Not really, she talked about some of the teachers she knew, like I would go to a class and sometimes it would be the same teachers that she had had.

JT: Some of the same teachers that you had at Jefferson were the same as she had had? Do you remember who that was?

PW: I know Miss Mary Wyatt. And Mrs. McGinness. And I think Miss Michie (?)

LS: Did your parents meet in Charlottesville?

PW: Yes. Well, my mother, see when she was really young, her father moved to Charlottesville, and she lived here and grew up, and went to school. And so, when she got married...my father is from Ashland. But his brother had a job in Richmond at MCV Hospital, and he used to have to come up here; he was in the anatomy department and he
used to have to come up here every so often to the University. And so he found out that they had this job open at the University in the anatomy department.

JT: In which department? I’m sorry?

PW: Anatomy.

JT: Oh, he worked in the anatomy.

PW: And then he brought his brother up here for the job. And he worked at the hospital for 40-something years.

JT: Did he walk to the hospital?

PW: Yes, we just lived down on 10th Street.

JT: I guess that’s true.

LS: It’s not that far.

JT: But did he have a car?

PW: Not then, but later he did. But then he still walked, I guess it was his habit. He still walked a lot.

JT: It’s healthy! So did he have a car when you were in high school?

PW: No.

JT: No, that’s why you took the taxi.

LS: Your family has been here a long time?

PW: Yes.

LS: That’s neat.

PW: All of us were born at the University Hospital.

LS: We’ve thought a lot about the last question we have on our list, but...its what do you think should happen to the building?

PW: You’re talking about the people and the connection? One thing, at that time, you could go to the store, you could go anywhere, and you’d probably see one of the teachers. And when you went to church on Sundays, some of the teachers were there. And so, the
teachers knew everybody in the community, and everybody knew who they were. And they interacted with the community.

JT: Did they live close by?

PW: Yes. Let me see, Miss Rogers lived up on Anderson Street, Miss Baylor lived up on Anderson Street, Miss Gamble and Miss Jane, they lived over on Oak Street in that section of town. They lived right among us all the time. And Miss Pleasance lived way at the top of Tenth Street. See we lived down here at the bottom, she lived way up at the top.

JT: So they knew your parents, and chatted with your parents.

PW: Miss Pleasance would tell on us…?

LS: Did most people think of being a teacher as a very respected, highly respected job?

PW: Oh, yes, at that time, they did. It was more respected than it is now.

LS: So the school was really where the people who were highly thought about were there, and so that might have been part of it.

PW: Yeah, see, and the teachers came to the football games, and to the basketball games, and just whatever the community was doing they were involved.

JT: What about their children? Did they have children who went to the school, or were they mostly younger teachers, or?

PW: Let me see, Miss ???’s children went to the school…? If they lived here in Charlottesville, and they had children their children went to the school.

LS: Were they mostly women? The teachers?

PW: We had some men teachers. Let me see, Mr. Howard Johnson, he taught music. And then Mr. Henry, he taught English. And Mr. Armstead, he taught chemistry. And Mr. Page would teach biology. And Mr. Robinson taught shop, and Coach Smith did the football and basketball.

LS: That’s pretty many.

JT: Do people talk about the Jefferson School still? And remember?

PW: Yes.

JT: Are there a lot of people who stayed in Charlottesville or moved back?
PW: Some of them moved back. The first time we had our reunion, people hadn’t been to Charlottesville in, oh!, 30 years or something. And they came back, and then some of them decided to move back.

JT: Really! Because they liked it! Or they remembered how nice it was?

PW: Yes.

LS: What year was that that you guys had your first reunion?

PW: Must have been in the late ’80s. I can’t remember, I’ll let you know.

LS: I was just curious, I didn’t even know what decade...

PW: Yes, we had the first one, it must have been in the ‘80s. And we had it at the Doubletree. Now it’s the Sheraton. We found out that was the wrong place! Because the people that hadn’t been back to Charlottesville in a long time, they weren’t familiar with that part of town, so they wanted to... somewhere they could be in a familiar spot.

JT: Downtown.

PW: Yes, so we moved it to the Omni.


PW: In the auditorium.

JT: Did you start that right at the beginning when you started having the alumni reunions?

PW: No, they... a lot of people kept saying they didn’t want to do it there because they didn’t have air conditioning, but then, um, when I became chair, I said this is going to be here. Me and my little group decided.

JT: I think it’s a great idea.

PW: Yes.

JT: Well you’ve done a great job with the...

PW: Did you have anything you want to fill in just tell me.

