

**GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO CIVIL RIGHTS ORAL HISTORY
COLLECTION**

INTERVIEWEE: Robert Glenn

INTERVIEWER: William Link

DATE: April 16, 1987

WILLIAM LINK: This is William Link and the date is April 16, 1987. We're in the home of Mr. Robert L. Glenn, and I wonder, Mr. Glenn, if you would mind telling me a little bit about your background, where you were born, when you were born.

ROBERT GLENN: Okay, I was born right here in Greensboro in September 20, 1921. I spent most of my life here except for the time I served in the Marine Corps during World War II. And attended Greensboro public schools, Caldwell School--Elementary School, Gillespie Park Junior High School, Aycock Junior High School, and then Greensboro Senior [now Grimsley] High School. [I] graduated from Greensboro Senior High School in 1940. And then went in the Marines during World War II and served in the Marines four years during World War II.

After World War II, I entered Guilford College, graduated from Guilford and then went down to [the University of North Carolina at] Chapel Hill, the School of Education, and got my master's degree. Then in 1950, September 1950, I was employed by the Greensboro city school system to teach classes at Lindley Junior High School during the day, and coach, assistant football coach at Greensboro Senior High School in the afternoons. And then after the first year I went over to the Greensboro Senior High School as a teacher and coach. [I] served in that capacity for six years as a teacher and coach, and then became assistant principal. But originally when I started out [as] assistant principal I was also teaching. I taught three classes in the morning, and then did that for thirteen years. And then was appointed principal upon the retirement of Mr. A. P. Routh in 1969, and served in that capacity as principal 1969 until 1981, when I retired.

WL: I wonder if you'd, since you grew up in Greensboro, if you'd mind providing a few recollections of, of race relations in Greensboro, how you think blacks and whites got along, say in the thirties or forties when you were an adolescent [unclear]?

RG: Well, you know, at that time you really didn't pay too much attention to this business of segregation or desegregation. In fact, I don't recall ever hearing those words at all when I

was growing up. I had friends in the black community. In fact, in the summertime I played ball. Black youngsters and white youngsters played ball together, you know, that type of thing. Of course, during the school year there was no, there was no connection at all between blacks and whites. I never did see any black students during the school year. I never heard very much about Dudley High School. I knew at the time that Dudley High School was an all-black high school, but--

WL: When you played sports in the summer, would this be formal or informal?

RG: No, informal. Just, you know, pickup games, stuff like that. We played in the summertime. In fact, we had a big time together. Never any, any problems at all and, just, you know, just--that's just the way it was each summer. Like I say, you never even thought about integration or desegregation or segregation or whatever it might be. Except that, you know, I knew that black people lived in a certain section of town, and white people lived in a certain section of town. But I lived in south Greensboro at that time, which I was born and raised in south Greensboro down around Asheboro Street, Gorrell Sreet area, down through there. And that was not too far from the black community, and blacks passed by my house every day.

But from my own standpoint, race relations were very good, you know. We got along fine. Now, you know, since then I've thought, well, I never saw any blacks in jobs that, you know, any, well, just never did see them except walking down the street on their way home, and, like I say, in the summertime when we all played ball together.

WL: That's something you thought about.

RG: No. You really just didn't think about it.

WL: What about the armed forces?

RG: In the armed forces, there were blacks in the armed forces. And to my knowledge, at least in the units I was in, why, they seemed to get along all right. I never saw, I never saw, I never experienced any kind of animosity or any kind of violence or anything like that between blacks and white, just never did see it. It may have happened. It probably did in some places, but I just never did see it. I'm not aware of anything that ever happened where I was between blacks and whites. But I did see black Marines quite often.

WL: Did, when, from the point of view of a school teacher, say when you started in 1950, did you--how did you view separate schools? How did the two school systems, black and white, get along, or did they have much contact?

