

CIVIL RIGHTS GREENSBORO DIGITAL ARCHIVE PROJECT

William Henry Chafe Oral History Collection

INTERVIEWEE: Evelyn Troxler

INTERVIEWER: William H. Chafe

DATE: unknown

EVELYN TROXLER: [unclear] previous to that, which would have been '63-'64. And in order to affect that, we would have begun our work in '62. I think in early '62. It was in January. This is—this is—what I'm speaking of now is a project that caught up a whole lot of people. And these people had been working together in other groupings earlier. They were brought together because they had worked together in other groupings, and you may want to know about those.

WILLIAM CHAFE: Yes.

ET: Do you want me to begin that with that, with some of that background?

WC: Maybe you could, yes. And then I can—

ET: Well, we've got the date of early '62—

WC: Right.

ET: —when this school group coalesced and began working toward desegregation. Well, [pause] and I'm not sure dates back in the fifties. But for a long time here in Guilford County, there existed a group call the Guilford County Human Relations Commission. And you may have talked to people who referred to that committee. I don't know when it was begun, and its main function for many years was to sponsor brotherhood vespers in February. And that was all pretty much. But when I got acquainted with the group, which probably was, I don't know, early fifties sometime, it was becoming a little more active, and there were efforts being made to break down some of these other barriers. And one thing that I remember we did was to go out and try to get rid of the dual drinking fountain systems around—drinking fountains around business places, government places, everywhere. And we went out in teams interracially to try to combat that, and were reasonably successful eventually.

But that group then did vanish gradually and was replaced by some more active groups. However, while it was still in existence, there was a spinoff from it. Mothers—after the '54 Supreme Court [*Brown v. Board of Education*] decision about schools, a spinoff group formed of mothers who could meet better in the daytime, and we started a group studying the school situation. We met down at the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] which was really, goodness, for many years the only place you could have a very comfortable interracial meeting. And we continued for something like, I guess, at least four years, meeting once a month down there, bringing in speakers on—who had information about different facets of the public schools, talking to students, because this was—in 1957 we had our very first integration. You know it was token, but it was there. And I know one of our—or remember one of our programs toward the latter part of our existence as that particular group where the—what was her name? Her last name was Boyd.

WC: Josephine Boyd.

ET: Josephine Boyd came along with a friend of hers from Grimsley [High School]—what is now Grimsley. It was then Greensboro [Senior] High [School] —to talk about the experiences. So we must have lasted then maybe until 1960 as that particular—

WC: Who was in that group, Mrs. Troxler?

ET: Well, yes. Let me try to think. Helen Douglas. Mrs. Julius Douglas was active in it, and she and her husband were people that I—if you had not known, you may have already talked with them.

WC: I haven't yet, but I want to.

ET: They will be they will be important people to talk with, both of them. Some—you know, you get a feeling of time because people have moved away. Academic people who were in it have moved, and this was academic to a large part. Cordelia Penn Cannon, who was my across the street neighbor, was in that group, and she is still a resident here.

WC: She was UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro] or—

ET: Well, she—no. No, she was the wife of a very successful businessman, a lawyer who died very recently. I can think through and try to dredge up some other names. A number of the people, though, are not here now. [pause] It would be hard for me to recall those people way back there.

WC: Was Louise Smith in that group?

ET: Oh, no.

WC: No, she was in a later group.

ET: I think—I'm not sure. Louise may have come some. Yes, I think she did come some. Yes. Yes, Louise did come some. She was not, I think, one of the real regular people, perhaps.

WC: And who were the black people in that group?

ET: Well that's what I've got to grope for. Helen Douglas was one. There was a Mrs. Jewel[?] who came. There was a Mrs. [Maye Bailey] Edmonds who was a leader in that group, whose husband [Rev. Edwin R. Edmonds] was in sociology at Bennett [College], and who went from here to Yale [University], and I don't know whether they're still in New Haven or not. He headed up the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] before George Simpkins took it over. Anna, I think, [Cassell?], was no doubt involved to some degree.

WC: Was Margaret Faulkner in that group?

ET: Right off the bat I would say no, but this was so far, so far back, and people came irregularly, and like all groups like this there was a small core that did the planning pretty much, and I can't even identify those people. I remember a faculty wife at UNCG who was white, but who was extremely active in the group. Mr.—Dr. S. J. Shaw at [North Carolina] A&T [State University] came as a speaker and had been active in the interracial commission and continued to be active in all these movements right along. And if you haven't talked with him, he would be someone to check in with.

WC: Was this group largely made up of women?

ET: It was. We considered ourselves a mother—oh, there was a marvelous man who always came, Mr. Ed Martin, who was an insurance man here, and whose wife was in nurse with the public health department. They've gone now. They live in Baltimore [Maryland]. But he came very frequently. He was marvelous. [pause] Anita Kurland, whose husband [Jordan] was at UNCG, was one of the prime movers, but they moved. He took a job in Washington [D.C.] with the American Association of University Professors. He was in history, too, at UNCG. And she was very active in this group. I can't remember any more black people in it.

WC: It was largely made up of academic professional families.

ET: Pretty largely. As I can think of the back—of the makeup right now. And I know I'm not being anywhere near complete on this. It's so hard to dredge back that far.

WC: And how did you define the major purpose of the group.

ET: The purpose was to investigate the schools. We all had school-age children, and we wanted—we were all anxious for integration to come about, and we needed to look into school problems with that. We looked into things like busing. We—on occasion, I think we were much more successful at getting people, say, from the colleges to come to speak to us—perhaps an academic program for high school children that was carried on at Bennett. I remember Dr. [Sell?] coming to talk to us about that. I'm not sure whether we were ever able to get anybody from the public school system to come, although we may have been. I simply can't remember.

WC: Did you—what perception did you have of what the school board was about and the superintendents? Did you—how did you feel about their attitude at that time?

ET: I can't remember when Dr.—when Mr. Smith died. The—our school superintendent at that time was Mr. Ben Smith. And he was really of retirement age, but when the '54 decision came down, he stayed on a number of years, and you can check these dates out. I simply don't remember. He—well, I guess he resigned. His death came not too long after his resignation, as I remember. But he did stay on for several more years trying to see this through. And Mr. Smith had already made preparations to implement the Supreme Court decision immediately. And he was lining up the details on that when the word came from Raleigh, "Hold everything. We have something in the legislative mill." And this was the—

WC: Pearsall Plan.

ET: Yes, the Pearsall Plan, which was—it was just so sad, because we possibly could have moved ahead right then before the opposition got so firm.

WC: So you thought then that Dr. Smith, at least, was prepared to act—

ET: To follow the law.

WC: —immediately?

ET: Yes.

WC: When—

ET: He had asked his teachers to volunteer to go—excuse me—to go into some of these type situations and had gotten response. And we certainly got the feeling that he was really ready to move, but he was stopped.

WC: How did you feel about the rest of the school board? Did you feel they were behind him?

ET: I don't even know. I don't know much about the makeup of the school board at that time. I have some definite opinions later on, but right at that moment I don't know. I don't know how they would have—I think generally in a situation like that where there is strong positive leadership, they tend to go along. Where there is hesitation, that's I think when you get a lot of opposition to things.

WC: And so from your point of view, it was really the state's action, or lack of action—

ET: Yes.

WC: —which prevented—

ET: Yes, precisely, precisely. I think it held us up terribly and probably made it much harder to achieve anything later. Because nothing happened then, of course, for a good long time, until '57 when Gillespie [Park School was integrated]. In concerted action with Winston[-Salem] and Charlotte, I guess it was, the announcement came that the three systems would open up. And of course that was in a very token way: one school and Josephine Boyd. That was the extent of it, and that continued to be the extent of it. And this is why some of us were drawn together in early '62 to move on to try to bring pressure, because at that time Josephine's pioneer work had not been followed up, you see. I saw her mother just—have you talked to Mrs. Boyd?