LS: We pretty much have some of the ideas you have for what the building should become, and that was the last question, so, you know.

JT: That was great, thank you.
LS: Sorry to stay so long!

PW: That's OK.

End of interview.
Priscilla Whiting, July 2003

(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. Select transcriptions of interviews may be posted on the Carter G. Woodson Institute’s Race and Place website at www.virginia.edu/~woodson, or a virtual museum site for the Jefferson School.

Should a museum be established at the Jefferson School material gathered from this oral history project may support a permanent exhibit interpreting the history of the Jefferson School and its role in the community.

In support of this program:

I ___________________________ (name)
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Interviewee: ___________________________ Date: 6/9/03

Interviewer: ___________________________ Date: 6/9/03
Interview with Eugene Williams

Interviewers: Jacky Taylor and Liz Sargent
Date: February 17, 2004
Location: Dogwood Properties
Charlottesville, Virginia

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

JT: Just for the record could you please state your full name and your current address.

EW: My name is Eugene Williams, and I live at 620 Ridge Street, Charlottesville, Virginia.

JT: And the date and place of your birth.

EW: I was born in Charlottesville, Virginia, on November 6, 1927.

JT: Can you tell us your relationship to the Jefferson School? Were you a student there, or did you...

EW: I attended Jefferson Elementary School and Jefferson High School. Both schools on the same site...

JT: OK. And then later I believe you were involved during a period of transition. We talked to George Tremontin, and he said that we should talk to you about how the schools were integrated... Is that correct? What was the role that you played?

EW: Well, I think that it is important for me to mention that... after graduating from Jefferson High...that I was away from Charlottesville about ten years, and that ten years included college education, 18 months in the Army, and returning to college and working in Louisiana and Chicago. In 1953...my wife, likewise a native of the Charlottesville and Albemarle County area and a graduate of Jefferson High School, we both returned to Charlottesville with our two daughters. And almost immediately after returning to Charlottesville, and getting employment with the Richmond Beneficial Life Insurance Company, my wife employment with the city school system...I apologize, city and county school system...there was the Jackson P. Burley High School, the joint school.
Then I became committed and dedicated and involved with the Charlottesville Branch of the NAACP.

JT: O.K. So, just to go back quickly...do you remember much about your years at Jefferson High School? Were they happy years?

EW: That question always seems to be raised to Black people. May-be this is not for everyone, but it doesn’t come across as very respectful as far as I’m concerned, personally. I cannot see how any Black person could ever be happy knowing that he or she was being segregated because of race.

JT: Did you feel that strongly then?

EW: I was born feeling that way.

JT: Did your parents talk about it with you?

EW: I won’t say they talked about it with me particularly. I guess, believe it or not, when your parents may have to look for their livelihood from a White person, it may, it’s hoped that you may not have those feelings, but I have always had those feeling. I am seventy-six years of age now, and I still have those feelings.

LS: Did the teachers actively promote the idea that education could help change the system, that your being educated in the schools and trying to go on college, would be ...?

EW: Well, I do think they may have promoted that a little bit but, when education is not equal, there is nothing in the future that is going to make life equal.

LS: So, you arrived back here in 1953, but then in 1954 something dramatic happened in the legislation, and how did you see that affecting your family?

EW: Nothing dramatic happened in the legislation in ’54...

LS: ...Brown v. Board.

EW: That...made a difference in education in Virginia. The Supreme Court decision of May 17, 1954 did not change the attitude of the legislators of Virginia.

LS: So do you, what started to happen here in Charlottesville to change that? Were there...did people start actively trying to make that ruling have an impact here in Charlottesville?

EW: Oh, after that decision came down, we could easily understand that Charlottesville was not going to move affirmatively toward integration of the schools, so we just knew that we would have to use the court system to get the School Board to integrate the schools.
LS: Did you help put forward the cases that....

EW: Oh, I'm not too modest to say that I took a leading role.

JT: How ... how ... how did this leadership manifest itself? Did you, did you have a group of people that you knew already would be ... active and helpful, or did you have to go out and rally people?

EW: Well, when I came home, Ray Bell, one of my very dearest friends, and the late Charles Fowler and I, we decided to...we went to a NAACP meeting, and there were maybe less than ten people present, and it looked like they were disorganized and found they had about 65 members registered as NAACP members, so we just decided that... we three young men, that had returned home, particularly Ray Bell and myself, Charles Fowler was a native of Lynchburg, Virginia, and that there was something for us to do. And, so we went to another NAACP meeting around election time, and got ourselves in such a position that we could kind of be in leadership. All of this is before the sixties. So, I got appointed to be the chairman of the NAACP membership committee. And the first year, I believe that was in 1955, I think... I believe it was, we increased our membership from 65 members to 900 members the first year.

