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William Henry Chafe Oral History Collection

INTERVIEWEE: Eula Hudgens

INTERVIEWER: William Chafe

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WILLIAM CHAFE: You grew up in Greensboro?

EULA HUDGINS: I grew up in Winston-Salem. I've only been in Greensboro for twenty years.

WC: Twenty years?

EH: I've lived here twenty years. I went to school here at A&T [now North Carolina A&T State University] and got married, left, and came back, and I've been here twenty years.

WC: What was it like when you were going to school here?

EH: Well, I—the same type of riding in the back of the buses, eating in special places, going to movies, going into the balconies by the side door. That was just about the bulk of it because I stayed on campus, so I didn't—I wasn't involved too much in the city. [It was] just a matter of not being able to do certain things you wanted to do when you left the campus.

WC: Did most people stay on campus, most students?

EH: Most girls did at that time. You see the war was going on. Part of our campus was ORD [Overseas Replacement Depot] for soldiers, so we had to stay on campus most of the time. Most of the activities was geared around—were on campus. We traveled a lot. We

had extra activities. Basketball, girls played basketball. I was in the choir. So we would leave the campus. Even leaving campus we always chartered buses, and we were still sort of in an environment, you know, with your people, with the same people, so you didn't get in touch with the other part of the world too much. Go on that bus and do what you had to do, and get back on the bus and come back on campus.

WC: Did you have much contact—or did the students at A&T have much contact with the students from Bennett [College]

EH: Yes, yes we did. We would interchange in clubs and debating teams. We debated a lot, the girls. You know the fellows would always have an inside track, but it wasn't as close a relationship with Bennett being as it is now.

WC: Is that because of both have changed?

EH: Really, when Bennett and A&T really got very close was when the sit-ins started, and one thing or another—everybody was going for the same cause, so it started paying to get it together, you know, to really be strong. But that was the first time that Bennett and A&T were very close, you know, really close. We used to be sort of cordial but, you know, just polite and you do what you had to do. Just some few would really intermingle and get to know each other quite well. Now we did have the varsity debating team. We would debate each other and we would exchange certain types of programs, but the sit-ins really brought the closeness.

WC: How did that happen? How did that closeness develop?

EH: I think it developed because—well, the four students who left here that afternoon going downtown were—naturally the press was there and everybody was blowing it up, so a couple of the Bennett girls decided to—"Well, now if A&T can go, then we should go and—" you see, because this was sort of spur of the moment. It wasn't really spur of the moment. It appeared to be spur of the moment; they had worked on it a little bit, and the fellows were really thinking about it and talking about it. But after they just—they didn't really know what would happen. They hadn't even anticipated so much that would happen. They just decided to go, and that very next day some of the Bennett girls decided to join, and then UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro], some of them joined, and then the churches and the preachers and students and high schools and everybody else started going. And it sort of developed even a communication between the other campuses, because they hadn't done that.

WC: Did that continue after the sit-ins, that kind of communication?

EH: It did.

WC: I've heard some people say that the students at Bennett were really in a sense the backbone of—

EH: Of the sit-ins?

WC: The demonstrations, not that they started it, but that someone—

EH: I don't think any more of Bennett folks went to jail and stayed out of class and got caught than A&T. I'll tell you what, a couple of Bennett faculty members got out before A&T faculty members did, because A&T faculty members seemed to have let students—figured the students could keep it in hand. A lot of people seemed to have thought it was the wrong thing to do. You always have that faction that figures, "Well, we need to let well enough alone. These kids are doing things to cause trouble." But those were the type—after so long they stopped thinking that. Some still did, some still do probably.

WC: This was the faculty people?

EH: Well, I'm talking about the adult community as a whole, including some of the faculty members. They were sort of behind the students, but somehow or another they would sort of say—in certain areas—to really say that they were for it.

WC: Was this because—I've heard from some people that [A&T] President [Ferdinand] Bluford was not very encouraging toward expressions of protest.

EH: Well, he wasn't too much so. He was one of the old gods who felt like we're doing—progressing as much as we could at the time. I mean sometimes the old people would feel that if you just take things easy and go along slowly, everything will work out. But you could see in a part of the younger people that sometimes you have to make things happen. You can't just wait for things to happen; you have to make them happen. And the time was just the time, the right time for them to start making things happen. And we, I think—and Dr. Bluford, to me, was one of the best presidents this institution ever had, one of the most humane. We've had good presidents; we have one now. But he was the type anybody could talk to at any time. Well, the campus was small enough. Everybody knew everybody just about, and it was just something that he wasn't used to. I mean he felt like he got along with people, and of course he did, but I can imagine, maybe to disrupt or upset some things—He was upset over the people.

WC: Sure. Plus the fact [of] being a public institution, and getting money from the state could—

EH: They could have had it. But really Dr. Bluford wasn't the president at the time in sixties when the sit-ins started; Dr. [Warmoth] Gibbs was the president. But things that students would do—like a long time ago we had the interstate, you know, testing interstate travel? Well, some of us were appointed or they got a group of students to take some rides on the bus, and we went to Florida, a couple of us, maybe a six or seven, to test the interstate law in traveling, because I was put off the bus and my sister was put off. I was put off somewhere down near New Bern [North Carolina]. [unclear] because she didn't get up and move for a white man.

WC: When was that, '48?

EH: The latter part of '47 and the beginning of '48. So those types of things can be pretty humiliating, but it's a funny thing and an odd thing about it when you know that you're right and you know you're doing something that's right. It doesn't bother as much as it would if you were just doing something because you thought somebody else was doing it.

WC: What kinds of organizations would you have belonged to in the fifties when you came back to Greensboro?

EH: Oh, I was a member of a sorority, and that's just about the only thing that you had. And I've been a member of NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] a long time. I can't even remember. I had a student membership, and it's been a long time, and the Y[WCA], the student government, and that type thing. [We] didn't have as many wide and varied organizations as you have now to be in. I really think those things just started happening after then. People got—getting different types of organizations together. I remember when CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] came along. I paid donations of CORE and got some kind of little card. But CORE came in awhile to do certain things, but it didn't last too long in Greensboro. Not to my knowledge it didn't.

WC: William Thomas was a head of that wasn't he?