WC: Not yet.

ET: Oh, you must talk with her. I saw her recently.

WC: I would like to very much. She seems like a remarkable person.

ET: She is indeed. She is a very remarkable person. Mrs. Boyd, probably. Check with her about whether she was one of that group that met at the Y. I can't really remember, but this may be where I first got to know her. I've known her for a long time quite well.

WC: Now before we get into the formation of the second group—

ET: Yes.

WC: —what was there about—was there a leadership structure at the Y which—

ET: I'm sure we had a chairman.

WC: —consciously sponsored this kind of thing?

ET: Oh, you mean within the YWCA structure?

WC: Yes.

ET: Not really. The YWCA has always been available, and that's been so marvelous. It's been the most open, I think, the most open institution anywhere in the South, really, and certainly in this town. And I don't think we were under the aegis of a group down there, we simply met there. We were—it was—we were welcome. We were welcome to meet.

WC: How did you see the rest of the community? How would you characterize Greensboro during this period of '54 to '60 in terms of attitudes on this issue?

ET: Well, they seemed rigid to me. I was going into something that was new to me, and I was hesitant and timorous, of course, as you are when you break a social pattern. And I think all of us felt, oh, the first time that we would go into a new situation it was bound to seem awkward and difficult. And it seemed to me that—well, in the water fountain thing we just ran up against walls, you know. My assignment was to the Sears Roebuck place, and probably we were treated as gently there as anywhere. But the answer was, "When we go in, we follow the custom of the community. And when the rest of the community changes, then we will." That was the response. So gradually it was changed. And probably—I don't know where the first change came, possibly in government buildings on that particular thing, a little more pressure because we fought there, perhaps.

WC: How about the institutions in the community and what your feeling was about them?

ET: Churches were rigid. My own was open for attendance quicker, I expect, than most any other.

WC: Which one was that?

ET: West Market Street [United] Methodist [Church].

WC: You had a strong division in that church, didn't you—

ET: Yes.

WC: —between Mr. Smith and there was—

ET: Yes.

WC: —some people on the other side.

ET: Oh, very. Well, that church [laughs], like any big church where there's a liberal faction, you're bound to have strong elements all the time, and still do now.

WC: Who was the leader of the conservative faction at that time?

ET: In the church?

WC: Yes, against Dr. Smith.

ET: Goodness, I don't remember.

WC: I've heard the name Stark Dillard.

ET: He did not belong to West Market. I think they're Presbyterian. Probably First Presbyterian [Church], and there you found the same thing. Dillard—the Dillard [Paper] Company I know in a business way. Oh, yes. The Dillard Company withdrew its contribution to the—this was so picayune and you will be amused by it—threatened to withdraw from the United Fund [now United Way of Greater Greensboro] drive, whatever we called it back then, if the little interracial commission was continued to be given \$250 a year by that fund. So the interracial commission was struck, and it was a real defeat for the causes of justice and fairness and everything else.

WC: Was Mr. Bowles caught in the middle of this thing?

ET: Dr. Charlie Bowles who was the minister of West Market?

WC: Yes.

ET: Dr. Bowles didn't let himself get caught in the middle much, in my view. He was a very outspoken, bold, brave man. He had, I suppose sometimes, to temporize a little. But generally, my husband and I certainly felt that he did not—he didn't let himself be—be threatened too much. That's why he left the church, of course. But—

WC: When did he finally leave? Was it nineteen—

ET: I don't have the date. I cannot tell you. It must have been almost ten years ago, maybe ten years ago. He died a few days later.

WC: And his wife is still here?

ET: And his wife lives here on Mendenhall Street, yes, and his daughter. But he—and at that time too we had a very fine minister of youth named R. Harold Hipps. People may have mentioned who he is.

WC: Yes, I've heard his name before.

ET: The two of them offered the best leadership our church has ever had in our experience. We've had less able people since that time.

WC: Do you know where Mr. Hipps has gone?

ET: Yes. He went on to our national offices in Nashville, Tennessee. He's there. I saw him not too—back in the spring he was back here for a meeting. But through that period Dr. Bowles was—well, a number of things happened, if we're on the church now. And that was one of the things I was looking and maybe I can find that leaflet for you because I came across that recently. This ties in, what I'm about to tell you, with the second group that I mentioned, the efforts of this second group to broaden desegregation, to get children in neighborhood schools, black children who passed maybe several schools on busses to get first graders registered in schools they lived nearest. And after we spent the year—well, I'll go back a minute. It must have been about Christmas time of '61. I had a phone call from the [American] Friends Service Committee in High Point because they had been—during this time the first group was in existence, the Friends Service brought in two people as staff members to work on school desegregation in this whole area, and

one was named Bill Bagwell, William Bagwell, and the other was Charles Davis. Are those names you're familiar with?

WC: Yes.

ET: All right. They came in during the time our mothers group was meeting at the Y, and they immediately backed us up, helped us in many ways.

WC: Was Davis black?

ET: Yes.

WC: Okay.

ET: He's a marvelous man. I do hope you can talk with him. I just learned today that he maintains his home here in Greensboro.

WC: Really?

ET: And so his wife is here, and he can be reached. And I certainly do urge you to talk with him because he will have much, much information. Well, they had come in during this period, and I don't know just when. There was a call from High Point from one of them in early sixty—well, about Christmas of '61 because we said, "We'll meet after Christmas," to get the group together. Our mothers group had disbanded by then, but they had a concern at the Friends Service office that this was going too long, that the desegregation was not moving, and that this group should be [cough] should be revived and put to work, and so we met here early in '62. And I made calls and got those people pulled together again. And under the direction and help—with the help of Charles Davis and Bill Bagwell, we started in a very exciting and fruitful year's work, almost, of documenting cases of social—of discrimination in the schools. Because the schools were maintaining at that time that things were equal, and that we had to prove that things were unequal. So it was very exciting thing.

There were people so ready to work, people were volunteering for difficult jobs. And there were people of great ability working in this. And again, many of them have moved away. There was a Dr. Gladys Royal who was one of the most capable women I know, and she took the lead in a lot of this and spent hours down going through material. It seems to me it was legal material downtown. I guess she was searching for laws about little tiny specific things, and then she had entre to the black schools in a way we did not have at that time.

WC: What was her profession?

ET: She taught at A&T, and what was her area? [pause] Her husband was a professor there, too. I can't remember what her area really was. History or humanities, I'm not sure. I'm simply not sure, but she was a very interesting and unusual person. And also the Edmonds family, you see, was still here, so they were very active in all of this.

But it was an extremely exciting group to be in, and I just wish so much I had those minutes to give to you. We can check it out with Anna [Simpkins?] about what happened to my notebook, but she came over and borrowed it a couple of years ago. I'm afraid it is gone.

That group at one time was, I suppose—I used to send out the notices for meetings, and I guess we reached maybe a mailing list of about forty or fifty names at one time. We met every week for a long, long time. And we met here at first and then—where did we meet? I guess at the Y. I guess at the Y for, why, I suppose for something like eight or nine months. We met every single week [for] six or seven months, certainly. And this group would have been made up of academic people, people like Mrs. Raymond [Mary] Smith at West Market who had headed—was then heading up the Commission on Christian Social Relations, it used to be called, and is a marvelous woman whom you must get to know. At seventy-four she hands out leaflets at our peace vigil.

WC: Wow.