LS: Wow... And all locally here in Charlottesville?

EW: All locally ... And that gave the signal that there was power... in Charlottesville.

LS: Did you establish an agenda of what you wanted to accomplish?

EW: The big thing to accomplish then was...to get the city to comply with the May 17, 1954 decision. Then the second year of our membership drive, we moved our membership from 900 members to 1,500 members.

JT: Wow...

EW: It was a bigger membership than the chamber of commerce.

JT: How did you do that? Was there a specific strategy that you had, or once you started doing it...?

EW: Well, we just developed a membership drive that motivated people to do something that they can feel proud of, and be proud to be a member of the NAACP, and convince them the best we knew how that you have to demonstrate to prove to anyone that you have a mission. And so we did. And the NAACP stayed extremely influential in the community on up until the mid-1990s.

JT: Mmm... Pretty active time. So, did you hold meetings in a church or...

EW: We held our meetings in the churches.
JT: In various churches... so you were able to talk to all the different congregations..?

EW: In various churches, yes, yes.

LS: And what kinds of things did you start to do to... to lay the foundation for to have the courts...

EW: Well, we brought to Charlottesville figures like the late Thurgood Marshall, the then Secretary of the national association, Ronald Wilkins, the national Membership Secretary Lucille Black. We brought speakers to Charlottesville like in Virginia the Executive Secretary Lester Banks...

JT: And did you...did you advertise this through....in the newspaper? Or, how did you let people know this was happening?

EW: Oh yes, we used every advertising means we could think of.

JT: Which were?

EW: The newspaper, the radio that would take it, and hang flyers. Talk...

JT: Uh, uh. And where did these people...Did these people come to speak at one particular place?

EW: We would use... we would use the churches and the Jackson P. Burley High School.

JT: OK.

LS: And they came with recommendations about how to actively pursue the court cases that...

EW: No, no...These speakers, all the speakers at that time were speaking from the same message, that segregation was wrong. I mean...

LS: But how did you get the, you know, the White entrenched establishment to recognize that? What were the types of activities that you had to use, you know, to even have an influence on the establishment? How did, how did you knock down those barriers?

EW: Well, you know, its an interesting thing, when you speak to intelligent Whites they will understand, and they will agree. That's the difference. That's how you can separate the intelligent from those who are not intelligent.

JT: So, so did you, you actually met with them and?

EW: Oh, we actually asked them to come...the intelligent ones.
LS: They came to the meetings?

EW: Yes. Oh, yes. You know, that’s what we have to understand now. Who do we address? Where do you get your action from? You get your action in 2002, 2004 from intelligent Whites to make a difference.

JT: Uh, huh.

EW: They know the difference between right and wrong, and until we can get more of them, we are going to still have problems.

LS: So your presence became much more powerful when you had 1,500 members, and people started to sit up and take notice, and start to recognize that this was not going to go away...

EW: That’s right...

LS: And that there had been a federal ruling, and that some day it was coming to Charlottesville. But yet there was still fear, opposition, and no clear path?

EW: Well you have to look to your board for the clear path, and they don’t ever come up with a clear path until finally the judge tells them that they must act and give them a deadline.

JT: So did you have meetings with the School Board?

EW: Oh, we tried to use meetings with the School Board at different times, but we made very little progress, very little progress....

JT: What about the White supporters that you found you had? Did they have any influence in the School Board?

EW: Well, we never knew how much influence...I imagine they would call the School Board and all. So, your power structure happens to always be the power dealt to those who are against even trying to make something equal that never took place, and against integration. So, it usually... its always been a case of court action for finally getting these boards to comply. For example, a good example, the city was talking about building two junior high schools, and it came out in the paper that they had land for one and that was for...that was at Burley High School campus, and they had to find the land for the second. Well, it was a matter of letting the School Board know that if they built that one at Burley, that we were going to be in court. So you know, they got the message. And they never broke ground on the one at Burley. Let me back up, if they built the one at Burley, that was going to be the junior high school for Blacks only. You know. And so that’s when we said, well, if you build the one at Burley, its going to be for Blacks only, and we think you’ll have to have a day in court. So, that never happened. That’s why you have one on the north side of the city and the other one, not far from here, on the south side of the city, Buford and Walker, respectively.
LS: Well, the other interesting thing about Virginia is, even after the court ruling went down, we still didn’t integrate, and there was still a lot of work to be done even after 1958. And I have a feeling that those were the years that George Tremontin was involved from the superintendent side, and that he suggested that you had an important role from the NAACP side, and we were wondering about some of the things that came to pass during those years...