EH: Yes.

WC: He was a student at A&T?

EH: I can't remember. I know there was a Thomas, but I can't quite remember.

WC: Someone just told me that he is a lawyer now in New York City.

EH: Really?

WC: I'm going to go see him sometime.

EH: I have really missed—when I started working, the students would still come around and we would talk and we would talk about things, but a lot of times when you stop being an active student, they seem to think that you want to be an active staff member. But I kept my participation up, still do.

WC: Were you active in the Pearson Street branch of the YWCA?

EH: Yes.

WC: Was that a strong group?

EH: It was, but not as—when things first happened, they started something, but to me they really started a lot of human relations workshops earlier in the times and was sort of criticized for starting some things, particularly involved with civil rights and a person's right to do certain things. But they started out pretty [unclear]. It didn't bother me too much, and during that particular time I think they were pretty strong in what we would think would be strong at that time.

WC: Who were some of those leaders?

EH: I remember Margaret Falkener was there. And, you know, Margaret Falkener is the only one that stands out that I can remember that is still here.

WC: Mrs. Graves[?] was?

EH: Yeah, but I didn't know her. You know it's hard for me to remember names. That's terrible. Very hard for me to remember names. I can see some people's faces, but their names just escape me right now. I think Carrington[?]. I'm sure she was in there then. And some people I know were in there who have moved from Greensboro.

WC: Did you have feeling that the—I guess it was called the Pearson Street branch then, or was it called the Susie B. Dudley?

EH: It's called the Pearson Street branch.

WC: Was that back in the fifties? Did you have the sense of the downtown Y being supportive?

EH: No, I didn't. They told me no longer than about two months ago that it was, but really to me we felt—I felt like it was a separate thing. Just recently—well, not recently. I can't—you know years go by so fast. But [it was not] too long ago when everything—when they had the new building built there on Davie Street, it seemed like it was, when everybody decided we would have one Y. And really in the last four years, to me we've really been using both Ys. We just call them branches of the Y now instead of saying this Y and that Y. It always seemed like it was separate, but to me the men—now they are beginning to use theirs together now, but the men held out a lot longer than the women did in coming together. And you still pay dues at the Hayes-Taylor [YMCA] and different ones downtown, and I think they're still not quite together.

WC: Were you an active member of the NAACP during the fifties? In other words, you would go to meetings and stuff like that? What was your feelings about the—what's your recollection about the kinds of activities that the NAA was involved in then? Was it a very active organization?

EH: I think it has always been active in most of the time. And the main feelings, when I would attend—I've got to admit I didn't attend all the meetings every time because I was doing other things, too. But the most active thing that I can remember was really getting ready for Greensboro—for the kids to go to school in Greensboro. And I stayed with them off and on even until George[?] and some other people—fourteen other people, I believe it was—filed the suit for desegregation, for unitary schools here in Greensboro.

And they had golf courses, you know. People—one time we played people here on the campus. We had this club trying to learn how to play golf. Gillespie Park had this golf course when it first opened, and then all of a sudden, bam, the door was shut. And I was along the time when they filed the suit to open that park up since it was supposed to be a city park. [It] seems like things were open, and then when somebody got the bright idea this just ought not to be, then, bam, the door was closed. And to me it was right to stop right then and there and have it just be reopened instead of going so many years and have it pile up, you know. Folks get the idea it's got to be that way. I think that was one of the activities that went on.

WC: Did Mr. [Edwin] Edmonds make a big difference with the NAACP? Did his leadership make a big difference, or was it more of a continuation of what it had been?

EH: It could have been. I'd rather not say because that's been a good while and I can't remember now. To me [Dr. George] Simpkins, who now—it has moved. To me it has really moved more. He seemed a little bit more vocal, plus fired up and determined to stick with things. Now I'm not saying this to downgrade the other, I just didn't remember as much about him. I'll put it like that. I'm not saying that he—George just—that's when I was more—seems like things were just a little bit more physical.

WC: Back then did you think that there was a real chance that the school board really was going to do anything to meaningfully desegregate the schools?

EH: In the fifties?

WC: Yes, after the *Brown [v. Board of Education]* decision.

EH: Not really. I've always—well, back then I just feel like they decided to do a little something to please the government. But then they would always, it seems to me, put the burden on the black students. The black student has always had to have the burden of deciding “I want to go” or “I'll go,” and it was always that one-way thing. Yet people would say, “Well, it's open and we got to abide by the law.” I've always felt that when [they] always put, “We've got to abide the law” in it, [it means] “I don't give a hoot about it, but since the law says it, I got to do it.”

And to me this is not going to be real, and you're going to always have a problem. Nobody is going to really go to bat to really make it work as long as their feeling is, “I'm doing it because the law says do it.” And I feel like the burden has always been on the black student when it came along to going to one of the schools. Now they had at Grimsely, Greensboro Senior High School, one girl went out there, and it was so ridiculous to me how people could just act up on the account of one person, as if that one person was contaminating the whole place. So I don't—I always felt that Greensboro had a pretty dedicated school board and a good one, but I still think they were just doing it because they had to do it. I don't think they really wanted to. Some of the members really wanted to do it at the time.

WC: I would assume that you were pretty disappointed. What point do you recall that you become sort of convinced that they were going to do nothing but token?

EH: Well, I was at that point when they first decided to do it, because at that particular time Greensboro did nothing. And I guess I can explain this more as we go up, especially in comparison to what when the desegregation suit came. But at that time you were just on your own to decide what school you would like to go to. [There were] sort of what you call test cases, and it didn't seem like they—I didn't ever feel like the school board was

really, as far as going out and getting students to go to these schools because, as I said, they would always, “Well, we got to abide by the law. The law says this and we do that.” And they never tried to encourage other students, the white kids, to go to other schools. And we got time—they didn’t give us time. Always to me it was an unrelated factor that they were putting on, you know, the real true factor. And to me, I figured they never would do anything but just drag their feet, and the kids would go to the schools they wanted to go to.