ET: Every week. She was there today on the corner. She's just tremendous. Well, we met weekly for a long, long, long time. A good many people from the A&T faculty, from the Bennett faculty and administration also, NAACP people, this was the makeup, really. And I guess—

WC: Was it pretty much divided down the middle?

ET: Well, I'm trying to think. I guess the white people were pretty largely academic. [pause] I would just give anything for a mailing list. It would be so helpful. Or a list—I used to list who came to meetings, and that would be helpful, too. Academics, some church people who had real convictions on these matters, [pause] very little representation from the business sector ever, of course. I guess education.

I guess it was surly more black than white, although we were able to do things in teams. We made up interracial teams for various efforts. We always went out as a mixed group because this gave us entre into black homes. And this was when the '60—along those '62-'63 sit-ins were coming along, and a lot of the black people felt a good deal of repression in the community. And so it was particularly good then as we went to approach families about transferring their children. We had this as a sort of entre. But

from '62 on, what we did was do a lot of real digging and research about specifics in the school system, the school system that was certainly unequal, and conferences, just constant pressure on the school administration, whom we found just impossible to communicate with in an open way. The chip went on the shoulder immediately, just immediately. And at that time Mr. Phillip Weaver had taken over, and [he was] a very fearful, very uneasy sort of person in these situations.

WC: How did he manifest that uneasiness?

ET: [pause] By never being willing to admit that anything at all was wrong anywhere within the whole school system. Everything was the best possible world. By shifting, I guess, too, a lot of the decision making onto his school board, he would suddenly become just the administrator. So we hit the school board and we went to board meetings, and we had people speak. Dr. Alfreda Webb is someone else you should talk with, because I remember her making a statement in front of the school board one night that was—excuse me—extremely impressive. We had conferences with them.

They finally did set up a committee to hear this kind of grievance, and a Mr. Paren, Jim Perrin[?] was to take those complaints, and we tried to talk with him once. Since you called I was remembering this. He worked for a local funeral company, and he would not let us come to his office. He would not meet us at the school board. This was a mixed group of women who were coming. He finally said he'd come by here on his way to lunch. He lived in this part of town. So he did come and sat here in the living room here and talked with us in a rather belligerent way for a while.

But at any rate, the final—the final upshot of all of this and all of our efforts was that the next spring, and that would have been '63, the school board sent home with every child a printed, very legal, statement—it was taken, I guess, right out of whatever acts of incorporation the school board has—of the process for transfer and the process for registration. And so then there was a period—a very short period of time when these applications could be made and when first graders could be registered in the school they lived nearest.

So then we went out in interracial teams to try to explain this to parents and to try to back them up. We felt that this put the whole burden in the wrong place. The burden was on the parent, and the whole psychological stress was just terrific for them, you know, to make a change like this. It was an extremely difficult thing. But we were able to back up some enough so they weren't comfortable doing it, but they did it. So then once those—and there were many interesting stories about taking children to try to register them, and finding the schools all locked up at an hour when they were supposed to be open for registration, and a whole lot of things went on that way. Individual little experiences just made you so disgusted with the whole system, just completely.

Susie, this is Mr. Bill Chafe from Duke [University].

ST: Hello.

WC: How are you?

ST: It's nice to see you.

ET: This is my daughter Susie, Bill. He's doing some material about Greensboro.

ST: Is this for a thesis project?

WC: It's for a book.

ET: Beyond that point. [chuckling] Get him another cup of coffee, Susie. Do that please. Pour this out.

Well, anyway.

WC: Could you just tell me a couple little stories?

ET: Yeah, well I'll tell you what happened to me one time. There was a marvelous family. My assignment with another doctor's wife, who was black, was to go out to Pisgah Church Road where Mrs. Boyd lives. That was our area, so we knocked on doors out there, and we spent a lot of time out there. There was a marvelous family out there. The husband was with the ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] unit at A&T named Major—thank you, dear—Thomas Beatty. And they were black and very supportive of all this work, and had the rare gift of putting down roots wherever they lived. So although they knew they were temporary, they really dug in and helped with local situations.

So one afternoon, Major Beatty and I were going out to town to take some children to Joyner [Elementary School], which was in walking distance. Those children were being bused clear down, I guess, to David Jones [Elementary School] downtown. And we picked them up well within the time of getting them to the school to register. We got there, every door was locked, every door. And Maj. Beatty just made the rounds all the way around the school, which I would not have had the courage to do. [laughs] He finally attracted somebody's attention so obviously they could not ignore him, and we did get on in. But this kind of thing, I'm sure, other people ran into constantly. And I was treated very coldly although I had a daughter at that school in an accelerated program for two years, you know, and suddenly nobody knew me. And there were phone calls downtown to check all this out. Every delay, every delay was taken advantage of that could be used in every way. Everybody felt so threatened.

WC: Yeah, because you were pushing something which they weren't in control of.

ET: Yes. Well, they wanted—I think finally—I think finally, when we went under court order, this finally, you see, gave the ultimate backing. “We couldn't do anything more,” they could tell parents. “We were absolutely forced to.” And if they had been told that right off the bat, they would have had that kind of thing to fall back on. This way it looked like they were making some judgments on their own, and they just weren't strong enough to do it.

But that particular school did have a number of black children registered and transferred, too. It was almost easier, I guess, to register a little first grader than to transfer an older child. But we—once we achieved that, then we saw what was ahead. What we were headed into was a long series of trying to support of this. So what we did was set up a very interesting program over at Bennett at the Children's House, which is their kindergarten on the campus. And I don't even know where we got all the money for that. My church paid for part of it, I think. I'm not sure where all the money came from. But we ran a two week, maybe, a month, kindergarten for those black children. There were about twenty, I think. It made just a good kindergarten group. And we ran—we ran a session for them to try and help them get a little readier for what they were going to. And it was a very exciting thing, lots of teenage volunteers, a good program, a very good program. And we carpooled where we had to to get them there because they did come from all over town.

WC: Was this a preparatory experience? Mrs. [Anna] Simpkins mentioned something to me about the feeling that other situations had shown that a lack of preparation was detrimental to students, and therefore you were trying to compensate for this in some way by getting the students ready for—

ET: Sure, sure. Yes.

WC: Did this take place in anything but a kindergarten setting? Was there anything beyond that on the same lines?

ET: Oh, there were just two. I had forgotten about those. There were two picnics where sympathetic parents and children at a particular school would invite the black children who were coming into the student body for a picnic. I think there were two of those held. We had hoped there would be more. But I think there were two schools, maybe Aycock [Middle School] and Page [High School] were the two. No, Page wasn't. Maybe it was Aycock and Page. I'm not really sure about that. Or maybe there was one sort of general one out at the John Taylors'. And if you don't know them, you will.

WC: I'm going to see them on next Monday.

ET: Yes. Well they'll have great amounts of information for you. But there were those two efforts made to at least pull the children together, and I remember the picnic out at their house.

[recording paused]

ET: At any rate, we did that that first summer. And after school opened, we had a series of Sunday afternoon sessions at the Pearson Street YWCA where the parents and children who were involved in this pioneer effort would come together and compare notes, and this was a supportive thing that seemed very much appreciated by them.

WC: How would you—how would you characterize the—well, were most of the black parents who registered their children, were they of all different backgrounds or where they primarily middle-class people?

ET: No. I think it would turn out to be pretty much across the board. I really do. Yeah. They were not the academic people exclusively by any means.

WC: Did they come from any—were you concentrating on any specific geographic areas?

ET: We were concentrating on pockets of black homes that are scattered around town near schools that had been white. And here's where we felt we had the most logical grievance, because these children were—we submitted long lists of questions to the school board at one point, which they did answer, and we learned from that that the longest bus trip a child had was 14.5 miles one way.

WC: Wow.