EW: Well, school integration would be able to show more progress throughout the South if there were more people like George Tremontin. It was very interesting that George Tremontin...was...most of the School Board members had no interest in even attending the court hearing. George Tremontin did attend the court hearing. That was very interesting. And George Tremontin appeared in the courtroom as if he was interested in a fair judging. He did not appear, nor did he carry himself, as if he was a racist, a segregationist, he just carried himself with dignity. And so, when the decision came down, George Tremontin had no recommendations on how to not comply with the decision. We talk about the Virginia gentleman. He was just that type of person.

LS: But he was a foreigner who came from Chicago with progressive educational ideas, and...I think he had a hard time here in Virginia with the...I’m not sure people were very happy with some of his ideas. Did you help smooth that over at all, or were you able to help to support his effort in a way through your work?

EW: Well, I don’t know if I openly found a way...to address that sensitive problem. That is to say...that you had a school board that was not interested in desegregation at all, and so tried to do everything they could do to not to desegregate the schools...They hired the type of superintendent who likewise was not, promoting integration or trying to make it work. One time we went to court, and they wanted to show that they were complying by selecting certain students into the so-called White schools...these were students of the upper grades, and they were selecting them saying “Well we’re complying with the new action of the NAACP, we have admitted ‘x’ number of students.” But disregarding the students who had to pass a White school to get to a Black school.

LS: And George tried differently to change to try and force people to...

EW: Well, he tried different...Yes. Well, it was the first major effort in this area, that’s the one that the School Board did not like, or accept. But, well did not like...you could say something about accepting, did not like, is when he decided that all the sixth graders of the city, White and Black, would go to Jefferson School. And they did not like it, but they had to accept it for about two or three years thereafter because that’s how the new superintendent did it, and it still remained the same.

LS: George seemed to think that a lot of people were angry with him, he was threatened with a law suit as well, but he always...he reiterated over and over again that he felt that you had been a friend to him and that he really appreciated the support that you had given him, and I just wondered you know, what kind of...
EW: Well, it's nice to hear...it's nice of him to say that. It never came to...before us, but I am certain that the city had surely made the break with him more unhappy than it did. The NAACP was, perhaps would have taken his case by all means, as much as the NAACP had its slate full. All the time with these cases, the original Supreme Court case, the Supreme Court case that originated in Virginia in Prince Edward, and three or four other states, but everybody has said that it did not bring about a plan for instigating desegregation in the schools. So, the progress was made, number one, Charlottesville was the first city to file suit on its own after May 17, 1954. And all other cities had to file suit on their own—I believe it was Richmond, Norfolk, Warrenton, not Warrenton, Warren County. They filed individual suits, and that just kept the NAACP lawyers, Black lawyers, busy all the time going from one court to the other, and winning, naturally. After they go through the appeal system, short of going back to the Supreme Court, the lawyers know very well when to turn the case back to the Supreme Court. We started making more progress statewide when the NAACP lawyers filed a suit against the cities that were desegregating for the cities to pay them the same per diem that they were paying the White lawyers who were defending their citizens. The White lawyers were going to court saying that they were defending the citizens of that city. White. Well, what about the Black citizens? So the NAACP lawyers came up with the idea that they were defending the citizens of the city that were not getting legal help. And the court ruled in their favor that they were to be paid the same and that's what began to make things move because cities could not afford to pay those top dollars to two groups of lawyers.

JT: Right, that was very smart. What about when...when George Tramontin chose to have all the sixth graders go to one...with the African-American teachers about who would be part of the integrated school and who would go elsewhere?

EW: No I don't remember having any part in that. I don't think we--the NAAC-- ever questioned the teaching staff...per se. It did come to surface that we had teachers and principles that did not want to comply, and then we had would have to deal with them individually according to whatever the situation was. For example, our youngest daughter was in a class that the teacher decided...she let all of her class see a movie at the University theater that had no balcony, and...so she told our daughter that she would give her money for her to go to a theater of her choice downtown and do whatever she wanted with the money. And, of course, you know the rest of the story--her daddy got involved. So then they didn't let any of the class go.

JT: So none of the class went?

EW: I don't think it would have been wise.
JT: Was there a lot of that sort of thing that went on? You know, it seems like they weren’t really prepared for what it actually meant to have an integrated classroom...?