And especially when they got freedom of choice, you go where you wanted to go, but still that was blacks going to other schools. And then that seemed to have given some of the parents and also some of the kids—they had heard the parents say it, I guess, the idea that blacks just wanted to get into those white schools just to be with white kids. And then they would start talking about the schools were equal and “I don’t know why they want to come over here.” And they knew then that the schools were not, the equipment, the books we had—we used to see books that the white kids got through using, and the blacks would get those books and the whites would be in some other books. That’s what was happening around here. A few parents saw it and a few parents talked about it. That’s what was happening.

WC: So that really you never had any illusions about the school board?

AL: Not [unclear]. I could have been wrong, but I just felt like—

WC: I guess when I said that, I meant that you never bought the idea that they were—

EH: Not then, not those days. I figured this “all deliberate speed” hung up a whole lot of folks. And it took them seventeen years. Their deliberate speed was mighty slow. I figured if they had really wanted to do any better, they could have. But then, too, as I look back and see, maybe not enough parents demanded it so much, because a lot of parents didn’t want it.

WC: Were they afraid for their children?

EH: Yeah, I’m quite sure they were. Some parents, even as late as today, seem to be afraid for their children. [It] seems like they found out it it’s not really all that bad. Nobody changed colors.

WC: You’re talking about black parents now, as well as white parents?

EH: Black and white parents. You had black parents afraid too, because you had so many factors that blacks were afraid of at the time, like the [Ku Klux] Klan. I’ve seen—they

would be all upset, and now the Klan had a rally not too long ago and they were standing out laughing at them. So it's really amazing to see how things can change and how just, I think, a matter of getting together with each other and talking and seeing that people are basically alike and they have the same needs. I think that helps a person, especially when you don't know and you are afraid. But once you learn or know about something, it doesn't bother you. I can just give you comparisons. The Klan burned a cross on a yard and everybody was so upset, or when they wanted to have a parade downtown, how people would be so nervous and didn't want to go, and how they had this thing on the court house steps. And you know how they really stood up and [unclear], and black and white together is nice. It's just really something.

WC: [unclear]

EH: I can't remember. We had a capital punishment rally, and then the following week or so they came. But it's really amazing to see how they don't affect people now. Because frightening people was to get what folks wanted, you know. Just scare them to death and then they will be quiet. And you really had some who would speak out even then, but it was very few.

WC: When was the cross burned before?

EH: This one was burned in—well, [Reverend] Frank Williams had one burned in front of it. But during the time of the schools, the girl first went to school—

WC: Was it [Dr. Edwin] Edmonds house?

EH: I can't remember his house having one burned. I don't know. But I do remember it was during that time a cross was burned. And I know down into—down here—I'm not talking about Frank Williams' house—one was burned [unclear]. But those kinds of things used to frighten people.

WC: Is Frank Williams still around here?

EH: Yeah.

WC: That was pretty serious, wasn't it, that whole—

EH: Yes, it was. Now his didn't have anything to do with schools. His was because he moved out to that neighborhood, and we've had some pretty rough touches here in Greensboro.

WC: Can you tell me a little bit about the Frank Williams' situation?

EH: I don't know as much about it as somebody else could tell you, but I do know when he moved out there, the man that [unclear] across the street—I think they said that he was a known Klansman, and he's moved since. I know somebody else lives in his house now. But anyway, that's when all this started. And they didn't want him in that neighborhood, and naturally they thought they were going to frighten him out. And he would be the best source to tell you about it. But I think they thought they were going to frighten him out, but some of his church members were around and sitting in the house around the clock, and they stood by him and they refused to move. Then I think—I know the city police got into it and sort of helped calm it, but they were really getting pretty rough down there. And he really would be the best one to tell you about it. The only thing I know is I was coming through there one evening when they were gathering, and that's how I found out that he was—when Frank had moved down there, because I didn't even know anything about it until I came through there that evening and all the crowd was out and from the Klan. But I do know I worked with one of his members who sat in that house with a loaded gun helping to guard it. They guarded it around the clock a good while because he was determined to stay.

WC: How were the city police during all these years? Were they neutral, were they hostile, mean?

EH: I never ran into—I only had one incident with the police, but at that particular time I don't think you had as many dedicated for protection of blacks as you do now. And the police department has really come a long way, a very long way, and I helped work with them in workshops for five years now. They just got a new idea not to just have cadets coming in becoming policemen today. They have schools and have all sorts of activities. And I think—at that particular time, I really think some of the policemen would have, and some of them probably did—I won't say they did. They probably did—didn't do much to help the total cause because they didn't believe in what they were told to do, and I think some people got shortchanged by it.

WC: Who is most responsible for the change in the police department?

EH: Let me see now, I'm trying to think. I know quite a few of them down there. And I think John Patterson[?], before he became even in police relations, community relations part, was a lot of the reason they changed, along with Hal Sieber coming to Greensboro. You remember him?

WC: Yeah.

EH: At the chamber of commerce—see, when he got the chamber of commerce as a change agent, being a person who could really—well, he sort of maneuvered people, too. He could do that, but he knew how. [He was] outspoken, taking insults and everything else, and really standing up for what he believed in. It helped change the chamber of commerce around. And working with some of the—you see, some of the school board were even members of the chamber of commerce and just about a little bit of everybody. He got more members in the chamber. He got black members in the chamber of commerce, those type things, and really changed the attitude of “What’s good for business is good for Greensboro,” or “What’s good for Greensboro is good for business,” you know. [He] sort of reversed it and changed it to know that they had to be a part of the community. Those type things. One worked on the other, and with that type of leadership and that type of influence—he had to influence the city manager, had to influence the chief of police, and work with them to get certain [unclear]. Well, now when Patterson, [when] they got together and started calling in communities and started talking about the police and the police working with the community, things began to change and attitudes started to change. And I think—I can’t put just one person in, but those people working and really no giving up, working with it caused a lot of things to happen.

And now I think—of course you still have people yelling “police brutality.” There are still some, but not as loudly for some now as it has been. And I don’t think it really is. A lot of citizens have begun to—there are some times a policeman goes into a community, you call him and he has a problem, folk won’t even let him get to the cause, you know, and then they—we still have some of that I’m sure, but it is sort of coming down. We have a better group of policemen, much better. And see, what they do now is carry them through all those routines they have to go through to get to be a policeman. They can spot and find out that they won’t make it on that to start with, and that was the thing that they hadn’t been doing. They were just getting people who said, “I want to be a policeman,” and that was it. And they didn’t know that sometimes you had people who just wanted to put on a uniform and give them a license to do the wrong thing.