ET: One child was carried that far to get to a black school, so we felt we had a real logical, real logical beef there. And of course, someone brought a visitor once to one of our meetings who was from New Jersey, and she said, "What you're trying to do is set up de facto segregation," which really was what we were doing, but to us that was a benefit over what we had now—or then.

WC: Yes.

ET: So to get the children in neighborhood schools seemed to be a real accomplishment.

WC: Yes, yes. Especially given the absence of any will to do anything else on the part of the school board.

ET: This is right. It had to be a first step, it seemed. So we did—of course, there were many parents who agonized over it and couldn't do it, and we quite understood that. Mr. Davis was so strong on this. He felt it was so wrong to put the burden of action on the parents when it was really the system that had caused all this for so long. But we could not push the school board any farther than just making this [part?] and announcing that it was possible.

WC: Did you get any kind of support during this effort from the community at large from lawyers, professional business people at all?

ET: I wish I had a list of names. It's just so hard to remember.

WC: I seem to recall a news item about a meeting in 1963 in a church of a group of citizens who were—I forget what the name of the group was, but citizens concerned with integrating schools. This may have been your group which is simply holding a community meeting, but I recall that—

ET: I wish I could see. I could tell, I think, immediately if I saw the item, but I can't remember right now. Our meetings, as far as I can remember, were originally here at our house and then later at the YWCA. And I can't remember. I can't remember.

There were church meetings involved in a follow-up kindergarten program which was held—well, we had—let's see. We had the two sessions. For two summers we met at the Children's House to get these first graders ready—ready to go on into school. And then I guess it must have been the very next year we decided that West Market—the Commission on Christian Social Concerns there joined with St. Matthews [United] Methodist Church, which is a black Methodist church, and sponsored a similar program out at Hunter [Elementary] School where there were numbers of children who couldn't afford the brief six-week kindergarten that the city schools had—were offering, at that time, to children who had not had kindergarten. That was a program that earlier had been operated by the AAUW [American Association of University Women], and the city schools had taken over. It was a fee thing, but it did offer a brief kindergarten experience before first grade.

The principal of Hunter Hill School—Hunter School is a member of West Market Church, so we asked—they had the public school kindergarten session. Then we asked him about other children who were registered who hadn't been able to take advantage of this, and he found twenty, and it was just half and half as far as race went. So these children lived fairly close to the school, and we were able, in cooperation with St.

Matthews, to put on a very good program. We hired a regular first grade teacher—or second grade teacher I believe it was, from General Greene [Elementary] School—to direct the group. And it wasn't a long program. I don't think it was more than two weeks, perhaps, certainly not more than three. But it—I did some carpooling for it, and I had a chance to observe.

And what's more, there was—I think it was that very session we filmed. At that time in the Methodist church, the woman's work was celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary, Woman's Society of Christian Service it was called then. Well, there's a marvelous woman here named Mrs. David Jones. Do you know her?

WC: I know of her, yes.

ET: Over at Bennett College. She was involved in all this. She was one of the finest people in town. She had high connections with the church offices in New York, and interested them in including a segment about our kindergarten in a film that was being made, a professionally done film called *Living Response*. I think there were three, three units in that film, but we were one of them. And she's in the film, as a matter of fact. But it was that session at Hunter that was filmed. It was either that session or we simulated that session the next year. I can't remember, but I think it was the actual session we filmed. But the church—now there would have been a meeting, a church meeting, on that, but I don't think that would have been a newspaper thing.

WC: Was the AAUW an important group?

ET: Not really. We went to the AAUW once, I know, trying to get some money from some of this work, and I don't think we were very successful. AAUW was having its own trouble trying to get integrated, and I was in that group that time. I don't bother with it now. But there was a lot. It already seems quaint when we look back at the agonies we went through.

WC: It was such a short time ago.

ET: Yeah, yeah. Recently—well, I may be confusing you, I'm jumping around so, but you have a background on most of this, anyway. You know about the Greensboro Community Fellowship?

WC: Yes.

ET: Well, our group—our second group that was pulled together to help desegregation, went into the Fellowship full-blown. The Fellowship came together after we had started

working at a time when the sit-ins were pulling people apart, polarizing the community, and some folks from both sides wanted to stay in touch. John Taylor was one of these people. And so they—several men started having lunch at the Y, which was the only place in town an integrated group could eat, and from that developed an organization which has only recently disbanded. We went into the Fellowship as a unit as their education committee, so most of our work was done under the aegis of the Community Fellowship, as the education committee of the Fellowship. And it made it easier for us to ask groups for money. We—we were really the action group of the Fellowship, and I think did more really in the area of schools than anything that came about later through the Fellowship. It turned more into more a forum later on just for discussion and keeping in touch.

WC: And its function in one of its first forms was primarily to maintain communications during the period of the sit-ins.

ET: Precisely. Yes, exactly that. John Taylor and who else? Who from the other side of town? I'm trying to think who it was John Taylor wanted to eat lunch with. Warren Ashby was in on that. And they would know who the black—have you talked to Otis Hairston?

WC: Yes.

ET: He's—

WC: Yes.

ET: And if you just get to Charles Davis. Mr. Davis will have so much to tell you and from a different viewpoint. There's a Mr. Bailey who was in the administration at Bennett College who was extremely active in the education committee. Several of the people have moved away. I'm thinking of some other black men who worked in it very hard who have moved now. Well, maybe if I jot down names when they come to me I'll eventually be able to give you a little more on that.

However, we—our concern with these children extended into the academic year, and we set up what we hoped would be a growing system of study programs—we started at A&T in the library basement—to serve primarily older elementary and junior high students with the great help of the Catholic teaching staff at Saint Pius [X Catholic School]. Have you talked with Father [Hugh] Dolan?

WC: No, I haven't.

ET: You should talk with him because he has been in the forefront of all of this. And his—the nuns who taught at his school were involved in tutoring these children until just last year; they dropped out of it. But we started the program there and held it there, I think, only one year—it may have been two winters—and hoped there would be a similar cropping up around town. We weren't able to achieve that. We had hoped certain people in the fellowship—and Mrs. Donald Edwards[?] is somebody else who was active in it from the black community. You should talk with her. I believe that was Mrs. Donald Edwards.

But some of us concentrated our efforts the next year on a study program to serve the Pisgah Church Road children and the children in the East White Oak community, and hoped that we could draw them together by using the Catholic school which was central to both neighborhoods. It didn't work that way. We found the children from Pisgah Church did not come. We were offering transportation to the other community. We thought that the Pisgah Church people were aware enough perhaps to work out carpooling, and that didn't develop.

So that finally became just a study program for the White Oak children, which my church continues. We still have a tutorial for them. And the nuns have helped with it until this year. We had held it in the community some in an old, old building. The East White Oak community was the black mill village for Cone Mills. And at the—originally they had their own school. The mill ran school, which was considered a fine social concern approach to things back in the—before 1920, around 1920. And later the mill turned that into a YMCA for the community. And later in the forties, when the mill sold its property, it helped the community buy that building for a community center, so it is available. We tutored over there for a good long time, but for the last two winters we've been down at West Market Church.

WC: What is that community center called, now?

ET: Just the East White Oak Community Center.

WC: East White Oak.

ET: And Mr. Truman Gant is the patriarch over there, and he's observed all of this, and he'd be an interesting man for you to talk to some. His grandchildren were not involved in the very first of these efforts, I guess. But they have—they have followed along. He has—his oldest grandchild—well, the oldest one I know in a close way, is graduating from high school this year. So Renee was involved in some of this.

WC: How long did your group remain in existence?

ET: The education committee?

WC: Yes.