RG: Well, there wasn't a whole lot of contact, but what contact there was, we did get along. Now, I was well acquainted with black teachers back then. I knew quite a few of them. We were, we--well, actually we didn't even meet together then in 1950. But I think very shortly after that teachers meetings did include--I think about 1951 or '52, somewhere along there--not teachers meetings, but at your city-wide, say city-wide meetings involving the city-wide schools, you know. I'm not talking about, I said a while ago teachers meeting. I'm not talking about teachers meeting in individual schools. I'm talking about city-wide meetings that involved the total school system.

I used to meet and talk with black teachers--not many of them. And, of course, they had their own--the blacks had their association and the whites had their association. So there was no contact there. I'm talking about like the NCAE. It used to be North Carolina Educational Association, and theirs was a different name. And now they've banded together, they've banded together since then, of course, and it's know, it's NCAE now--North Carolina Association of Educators.

But here on the local level, I do remember coming in contact with black teachers for city-wide meetings involving the total city schools. Not anything in a big way, you know. Not anything at all like it was after we were totally integrated.

WL: When the *Brown* [v. *Board of Education*] decision--do you remember any sort of immediate reactions in May 1954, [unclear] very much of it, as a teacher?

RG: Well, I was teaching then, and of course I do remember the students asked a lot of questions about what did this really mean, you know. Did it mean that the Dudley students were going to be going to Grimsley, or would Grimsley be going to Dudley? Because at that time, 1954, there was one white high school and one black high school in Greensboro--Grimsley and Dudley. Page hadn't been built. Smith hadn't been built. And so that was, that was the chief discussion. That was the chief--that was the big question that was asked at that time was, you know, did this really mean that we were going to be going to school together.

I don't recall anybody being too upset about the *Brown* decision, that is, as far as students were concerned. And I don't recall much reaction between teachers about that. I think, I think in hindsight, I think most people were thinking, well, this won't happen here, you know. This was something that happened out in the Midwest. And the case was adjudicated in the Supreme Court. It'd be a long time before we really know--see results.

WL: So there was a question about whether it'd be enforced or not.

RG: Right. Whether or not it would ever be enforced. And of course at that time you read a lot in the papers about some of these Congressmen, and what they had to say, you know. Like I say, I don't recall a whole lot of comment or conversation really about the thing.

[It] wasn't something you heard about everyday. I think about the first two or three days after the decision was announced in the paper you heard some comment. But then after that I don't recall ever hearing anything until, you know, something else would come up maybe weeks or months later.

WL: So there was no--was there any planning, sort of, any initiations?

RG: Not that I know of. I never was a part of any planning or anything like that, although the superintendent of schools in Greensboro at that time, Mr. Ben Smith, said that the Greensboro city school system would comply with the law. He was--he said that, and he was quoted in the paper saying that. Of course, I think most teachers at that time felt that, you know, the schools should comply.

WL: But nobody really knew what it meant.

RG: Yeah, nobody really knew what it meant and when would it affect you, when would it take place. No one had any idea of when all that would take place. But our superintendent at that time, Mr. Ben Smith, who was a fine gentleman, he was a Christian gentleman. And I think that he felt should speak up, you know, be among those that would be counted on to uphold the law whenever it was time to be enforced here in Greensboro, North Carolina. [unclear--clock chiming]

WL: It was two years later, I suppose, when the first black student comes--

RG: Right. That was 19--yeah, two years later I think it was. I don't recall, it was '56-'57. Yeah, I guess that was the school year. Yeah. Now we--they enrolled one student in Grimsley High School, Josephine Boyd. She enrolled.

WL: Was she--how was the districting done in high schools in those days? Was it--

RG: Well, there wasn't any districting done, you know. Like I said, there was one high school for whites, and all the white kids living a mile and a half or more away from the school was supposed to be bused in, you know. And--although they couldn't bus everybody that lived more than a mile and a half. They didn't have the money to provide all the buses. But there was a lot of buses going on to the white high school and a lot of buses for the blacks to the black high school at Dudley from out in the county. They were busing black students who lived, really lived in the county into Dudley High School, because there was no high school for them in the county.