WC: Yeah, that’s probably very important. Did you know David Richmond and Ezell Blair [Jr. —now Jibreel Khazan]?

EH: Yeah. Have you talked to them, Richmond?

WC: Not yet. I just talked to Blair in Boston. I just saw him and had a lovely chat with him. Did you talk to them while this was going on? Would they be around, talking to you?

EH: The day they went down to Woolworth’s they came. They’d come in the library. Sometimes they would have—one of the fellows, McNair [sic], worked in the library and

he said, “Mrs. Hudgens, we’re getting ready to do it,” like that, and they left the library and went on down.

WC: You knew what he meant when he said that?

EH: Yeah.

WC: Because they had talked to you before about that?

EH: Yeah, he had been talking to me, McNair had—[Joseph] McNeil, I’m sorry. He had been talking to me because he worked in here. And we had talked a pretty long time about different things, and I said, “Well, good luck. And if you need us, we’ll be there.” So he had come in here that night before, and we were talking. He said, “Well, we don’t know what’s going to happen, but if we don’t start, we never will.”

He came by to say, “We’re getting ready to do it.”

I said. “Okay.”

WC: Was there one of those four who was more of a leader than the others? I mean was it clear, at any point, who was the most important leader or the strongest?

EH: I don’t know whether they considered anybody being a leader. It was an odd thing about that to me. The way I felt at—I don’t know how anybody else felt, but I do know because we talked about it later—it just seems like all of a sudden those fellows decided to do that. And you know, sometimes—and I know it seems sort of—now whether they did or not, I don’t know. They never told about a meeting, you know. They were sort of in a—you know how you have these rap sessions and you get to talking and you get through and you can’t put your finger on who decided what, but the next thing you know it’s done or you’re doing it, and that’s the way it appeared to me. Now whether they had one, they never told me about it or we didn’t ever know about it. It just seems like it was one of those things they talked about and decided all of a sudden to do.

WC: Obviously it must have shaken up a lot of people.

EH: Oh, it did. It shook them up both ways. Some were happy about it, some were scared to death, and some were—some were uneasy and some figured, “Well, we’ve been doing pretty good and they are going to mess things up.” And then you begin to wonder, well, what do you mean “pretty good”, you know? And then that thing just opens your eyes up to see what you’ve really been doing. You know it’s kind of like men and women, when we feel like we’ve got good jobs until you’re not getting paid what the other folks are getting paid. You see, until somebody opens it up to you, you feel like you’re doing all

right. Even though the people expressed that we were doing all right, deep within when they would go in those places and spend their money and then have to buy a hotdog or what have you and take it out, [it] didn't make you feel good. It really did something to you. And then they'd think, "Well, that wasn't too good at all," you know. Even though I thought it, I just didn't have nerve enough or felt like nothing would be done about it. You just have those types of feelings, and so why say anything about it? And they learned something from those four fellows: that if you want something done, you've got to go out and fight for it and let the world know that there is an injustice being done, draw their attention to it, and it's not so hard to look at then.

WC: Did you go to the meetings which they held after the demonstrations started, after the sit-ins started? They would have meetings here—

EH: Schools and churches?

WC: Yeah. And sometimes someone from the city would come, like Mr. [Edward] Zane came to some of those things.

EH: Yeah, I was sort of disappointed with our city fathers at that particular time. It seems like one had to wait for somebody else to tell them what to do, you know. It seems like the power, wherever they were, we didn't know them too well. They weren't as visible as they are now. The mayor didn't go into communities like the mayor does now. The mayor didn't—it seems like then the mayor had somebody to tell him, you know. It seems like some power was out of town at the time and they kept holding off until this particular came in. And he—"and he's got to do—", you know, "and you do this," this kind of stuff. We didn't know the people. You weren't aware. You knew by name who the mayor was, but you never—it was just somebody that you didn't know. It's just about like, be here and never see the president of the United States; you may see him on television every now and then. That's the way it was. To me there was no closeness with the city government and the regular people in the community.

WC: And who did you think were the powers behind the mayor?

EH: There I go with names again. All the rich folks like [Caesar] Cone, people like that who figured when they'd speak up something would happen. The reason I can't call all those names I've heard—but you didn't hear them much. You know, you might hear something about them in the news or somebody just talking about them. We didn't know them. I didn't, and I've heard the names but it just didn't ring a bell, just names. And even though I had moved back to Greensboro and started working and, you know, working and involving, I didn't know many of the city people. As I told you, the chamber of

commerce—you'd hear the city chamber of commerce. I didn't even know the president or nothing.

And you know, until a short time after then—but we would always hear, “Well, the power is not here yet.” The power had [unclear]. We didn't exactly know who the power was, but it seemed like one of these days the power came [unclear]. So that's what we would hear. We didn't know who, but we figured it was all the rich folks. We did hear Cone and people like—

WC: [Spencer] Love?

EH: Yeah, we heard that one and somebody else. [There] were three of them you used to hear about all the time. I'm sorry. I just no good on names.

WC: Do you remember seeing Mr. Zane, Ed Zane, at these meetings? He was the guy that was the head of the—

EH: I don't remember. Now he could have been, but I just don't remember. Because most times it was always tension in the meetings. You know you just ball up like this a lot of times. I can't really remember. I didn't go to all the meetings. And a lot of times people would speak, and somebody sitting and talking and asking you what are we going to do next or what we think we ought to do, and sometimes you didn't even hear the people who were saying things. But I do remember Reverend [Cecil] Bishop [and] Reverend [Otis] Hairston.

WC: Bishop and Hairston?

EH: And they were the most visible pastors who would, you know, keep people together, keep them from—nonviolence, that type of thing. They were the two ministers in Greensboro that I can remember really being leaders in times of tension, some such tension.

WC: How about McCoy?

EH: Henry?

WC: Cleo McCoy?

EH: Cleo McCoy. I don't remember. Now he could have been. I'm not going to say he wasn't. I don't remember him. I don't remember him as well as I—I know he marched and worked with the students on the campus.