ET: It's hard to say. We sort of vanished really. Gradually after later civil rights legislation was supposed to provide supportive funds for deprived children, all of that, and I don't know what date. Did that come in '67 maybe? I think about—

WC: I'm not sure.

ET: You know, the ESEA [Elementary and Secondary Education Act] funds, all that. Some of the members, primarily the black members in our group, came to feel that the government—that the school system should take over these peripheral functions. And so the interest in the tutoring—and it had narrowed down to the tutoring at that point—the interest in the tutoring rather dwindled. And for a year or two just one or two of us who really felt it was important to continue held it together, and then West Market stepped in, seeking an outlet for social concern.

WC: And this was the women's group on West Market which was primarily responsible—?

ET: The tot—it was the Commission on Christian Social Concerns. The total church, really. And we now fund rather extensive programs in summer recreation over here, and have a number of commitments to that community.

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

ET: —one little boy was accused of stealing a teacher's ring. And we went to court on it. We engaged counsel for him, and had some interesting—actually, it was just allowed—that particular case was allowed to die on the vine. It went to domestic relations court, and such a backlog of things appealed to whatever court you go to next that I understood later it was customary to let a whole lot of them just kind of vanish, which happened there. But the child had been damaged very deeply by the experiences he went through. And has Mr. Bob Ford's name come up—

WC: No, no.

ET: —in any of your—

WC: Not yet.

ET: Well, he is a Catholic layman. I think he's still in town. His wife is a doctor. He manufactures surgical instruments, and he's a very unusual man, and was chairman of our education committee for a good long time. And if he—I think he's still here, and if he is you should talk to him. I haven't seen him in a long time. His wife is a pediatrician and administers the children's and youth program in our health department. And they are remarkable people. Father Dolan could probably give you some more names of Catholic people who were interested, and I'm sure Anna—has Anna Simpkins been able to indentify—

WC: Well, we've had one two-hour conversation. That was last summer, and I have to go back and talk to her again. I have many more questions to ask. But I will check with her on that.

ET: Mrs.—well, the friend with whom I did my work out on Pisgah Church Road would be someone who might contribute a different slant to all of this, and her name is Mrs. George Evans [Marguerite Webster]. Her husband was on the school board through all this. So if you could talk with the two of them together.

WC: Yes.

ET: Dr. George Evans lives 1301 South Benbow Road. And if you could get them at the same time—Marguerite did a lot of activity of work with the Greensboro Citizens Association, which is a very active black group here. And she and I did the work out on Pisgah Church Road together and, of course, worked in other facets of all this, too. But Dr. Evans was on the school board at that time, and could give an inside view of some of these things. That would be very enlightening to you, I expect.

WC: I'm sure.

ET: He served for ten years on the school board.

WC: How—did McNeill Smith play any kind of an important role in these years that you recall?

ET: [pause] My memory is just not all that good. McNeill—during the first sit-ins at A&T, you know, downtown from A&T. I remember once a number of us going to the campus. The students were restless because the city didn't seem to be reacting in very positive ways. And I don't even know who set this up, and I wasn't at all sure why I was asked to go, but I did go one Sunday afternoon, and Mac was in that group. We went to the chaplain's office, Mr. Cleo McCoy, whom you may have talked with.

WC: I have not talked with him. I've talked with some people at A&T, but not him.

ET: Well, he might have some interesting ideas, too, because he saw this from the campus.

WC: Right.

ET: McNeill was in that group. Everybody knew McNeill felt the right way about these things. He tended, I guess, maybe to work a little bit more behind the scenes, perhaps.

WC: Yeah, I have the impression that he did work behind the scenes, and I was wondering—

ET: And very effectively behind the scenes, and maybe much more effectively than coming out openly with these things. It was frustrating to some of us who would have liked to see somebody with his stature in the community take a real front and center lead, you know.

WC: Yeah. How about the Jewish committee—Jewish committee—Jewish community in Greensboro? Was it in any way—

ET: There were some Jewish people who were active in this—

WC: —public.

ET: —group. There Mrs. Seymour Levin[?] worked with our education committee for a while. [pause] Mrs. Helen Rubin worked with it for a while, I think. Who else? Mrs. Richard Steel[?] was active in it for a time, too. And these were people who would really take assignments and take responsibility.

WC: Did any formal organization—

ET: And excuse me—

WC: —represent—

ET: —there was a marvelous man here, Rabbi Fred Rypins, who is dead now, who was a leader in all of this. I guess he was in the original fellowship group, no doubt. And he was—and also Dr. Herschel Foldger is someone you should talk with about the fellowship if you haven't, because he too was one of the leaders in that group. But Rabbi Ribbons is dead now.

WC: And so this is the extent to which there was any formal participation by the Jewish community?

ET: Well, it's just hard right now here at this point in time to do a total recall. No, I'm sure I'm forgetting lots of people.

WC: Yeah. I was wondering whether any of the synagogues took any kind of public stance on—

ET: I think it was rather more individuals. No institution wanted to take much of a public stance.

WC: Yeah, yeah. How did—how would you characterize the self-perception of liberals in Greensboro, white liberals at this point? Did they feel alienated? Did they feel overwhelmed, embattled?

ET: Well, I guess for each person that was a very individual thing. I felt all of them, I think. Plus an awful lot of pressure on my husband [Eulyss R.] , who really took a lot more batting around than I did.

WC: He received—

ET: Oh, yes.

WC: —harassment—

ET: Oh, yes.

WC: —professionally.

ET: Oh, yes, a great deal of it, great deal of it.

WC: Would that take the form of—

ET: His secretary. People would—

WC: —patients—

ET: —call his secretary, you know, want to know what's wrong with us.

WC: And would patients threaten to—

ET: We've had obscene calls. Not many, but they are terribly upsetting to me. We had a cross burned at a little farm we owned because we were allowing it to be used for outings where tutors took their children out in a mixed group. We had an effigy burned out there when there was a group on the farm. And indeed, for one summer I was in the outrageous position of almost being afraid to let young people go out there without an adult, which to me it was unthinkable in North Carolina.

WC: Where do you come from yourself, Mrs. Troxler?

ET: Right here. I was born here. My father was a Methodist preacher, so we lived around in North Carolina pretty much, different places, but I was born here and my husband's family is here.

WC: How would you characterize Greensboro as a community during your whole lifetime, really?

ET: Now I haven't lived here my whole lifetime. We've been back twenty-five years. So we lived in various places when he was in his medical training. [pause] Well, characterize it in relation to what, you know. It's better than a lot of places, and no doubt—

WC: Well, politically—

ET: I think it's pretty—well, I think Greensboro is, all things considered, a really good place to live. And I think there are a lot of awfully kind people here. And I think on this occasion with the education group in the Fellowship, we were able to bring together some remarkably fine people who were willing to stand out and willing to take some harassment. And I'm sure there are many other cities this size where you couldn't have done that at that point in time.

WC: How about—if you could use the phrase “power structure” to refer to—

ET: We did use it a lot back then. [chuckles]

WC: —Greensboro, who would you first of all say was in that power structure?

ET: I am simply not knowledgeable, really, about those things. I understand it's not the people that you think of first off. It's people behind those people. It's not the really

people who head up the big businesses or head up the newspapers, it's the people who tell them what to do, and I'm just not I'm not familiar with those people. I'm not.

WC: Would you say that— [pause]

ET: This is the kind of thing that McNeill Smith could answer for you.

WC: —whatever the power structure is, that it moves when it has to move but doesn't move otherwise, that it doesn't initiate as much as it does as a response?

ET: And responds probably reluctantly, with a good deal of hesitancy and holding back.

WC: If you—how large a segment of the Greensboro population do you think that the liberal community makes up? I know that's a terribly difficult question to ask.