EW: No, that’s what I said, that ... you can’t find ... at that period of time that there was a school system nowhere in the South was prepared. That’s the interesting thing. Nowhere.

LS: Was the NAACP involved also in allowing, or the desegregation of theaters and restaurants and these kinds of things ... that whole thing changing?

EW: Well, keep in mind when you have an active NAACP branch, all you’ve got to do is see a little bug of segregation and that’s the thing. And that’s the challenge that I’m talking about today. You know, we still see these bugs and why can’t we get people to do something about it? Why can’t we get people to write about it? Why can’t we get people to speak about it? Why can’t we get the photographs of it? Just the bug. Its so obvious.

LS: Do you have a specific area where you feel personally... you know...?

EW: Oh yes. I have a specific area. I have a specific area when I see the, the ... the what is that helicopter called?

LS: Pegasus?

EW: Pegasus! I have a...when I see that go up... I served on the hospital advisory board. And I spoke about the fact that there never was a Black pilot. That was a bug. It’s still obvious. I have a problem if that’s around this curve, not two feet, there’s a child... at the University of Virginia, there’s a Child Care Center, no Black students, or children. All for the upper class Whites. I have a problem of, when you go in all of our restaurants now, and particularly in the leading restaurants, and most all restaurants now, that you don’t see Black waiters and Black waitresses. But when people were leaving dimes and quarters as tips, just about every dining room, and don’t talk about your leading dining rooms, your big dining rooms, your best dining rooms, the waiters and waitresses were Black. You know, and so when people of organizations and all are making arrangements for big diners and all that goes up in the thousands of dollars, they are going to spend, the person never raises the issue about why it is that you don’t have any Black waiters or Black waitresses. I have issues with the fact that these better eating places got their customers by identifying their chef, and almost in every case the chef was Black and they were moved from one restaurant, customers moved from one restaurant to the other where this John Brown cooks. Now all the chefs are White. These are the bugs.

JT: When you were at the Jefferson School you...were you encouraged to go to college or was it just something that you knew you were going to go on and do? Many of the people we spoke to went on to higher education and to have professional careers. And I just wondered was it something that was really instilled in you, an important that you had to follow through?
EW: I think all of my life that I've always been encouraged by any Black that seemingly stood out in a leadership capacity. I'm sure I can think of... Mr. T.J. Sellars, the husband of one of my teachers, Mrs. Elmore Sellars. And I think she started... you say the word, just the way I was, and she would often encourage me to go by her husband’s office saying he would like to see me. And he was in the insurance business, and I succeeded him. He took a leave of absence from Richmond Beneficial Insurance Company for six months and decided he would remain in New York and I succeeded him at his desk.... That was my beginning in 1953.

LS: There weren’t a lot of jobs open even to college-educated Blacks at that time. We’ve heard a lot of stories of people having to move elsewhere to get work commensurate with their education and training.

EW: Oh, yes. Well, that goes on now...we don’t have one Charlottesvillian doctor graduated from the University of Virginia Medical School. We don’t have one Charlottesvillian graduating from the University of Virginia Law School, and you come right on down all the professions, every single one and we don’t have the first Charlottesvillian.

LS: What do we do to make that change? Because I know that was the same in the Architecture school. There was very little...

EW: Well we … to make that change, we need to pick up the Daily Progress [looks at the paper] …but this week or last week, there’s an article where President John Casteen is recommending I think a sixteen million dollar grant program to make it easier for middle and lower income families to get an education, and they will be forgiven for their loans... further, the president of the University is very committed to improving race relations. I think it’s because of his beginning in life, and of course he has three degrees from the University, and so... what he needs now is a lot of cheering, or lauding for the things that he would like to get done, because the Board of Visitors is not sensitive to this.

JT: When you were working with the NAACP did you have much support from anybody at the University?

EW: Oh yes, I don’t know if I can identify them by name, but surely, there were...I can’t think that your support would be in any concern that could make a difference. You’ve still got to keep on rooting. I don’t...There’s always a minority of Whites, that happens to always want to do the right thing. For example, someone named Linden Holten who I voted for, a republican. He became governor during school desegregation time, and he had his children to go to the public schools in Richmond. And they were to go to the schools that, because of their location, a majority of the students were Black. And you know the press made pictures of him and his children. But he’s so proud of his leadership that when you come in an office, most times you see the pictures as you come into the office, he had that particular picture at the door as you go out of the office. And when I was in his office, and I noticed where it was, and I said, “You want everybody to see this picture don’t you?” He said, “That’s why it’s there.”
JT: Your wife was a teacher in the...Lane High school?