[End Tape 1, Side A—Begin Tape 2, Side B]

EH: —just about every march, just about every anything I'd see them. And some ministers just didn't touch it.

WC: Would you say that was a real problem, that a lot of ministers didn't?

EH: Well, you know black folks, we looked at—I don't know whether we were conditioned or just the way we were taught, but you usually looked to the church for leadership. And too long we all felt that the church stayed out. We feel like if the church had been involved from the get-go, a whole lot of things would have happened faster and other things would not have happened at all, those unpleasant things. And we just feel like the church just didn't get involved quickly enough. And the church is still one of the last places to really to take on, to really act like what they claim, what you think the Bible is teaching. The church [is] still segregated to the hilt, most of them.

WC: Are you talking about black churches as well as white churches?

EH: Black and white churches now.

WC: In terms of the absence of leadership?

EH: Yeah, I mean even there it seems like you wonder where to go. You know, you've been taught the church and the leaders of the church are the people who can sort of help you, but you don't seem to have much help. Churches have really been the slowest one to really get into. And I think maybe since [reformed?] social ministry has come out, people are delving into that, and a lot of churches are getting social ministry committees and that type of thing. It's helping, but the church is still, to me, the body that's dragging its feet in this whole thing, even now, with a few people sitting up now complacent, now thinking "We've got it made in Greensboro. We've got no racial problems." That's what they're thinking.

WC: They've been saying that for a long time, haven't they?

EH: Yeah, they said that even then. Seeing as you don't admit you have a problem, then you can't do anything about it. They've been saying—

WC: They're still saying it now?

EH: Yeah.

WC: Who's saying it now?

EH: Well, some of the ministers are saying it.

WC: Black ministers as well as white ministers?

EH: Well, yeah, some black ministers are saying that we have good race relations. We do have pretty good race relations, but there is still an undercurrent here that still has to be worked on. You see what we've done is reacted and forgot about preventing it, you know. Most times you react and then you think you got it made, because everything is quiet. And things are still smoldering in places, and then you're not looking at that, you're still floating on what we've done, how well we've come about, and you're not thinking about starting to prevent what may explode later.

WC: You used the word "the undertide." Where is that?

EH: I say it's in the grassroots, the poor people who are still being overlooked in certain things. Now this—okay, revenue sharing came out. Greensboro was not one of the cities that would be able to take some of that money for community action programs, you see. They asked not to be, and I've talked about that enough to be able to use the word I'm trying to think of from legislature—they were scared, saying that this program didn't work, but this type of thing—but then we have too many people still hungry in Greensboro, too many people still being out of jobs, and to boast to have so much percent of people working—but then that sounds good. But when you think about the ones not working and programs that we could have gotten together, you know, using the excuse that, "Well, we don't know about that problem," you know.

I am in some meetings right now at the chamber of commerce. I belong to Community Unity Council. Anytime you bring up a problem—being somebody in there—those people haven't been hungry. "Well, I didn't know that exists. I thought we didn't have that in Greensboro now." You see, it's this type of thing. And then instead of facing that we have it, what will you do about it, they will pass it to a committee and then the committee meets. And this kind of stuff bugs me. You know, if I'm hungry, don't be talking about how to make this kind of stuff. And of course now I feel—on the other hand, I feel like Greensboro, under this new community development act and what it's supposed to get, now they called—had meetings for people to express their concern. Well, to show you where I'm saying about undertide, some people didn't go because they felt like, "Well, they already got the buildings planned that they are going to build, and regardless [as] to what we say they are going to do it anyway," which is bad. But that was the implication that they had been given, and therefore a lot of people didn't attend the

meetings. Half of the people who should have been attending didn't go to talk about [what] Greensboro should do with the money.

WC: How about the Greensboro Association of Poor People [GAPP]?

EH: They are very vocal and they usually bring—they do a lot to bring certain problems to the forefront that nobody knows about.

WC: Do they get listened to by the power structure?

EH: Yeah, they get listened to. Sometimes they may not do anything about it, but they listen. They have to hear them; they got enough people on it for them to hear them. They listen to them. Have you talked to Nelson Johnson?

WC: I didn't know whether he'd talk to me. Do you think he will?

EH: Yeah, he'll talk to you.

WC: Okay. I didn't want to—

EH: He'll talk to you okay.

WC: You know I hesitate to walk in, and I shouldn't and—

EH: I think he will. You tell him I said talk to you.

WC: Okay, great.

EH: Now, I haven't been a participant too much. I mean I worked with some of the people in his group, but I didn't join his group. At the time I was too involved. You know you spread yourself so thin you [aren't] effective anywhere, so I had to stop somewhere. But even though I didn't join his group, everything—the opportunity arose to talk about it and mention something about it [unclear].

WC: Is the Community Unity thing still working down at the chamber?

EH: Yes, but it's not working in the same way it did. It was a very viable source during the desegregation change, the transition between the schools. And again I have to mention Hal Sieber, because we set up cell groups, you know, discussion groups. And if we went to one meeting a week, we went to a hundred. And what we did, we'd get parents,

business people, students, just everybody, and we'd cross tracks, you know. The rich would hit the poor and the poor would—we did all this, and we really had dialogues, good dialogues. And one of the first things we would always tell the group when everything that they had mentioned [unclear]. Well, we were communicating. We'd been doing that for years, but the communication wasn't positive. But then we hadn't been committed to do anything about it, and that made the difference.

But this particular time when we found—and this is one thing black folks found out about the whites in this particular thing. Everything is quiet as long as my child is not involved in it. We had been saying it, but folk didn't believe it. Now when my child gets involved in it, I'm going to work for it. I'm going for it to work. All right, in some of those meetings we got, "Dudley High [School] and black schools are better equipped than whites," and we knew better than that.