ET: [pause] That is a difficult question. Anything I would say would be a guess.

WC: There was one study done in 1958 by a group of Princeton sociologists that showed that 18 % of the population in Guilford County, the white population, did not think that desegregation was moving fast enough. And I suppose that's—

ET: What was that date?

WC: [Nineteen] fifty-eight.

ET: Really? That's interesting.

WC: I suppose that would be as accurate a sample—

ET: That was the county?

WC: That was the county. That's right.

ET: So that would include a lot of rural people whose ideas so often a little less—that's very interesting indeed. I don't think we would have felt at that time that the percentage was that high.

WC: Well this was specifically on questions of school and was measuring resistance to desegregation.

ET: Are you familiar with William Bagwell's book [*School Desegregation in the Carolina: Two Case Studies*]?

WC: Yes.

ET: You do know that?

WC: Yes.

ET: I have a copy, and I have searched for it to show you, but of course you've done more. You're farther along with this than I realized when you called me.

WC: Well, I've done—I've been through most of the written material.

ET: You are permitted. And with him, he and Charles Davis were so—it seems to me that they certainly made their mark on the local situation in very good ways, particularly Mr. Davis. His wisdom—he had been a school principal in South Carolina and lost his job because he was demanding equal pay for his teachers, and came up to work for the Friends Service Committee on school desegregation. Left that to go with one of the federal programs when the AFSC abandoned—phased out this particular work. And then went with—well, he served I know a very unhappy stint here heading up the OEO here for about a year and a half. It was in such—such straights that nobody could have held with it, really. And then he went on with Floyd McKissick and his—I think working down in Soul City. But I was overjoyed, like I say, to learn that he maintains his home here. And I do want you to talk with him.

WC: Yes. I'd like to very much.

ET: He was very special.

WC: When someone like Ed Zane took over the responsibility of trying to work out the sit-ins, was he someone who the liberal community trusted and felt confidence in?

ET: I rather think so. Now I don't know what opinion the black part of that liberal group might have had of him, but our opinion was that he was a man who was very honest and very, very fair and right-thinking. And that this was—certainly he was putting himself in a difficult position. He was willing to do it.

WC: How about someone like Spencer Love? Was there any kind of opinion of him that the liberal community had or for that matter of Burlington Industries and its role in the community?

ET: From where I sat, I just—you know, there was no—I saw no involvement or any action from those quarters at all. Now there may be people who know the Love family who can give you a different view.

WC: Seems to me to be a terribly important figure in the overall situation.

ET: Yes.

WC: In fifty—'54-'57, he was unwilling to take a position on the issue of desegregation. Was unwilling to quote unquote "Get out in front."

ET: I don't remember. I just don't remember statements. Now was this in the newspaper?

WC: No. This has never been—has never been attributable.

ET: He was approached, then, hoping that—

WC: Yes. It was—

ET: I see.

WC: Never for quotation.

ET: You know more about this in many ways than I do, you see, because you're—

WC: I just wondered, you know, whether someone of his influence and power, whether there was—whether there were different perceptions of his role by different constituencies in the community. I think that probably after 1960 that Burlington Industries became much more responsive than it had been before that time.

ET: Well, I had so much more to do really with just the with just the work of trying to get children in schools, of trying to make some kind of witness myself, and am not, really am not in touch with the power elements within the community.

WC: How did you and people you knew feel about, well, the two major sit-ins in 1960 and 1963?

ET: Well, I think on the first occasion certainly, a lot of us felt that we should be down there helping, and there was discussion of this. And the feeling was brought out—and it seems to me McNeill Smith said this, and I can't remember exactly—maybe this was at the meeting in Cleo McCoy's office—but I seem to remember his opinion being that this—that the students had a right to this, that they had instigated it, and that it would be unfair to move in. That this was their project, that we were behind them if they needed us, and if there were ways in which we could help, but that it would be unsuitable for the white liberals within the community to converge and take part at that point. And this was the message that we tried to take to the campus that day, I know.

Macy Levenson, was someone else that was on that trip. Mrs. Herald Levenson. And she's a friend of the Ashbys. She's someone who might have some—and Macy may have been involved—she is very active in the league of women voters and may have had some—I expect she was in the old interracial commission, too. [She] may have had some different experiences than mine. I don't remember her being active on the school desegregation thing particularly.

WC: Was the '63 sit-in different from the perception of you and your friends?

ET: No. I think not really. It was a good deal—well it was partly. Those actions were partly integrated. It was not just a totally black group doing that. There was a woman, a professor on the Bennett campus. What in the world was her name? Dr. Elizabeth [Laizner]—Dr. Elizabeth something. She was middle European. And she really led those marches. They would come south up Market, and it must have been an extremely impressive sight. I did not go downtown to observe it. But they would come in complete silence and stand in front of S&W Cafeteria. [unclear] I can't think of her—Bob Ford knew her very well. I spent an evening at his house with her one time she was there.

WC: There were a great deal more polarized I think than the 1960 sit-ins.

ET: Possibly so. Well, you see, again, the '60 sit-ins just caught everybody by surprise. There hadn't been time to polarize. These things happen when people spend some time mulling things over.

WC: The actual demonstrations in 1960 only really lasted nine days.

ET: Yeah.

WC: While in 1963 they were—

ET: Yeah, this was spread out a long—

WC: —over a six-month period.

ET: —period of time. Of course Jesse Jackson was a very charismatic figure in all that. He was a person the police respected, the students respected, and probably it was his influence that kept things peaceful, because everybody would take his word on things. So although of course this was a very massive thing in '63, lots of people were involved and there were sit-ins right at the square, I understand, blocking traffic, and it was it was a much bigger operation all the way around, but if he gave his word that it would be nonviolent then the police would be cooperative.

WC: Do you think that race relations in Greensboro have improved since '63?

ET: [pause] Yeah, sure, a lot. I think the close—maybe the close working arrangements that came about in the real effort to open things up, those friendships are not there anymore and it's a sad thing to me that I don't see friends I was working so closely with. But by a large when you can see people like I saw today when I was at the vigil, whites and blacks walking along the street, perfectly unconcerned together, nobody paid any attention to this, and I thought today there was a time when people would have turned and stared. So overall, goodness yes. It's tremendous.

WC: Have you been involved at all in Hal Sieber's efforts with—

ET: I don't know Mr. Sieber very well. I've been in one meeting with him, but I don't know that Community Unity thing, no.

WC: It's an interesting idea which I have heard about only incidentally. It really covers in some ways a segment of time which is beyond what I'm working on right now.

ET: He is leaving Greensboro, I understand.

WC: Oh, is he?

ET: He has resigned. I'm not sure what he's going into.

WC: I suspect you're right about—

ET: I really don't know a great deal about it. My own efforts have been—I am still involved in the community, in this small black community, in a good many different ways, and

having great fun with the preschool group from over there, which now is well integrated with some academic kids. It's just a whole lot of fun with four year olds. So that's really where my main interest lies anymore.

WC: You think that the UNCG has much of an influence on the community?

ET: In what way? No.

WC: I sort of intentionally asked the question ambiguously.

ET: No. There's been many, many—yes, of course it does. Certainly it does. It's bound to. It's very available in a lot of ways, and pilot programs that are done over there, I think, are picked up on. It's—now in the area in the area of human relations, I don't really know. I don't know that much about what's going on there, so I'm really in no position to judge. But I think in many—I think it's a very good school and I think it's doing some quite exciting work in certain areas. It's bound to influence a lot of things.

WC: I guess that one of the things which is interesting is how academics relate to a community which they are a part of but at the same time are separate from.