EW: Yes, she was a teacher at Lane High. Then I think she transferred to Buford, then she transferred from Buford to Walker, and Charlottesville High. But she was not accommodated by the superintendent who will accommodate teachers at that time to say, "Well, because of these good reasons and other good reasons, I want to make sure to assign you to a certain school." She had to make it known that she wanted to be assigned to-- I believe I have it right-- to Lane.

JT: Oh, she did? She was one of the first?

EW: She was one of the first. And they did not give her a classroom that year. She would go from one room to the other with her briefcase, but no desk.

JT: What did she teach?

EW: Commercial...business courses.

JT: OK.

LS: Do you think that was a way to make her feel uncomfortable and not want to be there?

EW: That would be the only reason... to make her feel uncomfortable.

LS: And how did that...did that make her resolve stronger that she wanted to stay there?

EW: Well, that’s what makes all Blacks who see something that they can do, they have to make themselves’ resolve stronger...

LS: Was she ever afraid?

EW: That’s always a question that comes up? I don’t know. If you have goals that are about making a matter better, I don’t know how you can have the time to feel afraid.

LS: I didn’t know if anyone personally...you know, if she felt threatened ever.

EW: I’ve never felt afraid... not a single day.

JT: Did she...?

EW: Martin Luther King I am sure didn’t. I can speak for him. [???] I mean, you don’t have time to think about that.

LS: I wish I had the same experience.

JT: Did you and she talk about your experiences, teaching?
EW: Oh we were committed to each other for support.

JT: Did she talk about how the students behaved towards her?

EW: ... 

JT: Did they accept her?

EW: All children are born as angels in this world. They only learn to be devils by what the adults teach them. That’s the nicest thing about children.

JT: Did they...were they curious about her?

EW: No, they just...I mean children, its just so innocent about them, you know? You hardly can...given a child at that time, and potentially all of them are bad now, Black and White, I can’t get on that discussion...But... I mean you just experienced those things in a school system at that time. When you go to the schools....

JT: What about the other teachers in the school?

EW: Oh! Now you’re talking about adults! I wasn’t talking about how they act!

JT: Were they all difficult with her?

EW: Well, they weren’t friendly some of them.

JT: They weren’t?

EW: Nope.

JT: Did she make, she must have made some friends somewhere in there?

EW: Oh, you make a very, very few. If the principal’s not friendly, and he doesn’t set the climate for the school system to be friendly ... what can we expect?

LS: What about your children? Which schools did they end up going to?

EW: Well, that was very interesting. First of all... that we had to file a suit for them to be admitted to the Johnson Elementary School. And I think it took six years to get that case resolved. Six years.

LS: So they were beyond the years of going there by the time it got resolved.

EW: Yes, right. And what made it so...the... we live in the 600 block of Ridge Street, and I think it’s about 1, 2, or 3 tenths of a mile... we were nearer to Jefferson School than to Johnson Elementary School, and that’s really not far from here. So, in one case, we lost
that case, and we lost the case so, when the NAACP would lose, the NAACP would appeal. When the School Board loses, the NAACP... I was saying that, if the NAACP would lose its case, the NAACP would appeal, if the School Board would lose its case, or whoever did the filing, the School Board would appeal. So, we lost--the NAACP--and so they appealed. So then, we went to the Fourth Circuit Court. The first was in the District Court. Next it went to the Fourth Circuit Court. The Fourth Circuit Court consisted of five justices and usually only three would sit. And we won. And the NAACP... we won... and the School Board appealed that. And that appeal would mean that all five were to hear the case. And all five came in to hear it. And we won. And of course that caused our two children and I think three others to be the first to desegregate Johnson Elementary School.

JT:  Was it difficult for them? Did they have a hard time? They didn’t ...did they go?

EW: Yes. [unclear tape]. It’s still difficult [???] in the integrated schools as of today. And this, you know this is the area that’s going to be so important. What’s wrong with this integration? Its something we frankly... we just don’t even have integration at any level. We only’ve got desegregation by law, but we’re having a hard time getting into integration.

JT: It seems to start in the middle schools. In the elementary schools, from my experience, everything is fine. You get to a certain age, and they are in their own groups.

EW: Yeah. Well, as I said, I don’t even get into much of a discussion at all now because we don’t have children in school, but that all I can discern from that...

JT: So when your children went to Johnson Elementary, did they bring home White friends, did they go to Whites houses?

EW: We don’t have that now too much.

JT: Did you go to...?