We had asked—and I'll give you an example, I was on a PTA [Parent Teacher Association] committee down there on Lee Street and Lincoln, at Lincoln Junior High School, and we had been fighting for a stoplight down there for our kids. We had—one day we went to the school board and they told us the school board meeting was one hour, and we went there and the door was locked. I don't know whether they had it before or afterwards, but we were wrong, we were told. We asked to be on the agenda and the door was locked. Now they finally got that [the stoplight]. They started saying it's got to be so many feet away from the school and this that and the other, and they started talking about it being a highway, and you had to go all over the place and look at where lights were in a certain vicinity of white schools. And we had some arguments to make, and finally we got that signal down there. Then we wanted better bathrooms, we wanted fences. But the minute they knew that the white kids had to go to those schools, you'd be surprised, we saw sidewalks coming up, we fences being put up. You know, [there was] no money before and all this stuff got to happening so fast it was just—well, really it was funny and it would make you mad, too, to know that it can happen and the money can be found somewhere and all of a sudden.

We used to call them [white children] "Anne" and "Charlie." [Once they] had to go to school over cross the way, things got fixed up. They got to pulling—pulling tile up and redoing the principal's offices and give him new furniture and rugs, and all of a sudden the guidance center in the school was just terrible; they started pulling out and rebuilding. The auditorium was fixed up. And I said, "Now, well, if we were so separate and equal, why did we have to get all this now, if we were equal," you know? And some of it was funny, and some of it makes you really mad. It really would. And if the kids needed Latin, they couldn't—I mean they couldn't get them over to another school, they didn't have another teacher, and all this kind of stuff. And now the kids change places and get what they need.

Then they got hung up on the busing issue, and they got to talking about forced busing. We'd get in the meetings and we'd always say really [unclear]. And we'd tell

them, you know, you can ride a bicycle, walk, a car, or anything else. Nobody can tell you how to get to school. Transportation has been provided for and you are not forced to ride that bus, so don't bring something in. That's an emotional issue that people [unclear] to have some reason for saying "We don't want to go." And I guess you hear the expression—Jesse Jackson had one. "It ain't the bus, it's us." One lady in Virginia said, "It wasn't the distance, it was the niggers." So we decided to coin in Greensboro, "It's not the busing, it's where it stops." So we really worked out, and I really do think we had pretty smooth transition. None of that has really carried over. It has gotten people to talking, to really trying to understand each other and really being committed to act, and I think that was a good thing.

WC: And that's still happening now?

EH: It's still going.

WC: Where is that happening, PTA meetings?

EH: Well, it's happened all over. It happens in the community, churches. Where we would have meetings in churches, we'd have big public meetings, then we'd break up in—and every Wednesday morning we'd have cell meetings at the Y, and at night we would have what we called cell discussions. We'd go to all these housing developments. We'd go all over town. And this is the funny part, I got hung up in a "Klan meeting," you know, what we call Klansville. And we just raised all kind of [sand?], you know, answering questions and talking. And the funny part about it, when I got back home, people from town were calling. "Y'all watch it, because Hudgins might have a cross being burned in her [unclear], the way she—" It was really funny. And somebody else said, "Weren't you afraid to be there?"

I said, "No, I didn't even think. I wasn't even caring who I was talking to."

And the big man himself was there asking all sorts of questions. "Well, I don't want my child doing this."

And I'd come back at him—

WC: Who's the big man?

EH: What was his name? I'm talking about the Klansman. What's his name? I can get you that name, but I declare I can't remember now. But anyway, they got to calling over town, wondering if I was going to get a cross burned in my yard that night. But that didn't bother me, but they were just teasing me. Some of them weren't teasing; some of them were pretty concerned. And I got calls until about twelve o'clock that night to see if I was all right. But we really had a hot session that night.

WC: That was part of the cell group?

EH: That was part of getting the people. We were meeting—this was at the community center. We just set them up and different people from the chamber and the community council, and especially those who were trained in the human relations workshop would be the speakers who would go to answer questions.

WC: Now, in most of these things you said there would be a speaker. At what point would you start getting the confrontation or dialogue?

EH: Time we walked in.

WC: Between the people, as well as—

EH: Well, really we didn't make speeches as such. We were there to answer questions.

WC: Resource person, kind of?

EH: Yes. Now we had—there was—and they put out a lot of flyers and different type things of what—I should have had some of these things in here. If you give me your address I can send you some of those type things. Because we steered away from issues like—well, we answered what we could, but we had a forum to bring the people back to the main issue and not go off afar field and be trying to talk about something that wasn't even involved in what we were doing. So my memory—I've had a lot on my mind lately, but if you give me your address, I'll be glad to send you those things because I have plenty of them. And I can send you and let you know. We set up open houses in all the schools for the parents to go visit, even set the buses schedule, and they rode the buses to the schools. So it might have been a sort of brainwashing, but after they went to the school, met the teachers, met the principals, saw the schools, they felt a whole lot better.

WC: I think it was an ingenious program.

EH: And like one thing, when one of the fellows at that particular meeting said, "I don't want my child riding no bus with all—."

Well, I said, "I don't know what you are complaining about. All white kids are on the bus when they ride across there. You know the housing situation is not desegregated yet."

"I hadn't thought of that." You see this type of thing.

One said, "The bus drives too fast." And I asked this lady, "Did your child ride a bus?"

“Yes, my child has always ridden a bus.”

Then I’d say, “It’s not the bus then; it’s where it stops,” you know. I mean sometimes you have to—I tell them if you admit to yourself, you know, how you feel about it and really face that fact, then you may do something about it. You say, “I’m not prejudice, I’m not racist, but I just don’t want my child—.” Well, you know, why? And when you start coming to grips with why and facing that fact, we really got a lot done that way.

WC: Now these groups—how were you set up? Who was going to be at a given meeting? Let’s say, that you were going to be in charge of a meeting next Wednesday night. How would you choose who was going to be there?

EH: You mean the people?

WC: Well, you see, in that particular community, you sent out notices and you had it in the papers and they sent out flyers all over the community. “Well, tonight we will have the discussion of the desegregation issue here.” We tried to stay away from busing because busing really wasn’t the issue, and so we would have to answer those questions, but we tried to stay away.

WC: You would have a mix of housewives, business people, and lawyers?

EH: Business people, teachers, students, principals, housewives, fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, just everybody who wanted to come to those meetings. And you know, it’s a strange thing: just about all of them were packed every night, every time you’d go, and we went every night.