ET: Well they—there's a great deal of influence of course just through the families that the community benefits from who are academic. For example numbers of young faculty wives in the League of Women Voters. It was a very exciting group of people, really sharp. And the young woman who helps me with my playgroup is a faculty wife over there, and she exerts her influence through her church in a lot of different ways. Yeah. And of course the program itself at the college has been an influence on a lot of things, too. The—I don't know what the breakdown is racially over there now, but they do have, I know, large numbers of black students. And all of this, of course, just insensibly changes the climate in the community. It changes the ideas that young people, adolescents have when they see college communities with people coming and going of both races. It broadens the aspirations of young blacks to know that all of this is a possibility really.

WC: Yeah. And from your experience, you've only had—Susan is in high school?

ET: Susan would be flattered. Susan is twenty-eight. She's through Oberlin [College].

WC: My goodness.

ET: —and three years of special cello work at BU [Boston University].

WC: Wow.

ET: So she's—I have nobody in public school. We have five children, but the youngest was out of—well, our youngest finishes at Julliard [School]—has just finished at Julliard.

WC: Oh, wonderful.

ET: So ours are all through, still in graduate school some. Becky's going back for a master's [degree]. But I yearned for this when they were in public school, of course, and went out of my way to find interracial friendships and contacts for them. And it could be done. It wasn't impossible.

WC: I was wondering what your feeling was about the current state of integration in the schools.

ET: Well, I hear from my little next door neighbor on this occasionally. It seems to me, and I'm not in a position to have firsthand knowledge, but from what I have seen in the paper and from what friends have told me, we've had maybe a hard time under court order the last two years, but real progress is coming about.

WC: Do you have any idea as to why the school board fought HEW [U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare]. It's really one of the school boards in the state where we did fight HEW.

ET: Oh, good gracious, yes, and so foolishly. George Evans made this point over and over again, that no school board had ever won out over HEW, that we were doing nothing but throwing money down a rat hole, you know, maintaining law offices in Washington, paying lawyers down here, and it was absolutely doomed, the whole effort.

WC: Yeah.

ET: I don't know unless the leadership was just so fearful that it felt it had to hold off just as long as it could.

WC: It's so—well, of course, the greatest irony of Greensboro is that it's the first city in the state to say it will desegregate, and it's the last city in the state to really desegregate.

ET: To actually do it. Well you see if Mr. Ben Smith had been able to go ahead with the plans he had already laid, it would have been a different story I'm convinced. I don't think

there would have been any question about that. When Phil Weaver died tragically, so suddenly, Dr. [Wayne] House took over, and Dr. House had worked with him for a number of years. And I think maybe, from what I have heard—and this is more what I've heard; I don't have any great—I've only come in contact with him once and that was on an abrasive matter that he didn't agree with me on—but I think maybe he's a little more open than Phil was, but not a lot. And the whole school board as a board, the temper [timbre?] of it has been conservative by and large. You see our city council appoints people to school board vacancies, which is unfortunate, I think.

WC: I'll have to tell you about my first conversation with Dr. House. I was going in to get his permission to go through the school board minutes, and I asked him if they had on file at the school board briefs of school board arguments in its legal cases, and he said, "Well I don't think there have been many legal cases." And he said, "Oh," he said, "of course there was the case in which the North Carolina Patriots initiated to try and block desegregation in '57." And I said, "Well, I was thinking more in terms of the Caldwell [Elementary School]-Pearson [Street Elementary School] suit." And he said, "Oh, yes. That was a—" [laughter]. He said, "That did take place." He said, "That was a—

ET: Slipped his mind for the moment.

WC: —little bit contentious," he said. I was just—I walked away from that meeting—

ET: This is typical. This is typical.

WC: —with the impression that—

ET: This gives you—

WC: —he wasn't going to tell you anything—

ET: This gives you the picture exactly.

WC: —and that—

ET: Or have you had much to disabuse you of that attitude any since that time?

WC: No, no.

ET: That's what I thought.

WC: No.

ET: They're very fearful people, and they're—they drag their feet as long as they can. They have to be backed up by—their back to the wall or they can't judgment. A friend of mine is chairman of the school board now. A woman I was a student with at Duke. She's a lawyer, Margaret Harris. You might want to talk with her. I think her viewpoint would be very interesting because she was aware of every bit of this, and she was very active in parent-teacher organizations, all of that, all through the way. I went to her house once to ask for a signature on—oh, I—this is something that probably someone else will have a copy of. After the second sit-ins or during the second sit-ins, there were published several hundred names in the paper of people who were urging facilities downtown to serve everybody, you know. And I remember going to her house one afternoon to ask for her signature on this and I didn't get it. She and her husband are both lawyers, both graduates of the Duke law school, and she is now chairman of the school board.

WC: Getting back to the Pearsall Plan just for a second, was there much opposition in Greensboro that you recall to the Pearsall Plan?

ET: [pause] Well, there was from, I think, from some of us who—we weren't really organized right then, but we had each other identified, and we knew that this was a delaying tactic, and we knew that it certainly was not to further desegregation. But as far as organized opposition, I guess not. I don't know. I don't know how many months elapsed between the '54 decision and the publication of the Pearsall arrangement. Do you know?

WC: Just about two years.

ET: It was that long?

WC: Yeah.

ET: I didn't realize it was that long.

WC: The Pearsall Plan was surfaced in April '56. A special session was called for July and the vote was in September. Now, of course, there was the intermediate stage of the Pupil Assignment Act.

ET: Yeah, yeah.

WC: In '55.

ET: Where the school boards were given pretty much authority on that.

WC: Local autonomy. The thing which Dr. Smith was really the only official associated with the schools opposed to the Pearsall Plan. And there was a strong division on the board. Most of the board was in favor of the Pearsall Plan and—

ET: It would be fun to hear a rundown of the board then. I don't know. I can't remember who was on there.

WC: Well—

ET: And I had not yet come to the point of really caring who was on it. You know, my efforts hadn't—my involvement hadn't led me there yet.

WC: Well John Foster was chairman.

ET: Yes, oh he was—yes. He was an extremely smooth administrator. There was one very dramatic meeting that is written up in Bill Bagwell's book. We were right there, many of us sitting in that hot little room. And he conducted that meeting with the greatest poise.

WC: He's a very strong man.

ET: Yes, he certainly was.

WC: And Sarah Mendenhall Brown was vice chairman. Raymond Smith was on the board.

ET: Yes.

WC: Dr. William Hampton was on the board.

ET: Oh, yes. Dr. Hampton was still here.

WC: Mr. Cowan was on the board.

ET: Was he really?

WC: I'm not sure. There was a transition—

ET: He certainly would have been a conservative in every way.

WC: Yes.

ET: Believe you me. I tried to get signatures from him and his wife one time, too. Came to null.

WC: I think Howard Holderness had left the board by that time. I'm trying to remember who had taken his place. I don't think Hunter came on the board till '58 or '59.

ET: No, he was later, I'm sure.

WC: There was two or three people who left in '56, '57.

ET: Jim Perrin was on that board, I think.

WC: Yes, yes. He came on the board, I think, in '57.

ET: Oh, I see. Well, there's a constant in and out with who's on it. As a matter of fact, Dr. Raymond Smith stayed on much longer than he was really supposed to. He didn't know he was supposed to be rotated off. There's always someone representing the county area that the city schools served because the city lines and county lines and school attendance lines are not the same. But the makeup of it continues to be predominately conservative.

WC: Yes. The interesting thing, of course, is one of the things I found that is fascinating is that while the board nearly unanimous in deciding to go ahead with desegregation, in practice it did not really represent any kind of unanimous will to act.

ET: No.