EW: In Washington, D.C., my grand.. my granddaughter, my daughter’s child, that would be my granddaughter, this is earlier, ‘cause they are out of college, its interesting how she, my granddaughter, would go to the White classmate’s home, because they were very, very tight friends, and she would do that two or three times, but there again, that’s where the Black mother has to begin to think. But the White mother did not want her daughter to come to Rhode Island Avenue where my granddaughter lives. And I put the emphasis on Rhode Island Avenue. Rhode Island Avenue, once upon a time was a nice avenue and anybody who knows anything about Washington knows that Rhode Island Avenue became one of the worst avenues. And my son-in-law and daughter decided that they would participate in Marion Barry’s housing programs. We don’t want to talk about Marion Barry. He used innovative housing programs, seed money and all, to fix up those beautiful houses. This is not bragging. All those houses now sell for a million dollars.
You know? But this White lady didn’t want her daughter to come to Rhode Island Avenue where our granddaughter was raised up.

LS: So neighborhoods are also an issue that we have... we still have segregated neighborhoods and that, I mean, people aren’t interacting on a day to day basis, and understanding you know the differences and the things that are common ground to be able to be completely integrated.

EW: We’re holding ourselves back for some reason or other, I don’t know for what reason we are. I don’t want to... to get too far off the subject. I’m watching the clock. I’ve got to leave here by five o’clock.

LS: I know, we’ve got to go back to work.

EW: I’ve got to leave here at five o’clock! [laughing because it is now two o’clock.]

EW: But it’s very interesting that I share in all the, and tell me if I get too far off the...treat me like a wife, pull my coat tail, and I’ll stop. But, we, other than the [???] board—that was the name before it became McDonald House. And the First University Baptist Church wanted the house that we were in, and so we were to move...or build... or do something. So I knew of two vacant lots — right here--and remember this neighbor was all White at one time, and then when White, Blacks started moving in, including this very building that a Black man bought, then the Whites started moving out. And so it became just about one hundred percent Black. So I knew these two lots were here, and I suggested the board come over and look at them. Well, no one had been up and seen these lots but me. And...they looked and they looked, and they saw this house, and they were nice enough to pay a compliment to the house, about the house, but I never told them Dogwood Housing owned it, as a regular house they thought it was pretty nice. Thank you very much. So anyway, you can imagine that there’s one Black person on the board, and we’re all looking at the lots, and we’re kind of looking, and finally they moved away from me to talk. It amuses me, that’s why I don’t get upset, you know? So, I don’t know what they were talking about when they kind of stepped--started moving away from me, but anyway they moved, it gets to be funny. So, we had another board meeting, and boy, I [???] I just sometimes have to make a joke, I think they were getting ready to build the Ronald McDonald House over in Waynesboro. [laughs] So, finally somebody said, “All the places we’ve come up with are ridiculous.” And so to make a long story short, with a little humor in it, there it is. There it is. And you know the pleasure I can get looking out there everyday, and to know it takes that to break down some of these problems. You know?

JT: What do you think should happen to the Jefferson School building and the site? Do you think something could happen there that would bring the communities together?

EW: Yes, it...it should continue to be an educational center.

JT: For all people?
EW: No, no. Let me finish my sentence... so the educational center would be the majority of it should go for the Jefferson Madison Library. And I think that should face Fourth Street. And of course you could see the big sign on the building. Jefferson-Madison... right, Jefferson-Madison Library. Then, the part to the left ...

LS: You can point to the map now!

EW: Oh, yes, right! Oh, yes, thank you. Yes, my wife would like that. That would be Jefferson-Madison Library, and I guess it would take all of this in, so let’s put all of that... And then here it seems to me that this could be, and that big sign would be, right over there--Carver Recreation Center, the same big White letters.

JT: So keep this as the Carver?

EW: Yes, and ... and then here the big sign here, and this would be ... a, I’ve thought about this... another center... oh yes... the Jefferson Educational Center. The Jefferson Educational Center would serve may-be one of two purposes, one purpose may be for developing education or other education so we can start having second languages. The time has come that we better start learning Spanish so we get the most out of the Spanish speaking people. If we failed, if not that, then it needs to be an educational center for slow learners but not a full day. Some type of one-on-one teaching opportunities. Speaking of another bug of discrimination, the worst bug that we have in Charlottesville... now... is the alternative school. Do you know where that is?

JT: No.