Now on Wednesday morning we had cell discussions that would involve anything dealing with the community, any problems. But at night we went to—we hit every public housing unit. They would have it in their community house or whatever you call those things; community center or what have you. Some we would have in some offices with just some of the personnel, to get them, and then we would have school board members, we would have some of the teachers, some of the principals, you know, to express their views, and then you get your feedback and questions from them. When it got down to the bus schedule and that kind of stuff, then we get Dick Walker[?], the man who is in charge of the buses, and he would be there to talk. We went to churches. And then people got so they would call in and ask us to come to their—we went to houses.

WC: You just really took it everywhere there was to go.

EH: And we got everybody that we could. We had I don't know how many—over a thousand we called. CCS, Concerned Citizens for Schools, had just about everybody you can imagine involved in helping it to work. It was thought of as a positive idea. And then one night the school chairman [unclear] got up and was talking about what we would do and follow the law. At the meeting I told them then if the leaders would just get up and say what we were going to in Greensboro not because the law says, but because it's right, you'd be surprised how people would fall in and start thinking that way, too. And they started doing it.

WC: What did you think of [school board chairman and funeral home owner, Al] Lineberry?

EH: [unclear]

WC: You think he was with the program?

EH: I think he was.

WC: He did a good job?

EH: I really believe he was. We had a lot of fun one night in race relations class. He came to speak and I asked him, I said, "All I want to know: if I die, can I have you to embalm me?" [laughter]

He said, "You would be the first one." And he said, "Yes." [laughter]

You see, we would think about things. Now, Greensboro was the all-American city. We know we've got personal hang-ups about certain things. I mean, you know, like where my child is going to be buried and what funeral home, but we got to learn. We tried to teach people in these meetings [that] you can get involved in so many things that are race-unrelated and put it on race. Like now, like black and white hair, you know, going to the beauty parlor or barber shop. Like, I go to a barber shop [and] the man may tell me, you know, "I would cut your hair." The first thing he may say, "It's five dollars." And right then he's saying that to mean, you know, "Now, if I say five dollars, you may not have it, being black, so that will stop you." That's what I call race-unrelated factor, to say that, "I don't cut your hair," or he may say, "I wouldn't mind cutting your hair, but I didn't learn how to cut black hair," you know, this type of thing. And we were trying to get people in Greensboro to stop doing that kind of thing and just say, "Well, I'm going to try it. If you don't mind me trying it, then I'll go along with trying it." Don't quote the price on me first, you know, to turn me off, because when I go there, I'm going to have my money together because I know that's about the first thing he's going to say. Like, "We would embalm blacks, but, well, they don't have funeral services the same way we

do. Their blood type,” you know when, “They can’t take the same embalming fluid,” and all this kind of jive. Well, you hear it.

Then like another thing, if you and I would go downtown in a car and we have a wreck, if we’re dead, they would immediately take you to Cone Hospital and then to [Hanes] Lineberry [Funeral Home] or [unclear] and you don’t have to say anything. And then they would take me to Brown’s [Funeral Directors] or Hargett’s [Funeral Home], a black funeral home, you see. It’s just what they’ll do. Then when you get ready to get buried, they’ll take me to—anyway, I can’t—oh, good gracious—down off Elizabeth Street. Anyway, and they may take you out to that thing out there on highway 29. But now they are beginning to—they got one out called [Carolina] Biblical Gardens [that] black and white are buried in. And Forest Lawn [Cemetery], I know a black minister was buried out there not too long ago. But I mean it’s changed, but it’s slowly doing it. And it’s not anything that—they just take for granted that’s what you do. Now [L.] Richardson [Memorial] Hospital is right there on the highway, but you could be dead by the time they drove all that way to carry you over to Cone when they could have stopped you right there at Richardson. But I mean it’s just one of those things. And people see those things, and then when they can talk about it, most times—I grant you a lot of times, in a lot of stations, people can laugh at things and really get themselves together instead of being uptight and storming each other and nothing is solved. But I really think we got pretty good relationships. We still have a long way to go because we still have some factions, especially in the schools.

I’m involved with student rights, student [unclear], student dropout type of thing, and you see a lot of things. And we still have teachers, black and white, who are just not ready. I always tell—I told one not too long ago when I went to classroom, I waited until the students got out, but I told her she needed to be in K-Mart or somewhere behind a cash register where she can grunt and tell you how much. You know, [she] need[s] to be working with people rather than kids. We do have teachers even now who feel like, “Well, this black child is just not up to par and not going to learn,” you know. Well, look where he comes from. “I’ve got nothing to work with,” these type of things. We still have some blacks who figure, “Well, I don’t have time to work with you. I’ve got to really go with this child that knows.” Well, that accelerated child really didn’t need as much help as that slow one. We still have a lot of them still feeling that learning is supposed to take place with everybody on the same level, and if you don’t—if you don’t learn the way they think, you ought to—and that presents a problem, because they pressure the students, and the students eventually decide, “What the heck.”

We have a lot—I can’t quote percentages now—of kids being suspended and expelled from school, and we have a problem. It’s not as much this year, but last year we raised a lot of questions. The State of North Carolina says you go to school until you are sixteen years old, and yet still they had expelled three thirteen-year-old kids. So now what do you do about that? Something needs to be done. And to expel them, that’s pretty

bad for the rest of the year. And yet—and still the truant officer would come and to me. We need to work on that. What we've been trying to get the school board—and they claim they can't force teachers to do things. Classroom management is one of the things that is not working in the schools where, you know, they could have better discipline and less problems to get the students out. But some kids are already being pushed out—not necessarily dropping out, they are being pushed out. And that's our number one problem in Greensboro now. And it may be better now since students are beginning to learn about student rights and things that they can do. And we also know that teachers have rights, too. But that's the problem we have now, so far as I'm concerned, in Greensboro: letting everybody face up to what that problem is, and we can do something about that. And then I think we will be doing some pretty good.

WC: How about the school board? Are there people on the school [board] who were fighting or who were obstructions during this whole time?

EH: I don't think so. I think—

WC: Good school board?

EH: A number one school board, and I really do. In fact, I think our school board really came to [unclear] when this suit came through for unitary schools. And I think that was it when our school board said, "Now we are going to work and this is what we're going to do." They had all sorts of problems. They said, "This is how this is going to work. This is what we are going to do."