WC: It was much more of a question of Dr. Smith providing leadership which the others felt compelled to follow because of the legal situation, while in practice hoping to, as one person told me, "Let sleeping dogs lie." And, of course, I think that the board became much more conservative after Dr. Smith retired, that there's a transition period there in which when Foster and Smith retire there seems to be a real shift.

ET: Who was chairman after John Foster?

WC: [pause]

ET: Hunter. Didn't he take—

WC: No, Hunter—

ET: —over right away?

WC: —came in in '60.

ET: He was just dreadful. I can remember us having to appear before him and making pleas and he would ridicule. He would pick up the fact that Bob Ford was from South Boston, you know, was not a southerner, was not—I don't think Hunter himself was really a native North Carolinian, but he was a very crude man in his dealings.

WC: It may have been Thornton, Thornton Brooks. I'm not sure. I think it was Thornton Brooks.

ET: Was he chairman for a while? Yeah, it may have been.

WC: I have all the information at home—

ET: It's possible. Yes, of course.

WC: —I just haven't been able to—

ET: Yeah.

WC: —kept up—looked at it for a while.

ET: Goodness, it brings back so many memories to think of all those days, all those days. Well we benefitted a lot from the efforts of people like the Beattys and another family whose name I cannot remember who were in ROTC at A&T. [They were] knowledgeable, sophisticated black people who were here temporarily to be sure, but who were willing to dig in and take a hand with things. Of course, we were—they were at a disadvantage in speaking out because they were not local, and there was a great feeling of advantage if you were a local person, if you could say, "I was born here, and I feel this way."

WC: Yeah. Do you recall a Major with the A&T ROTC in the late fifties who was transferred, who was a very strong activist.

ET: That was Tom Beatty.

WC: That was Tom Beatty.

ET: Yes, yes, and that's why he was transferred. He was sent back down to Fort Bragg because.

WC: And do you remember when he was transferred?

ET: No. No, I don't. It was after—let's see. It's bound to have been after '63, because he and I took the children over to Joyner School. Maybe it was later that year; it may have been the next year. I don't know. I've lost touch with them. They stopped back by here once or twice later when they were in Greensboro.

WC: How do you spell his last name?

ET: B-e-a-t-t-y.

WC: B-e-a-t-t-y.

ET: And I think his first name was Thomas. They had a little boy they named Tom. I'm pretty sure it was Thomas. His wife's name was Marjorie.

WC: There may have been another one later on who might have been transferred.

ET: He was transferred very definitely because of his community activities and his failure to identify himself completely with the cliques there on the campus. And maybe there was someone else. Now there was another family, and this is the family I was saying I can't remember the name, John somebody. His wife was very active in the YWCA, and I can remember yet going with her to talk with Phil Weaver about school problems. She was very active in the YWCA. [pause] They lived over on Bluford Street, but I cannot—I cannot think of the last name of that family. He may have, although I thought they simply left because his tour was over and moved on to something else.

WC: I have heard a story that there was—

ET: I don't know of anybody really—

WC: —pressure for removing him.

ET: I don't know of anybody else who was active. I think I would have been aware maybe—

WC: There was a captain whose name I forget—I have it at home—whose children applied for that first or second year of token desegregation, and they were turned down.

ET: Yeah. Now this may have been the family because they had two children in school. They had two children in school and then there was another baby I think while they were here in Greensboro.

WC: Well, to read over the applications for transfer—

ET: Yeah.

WC: —and then to compare them—

ET: We've really seen some interesting stuff.

WC: To compare the black applications for transfer—

ET: Oh, yes.

WC: —with the white applications for transfer—

ET: Yes, yes.

WC: —is mind boggling.

ET: Yeah. This is why Alfreda Webb was saying to the school board when she made her appeal to them in a wavering voice. She said her husband and herself between them had sixteen years of graduate school. And they could not send their child to a high school that would prepare him for college. Dudley [High School] did not offer necessary courses, really, to get him into college.

WC: Did you ever have any contact with Nell Coley?

ET: Yes. I knew her, yes.

WC: How do you spell her last name?

ET: C-o-l-e-y.

WC: C-o-l—

ET: —e-y.

WC: —e-y. It's not in the phone book.

ET: She taught English at Dudley or at A&T? She was active in the—

WC: At Dudley, yeah.

ET: —interracial commission way back. And she may be retired by now.

WC: Yeah, I think she is. But it's amazing the number of—

ET: People you can't find—

WC: —blacks who—

ET: —in the phone book and this is very true. There are a whole lot of people who have unlisted telephone numbers.

WC: Yeah. Well, the number of black students who are now adults who will—

ET: Remember her.

WC: —single out Nell Coley and Vance Chavis—

ET: And Vance Chavis. Yes, of course. Vance was involved in—

WC: —as having been—

ET: —all of this all along.

WC: —the two most important influences in their lives.

ET: That's interesting. I know him well. Yeah. She was a very, very confident person. Oh, yes.

WC: She really inspired students.

ET: I'd like to see your names. The names you have bring back a lot of—you know, for a long time the school system was just completely dual, and the principal at Dudley had control and whole access.

WC: [Dr. John A.] Tarpley.

ET: And his name was Dr.—

WC: Tarpley.

ET: Tarpley.

WC: Yeah.

ET: Dr. Tarpley. I remember going to see him on one occasion, too, and I can't remember what it was about. But he was really a czar. He—any black woman, any black teacher who came to Greensboro went to him to get a job immediately. He had to okay it before it went through. And he really had a tremendous amount of power, more than he should have had. I think Gladys Royal had some run-ins with him because, of course, he was pulled both ways as a black man and as a school administrator when she was ferreting out those things like the discarded textbooks that were being funneled into the black schools and considered to be perfectly adequate for them. But she had some good friends who were teachers, and through them she was able to get along [unclear]

WC: Do you think he—is it your impression or the impression of the black people you knew that he was using his power—

ET: [unclear]

WC: [unclear] So he did not use his power effectively at all.

ET: The black people certainly would feel so.

WC: How about Dr. Hampton? Do you have any—

ET: Well, my husband was fond of him. Of course, knew him from medical connections. He was a fine man. I think any black man that served on any white administrative board back in those days had to walk softly. He would—

WC: That has been my general perception of Dr. Hampton's role. He was a marginal man caught in the middle and had nowhere to go.

ET: Now I think—I do think George Evans is a different person. George is not a southerner. And I heard him conduct a school board meeting with the greatest suavity on one occasion. And I have heard him ask very pointed questions at just the right time to bring out a certain discrepancy, you know. Again, he was one man out of seven eight or nine or ten or however many, but he battled it long and valiantly. And he did—we could count on him. When we had things to bring up we could count on him, on his backing. And of course, he and his wife had already identified themselves with the active black group in town, which was the Citizens Association, and the NAACP, those two groups of people working in the communities trying to better things all along. There's so many other names I ought to be able to give you, and I am just truly sorry that—

WC: Well, you've already given me an incredible number.

ET: —that my records are not available. I did have—I took notes on all of those education committee meetings, and it was fun to read back over them week after week. Oh, there was a Jewish—I've forgotten about him. Harvey—no, Adrian—isn't it awful how names leave you? They lived a block away from us. He was a psychologist here, clinical psychologist.

WC: I think I have his name somewhere.

ET: Adrian and Jenny somebody.

WC: I think just the first name and the "psychologist" will help.

ET: They were marvelous people, and they were here through most of all of this. They then moved to New York State. But they, I remember took—well, he was chairman of our education committee for a long time.

WC: It would be marvelous if you—if those minutes were available. I would love to be able to look at them.

ET: Oh, it really would. I'll give Anna a call and see. I haven't even asked her about them. But after I read about the fire in Julius Chamber's office I just assumed that they were gone too. She—it's possible she has them, but surely she would have met—

[End of interview]