EW: Well, you’ve supported what I was getting ready to say... it’s a public school. Do you know where it is? Right. Now that is on Henry Avenue, and when the school superintendent applies for state appropriations, he applies for his total school population. You get so much per pupil. That’s how the budget comes in. And, there you have between thirty to fifty students segregated from the public schools, the regular public schools, in what was a warehouse on Henry Avenue. And about ninety-eight percent of them are Black. A reservoir to keep filling up the city jail. No library, no cafeteria, no gymnasium, no lawn. That’s what caused us to go to court in the beginning to eliminate that segregation. And here we’re still doing it.

LS: What is that school doing? Why is it there?

EW: Well, you know we have another word for the children of that school, you know, you see that in the paper every day. Almost literally every day. At risk kids. You see?

JT: Oh, yes.

EW: You see? But you see, no one speaks out about it. Now, I raise the point, as I’ve said, I talk about my age, then, very personally, and I don’t want to stay on that, I want to get off it quickly, my wife came to Charlottesville in 1956, and we’ve been married fifty-four
years, and I just cut my time in half. I just don’t work full time anymore. I don’t bother to go to any night meetings. She moves along well, she lost her memory, lost her speech, lost the use of her limbs, but her speech is back. And … we get along, and her memory has been always good and, its back. I get her on the phone in a minute and ask her to spell ‘cat’ cause I can’t spell, and then the dictionary, I can’t use that! I’m in bad shape! You just don’t know, so I have to call her. And then she says, “Who had the stroke?”

[Laughter]

EW: Who had the stroke? And so we just enjoy each other. But, my point is, though, I don’t know why I say this, I still refer to the age group like I was when I was real relaxed, you know? That you just spot these areas, and there’s a good example, you know? To have four or five Whites, with all the Blacks you know stuck up in jail, you know? Few Whites, many Blacks, and here this school superintendent is counting the whole population, and getting the money for the cafeteria, for the gymnasium, for all …

LS: And none of it is going to the alternative school. I have heard talk about the alternative school, but I’ve never heard about it. Now it’ll be recorded...

EW: That’s a wake up call, that’s a wake up call.

JT: So you think something like the Jefferson School building could be a place where people from every… children from all the schools, people from the whole community could get together and ..

EW: Well, a library would be the main gateway for the whole city. Adults, I mean, you know, that’s where you can recite the history within the library, just like the way the library is now. I’ll take you back to the conference room before you leave to show you where Judge Paul was sitting in that library on the second floor, that’s where ??? the district court. You know? In 1958, you know? Alright, so there… this would make a good landmark, you know?

LS: And if the, if this library had to expand, if they had to build something on that site to accommodate the library. Would that detract…

EW: Well?

LS: Would that detract from the site?

EW: Well, well, I think for the moment your point’s well taken. But there are two ways for the library to go, they can take Carver Recreation Center. They can take all of this, so, you know, it’s a matter of getting started in the building. And they still have a lot of building already built.

JT: So you’d rather see the building stay the same so that the people know that that was the Jefferson School?
EW: Oh yes, I think they’d need all this for parking and landscaping.

JT: Well, you’ve told us some wonderful stories, and given us some great ideas, and some insight into what was going on and how you felt, and how you dealt with it. We appreciate that.

EW: Well, I hope I’ve helped a little bit. But more importantly ??...

JT: No, you’ve given us some things to think about.

EW: Well, we can make things so much better, and I think we need to make ‘em much better for a lot of reasons. We need to make things better because we’re beginning now to face this marriage institution, and we’ve got to learn how we’re going to deal with it. Not only do we need to address the gay marriage situation, but we’re going to have to also learn how we’re going to deal with interracial marriages, and how we’re going to love our grandchildren. And, so until we kind of open up a little bit more, then we’re going to make some people’s lives very unhappy, we’re going to make our daughter’s lives unhappy, because our daughter knows that momma and daddy don’t want her to bring her Black husband home, and vice versa, you know? But, you know, the Black daughter isn’t going to be happy to go home because the Black mom and dad doesn’t want that White young man to be in their home. So now’s the time for us to open up and face these issues, and we’ve got to look to places, institutions that grew up with, whether they be our churches or whatever or wherever they are, to speak much on these issues. And, because frankly failure to speak on the issues, our ministers, White and Black, are turning our young people away, you know? The younger group that’s not interested even in going to church because nothing pricks their conscience of what to do that is right. You know?

JT: A lot of work ahead

EW: It’s always on our road.

JT: Well you’ve certainly done your fair share it seems.

EW: Well I don’t know.

JT: Well, thank you very much.

End of interview.
Eugene Williams, February 17, 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 2-17-04

Interviewer ............................................. Date 2-17-04