WC: This sort of puzzles me, why the school board didn't read the handwriting on the wall in 1968, why they fought HEW [U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] so much. They just seemed to senselessly carry these things out.

EH: Well, I don't know why they were doing that. While they were doing that—you see, a whole year before, when Charlotte-Mecklenburg started, that's when the chamber of commerce community council got busy. The school board—I guess you had some factions in it—got the lawyer and figured they could fight it. And some, I'll grant you, some on the school board were still "freedom of choice" people, and they just sort of got this lawyer's advice. But after they saw that it was inevitable—I've got to give them credit—they came up. At least they didn't sit back sore and still try to fight it. They started getting the community together. After I find out about people, if you tell them what they have to do and you lead them, they'll do. It would have been chaotic if the school board had still continued to fight against it and the parents trying to for it. It would

have really been a mess. And that's why I think Lineberry just made a good school board chairman.

WC: He's very—

EH: He really [unclear]. I saw some things that I can't tell you about. I mean sometimes you get people to do things and they don't really know. You know they are in it before they realize it, the way you set it up. And as I told you, Hal Sieber was—

WC: He was good.

EH: Certain things would happen, and you'd get people in a certain position and hit the right question, they're going to have to say yes and you're committed then. But he really was a sort of committed soul, but I believe that this particular incident made it more so. Wasn't nothing illegal about it, it was just the pressure was so much until you—if you got in a situation where the pressure was, you had to say yes and then you went on from there, and sometimes [unclear] when you say it, you're not quite sure you believed it to start with. It was right funny when that happened. I can't tell you all of it. But I do think the school board has really been pretty strong, pretty good one because, you know, we had one faction of—what's that thing—wanted to boycott the schools and that kind of stuff. It never was effective because they were downtown making speeches, and we were all around downtown sort of showing the people where they shouldn't listen to that in the crowd but, you know, doing our little—some people called it your little dirty work, telling them the true facts. So that was tension, but it was fun.

You could really see people coming around to really—even some of the kids told the parents, “Now, if you don't believe in it, just leave us alone.” One guy got up in a meeting one night and told his parents, “Now, if we start fighting, keep your bedroom shoes on. Just stay home and don't make it a black/white thing, because we students [have] been fighting for years, and if we start arguing, don't get upset. Don't come here and mess up things.” And that helped some. Then we had this rumor control and, oh, it was ridiculous. I had some students, some of my sorority students, I sent them down as volunteers and I manned it one day, part of it. And one lady called in and she was so upset because her daughter was going to have to take a shower after physical ed[ucation] and she told her to keep her clothes on, you know. All this kind of stuff we would hear. And then they are going to bomb the school, they going to do this, and that rumor control thing really helped keep down a lot of panic, but people will try anything to get things upset.

WC: Is it true, you think, that Hal Sieber got forced out?

EH: No [unclear]

WC: How did that happen?

EH: I don't—I'm pretty close to Hal Sieber, and I know quite a bit and I can't tell you that, but not from the city.

WC: Not from the city?

EH: Not from the city. It was the inside, I can tell you that much.

WC: Inside the chamber?

EH: Yes. Of course, it—part of the white faction of the city, members of the chamber who sort of put pressure on the president—not the president, the executive man. Now, that is—

WC: Bill Little would have had a lot to do with that?

EH: Quite a bit. Yet Bill Little recommended him to the Dallas Chamber of Commerce.

WC: When did things really start getting tight for Hal?

EH: I guess about the last year. When did he leave, in April?

WC: He left the chamber in April, and left Greensboro in August.

EH: Yes, well he left the chamber in April. I really don't think it started getting kind of messy until—

WC: Starting getting kind of—

EH: January. It started in January and it sort of reached its peak in April. But then too—this is off the record now—

[Off-the-record comments redacted.]

EH: But really the council is not what it was, because I don't think the people—well, the leaders in it now are—they're dedicated folks, I guess, but they don't—they like to skirt issues, they don't like fights. I don't like just any kind of [unclear]. I say fight, but I mean

a challenge to do and to change things, see, and it weakens it when your leaders are not in there pitching.

WC: So there was a period of time there when Sieber was able to do what he wanted to do with the help of—and he broaden—they broadened the base and they brought in a lot of people and they set up new committees.

EH: He did and Little was along with him, backed him up to the hilt.

WC: So Bill deserves credit for that?

EH: Yeah, I give him credit for that. In fact, I like Bill Little. I don't have any—well, one little thing that was sort of narrow, as far as I'm concerned, but that did not shade my opinion of him, because people do—nobody's perfect and—but he really backed him up.

He—well, one thing about Hal: Hal gave everybody work. He could do just about everybody's work. And the type of group that he was managing was one that was, you know, communications and community and radio and television, all the news and all this, and he just—really his functions just moved out and moved the chamber along really, and people just went along with him because he is the type of person you can work with, work well with. And he is the type of person that—one of the most real ones. I worked with him a long time. He's not a phony guy. And you know you can spot phony; it doesn't take you forever to do it. And I think a lot of people didn't like that. A lot of them called [unclear], told him he was an FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigations] man, called him a spy, called him a lot of things.

And he has been run out right here on this campus. He was run out of a meeting, and he said he thinks that got him more than anything else he's known. He'd never been put out of a meeting before [unclear]. This was during the time of the sixties, you know, when the colleges were—when they had this black meeting. And, of course, John Marshall Stevenson [now Kilimanjaro], he's [unclear]. Now, he's another person who has really worked and fought. He and Hal are good friends. And he saved him that night because he said, "Now, look, I'm just going to tell you, you're going to have to get out of here before you are carried out." So he finally got him out of there, because they didn't know him then. And those guys—some of those same guys right now wouldn't have a better friend. They didn't know him then, but they put him out of that meeting that night, and John Marshall helped get him out of there to keep him from getting [unclear].

He's been into some terrible situations and still came back fighting. And after people found that out, they started trusting him and they really started to believe that there's somebody who would get somebody to hear us. Greensboro was sort of sad because he left here, a lot of Greensboro—you know, say, the whole of Greensboro, I'm

talking about a lot of factions—because he really did a lot of good and he caused—he really helped bring us together.

[End of Interview]