WL: There was no county black high school at this point?

RG: No, there was no county black high school. And a lot of them were bused into Dudley. But as far as any districting was concerned, there wasn't any. If you lived over in, say on North Elm Street, you know, you went to the closest junior high school at that time, which was Aycock. And then when you got out of the ninth grade you went to Grimsley Senior High School. Or if you lived out--over here in Pomona, back over here behind the outlet mall--that area there was what they called Pomona--and you went to school at Hunter Elementary School. And then from there you went up here to Lindley Junior High School. And then from there you went over to Grimsley Senior High School. That was the districting, if you want to call it that.

WL: So Josephine Boyd, when she enrolled, simply enrolling--

RG: That's right. She lived on Pisgah Church Road. That's where she lived. And she just simply enrolled in Grimsley High School. And there was no question about where she lived, you know, because the white kids who lived on Pisgah Church Road went to school at Grimsley too.

WL: And that would be the north, sort of northwestern section.

RG: Yeah, that's north, northwest.

WL: How did that proceed? What are your impressions of that year? She was just there her senior year

RG: She was there her senior year.

WL: She went to Dudley before that?

RG: She went to Dudley before that, that's right. And we were determined to make it work. When I say "we," I'm talking about the administration there at Grimsley and the staff, because we knew that the rest of the city and the state and the country were looking at this. And of course, there were people there who, there were people in school there who didn't want her there. They were what I called the redneck element.

WL: Students for the most part?

RG: Right, students. And there was a lot of people who were not students who didn't want her there, and they tried to make life miserable for her. But we got by the year all right without too much difficulty. And she got along fine. At first she wouldn't go in the

cafeteria. She used to eat lunch in the library--media center they call them now. They called it library then. But some of the teachers talked to her, said, "Ah, look, you come on, you're going to eat in the cafeteria just like everybody else," which she eventually did. And it was, you know, that type of thing.

And I did, I was assistant principal then, and I did take it upon myself to be close by during the change of classes to be sure that no one, you know, committed any violence against her in any way. Also in the afternoon--in the morning before school and the afternoon after school. I felt, well, we felt, not I, but we felt--me and Mr. Routh, the principal--felt we ought to do everything we could to be sure that these people that didn't want her there, you know, did not make life miserable for her. But the majority of students really didn't pay a whole lot of attention to her. They just went on their daily routine.

WL: What kind of intimidation did she face?

RG: Well, there were comments made to her, I'm pretty sure. I never did hear any but she told us about some comments made to her like, you know, "Why don't you go to your school," or "Why don't you do this or do that," as she would walk down the stairwell or something like that. I remember one time there was a--in the afternoon after school there was one rock throwing incident. She didn't get hit by a rock, but rocks were thrown, but we, we caught those people and--

WL: They were students?

RG: Yeah, they were students. [We] made sure that they did not do that any more. They wanted to--they would've been suspended if they did, and we never had anymore trouble with them. That all happened in the early weeks after she enrolled. By the spring of the year, really it was--the students, as I say were, you know, just normal daily routine for them. They didn't care [unclear] school. And they were friendly with her, but, you know, they didn't make any issue about her being black in there.

It was some outsiders, people in Greensboro who were members of the Ku Klux Klan, who were causing us the problems. They were coming over there, before I noticed, on the night of graduation, for instance. They were there parading in front of the gym with their confederate flags, that sort of thing. But we had the police there and we had it all set up so that they could not, they were not allowed in the gym where we had our graduation ceremony. We didn't have it in the coliseum. Well, we didn't have a coliseum. We might have had the coliseum but we didn't use it. I don't remember, but anyhow, we had our graduation exercise in the big gym, and they were not allowed in there, the Ku Klux Klan.

And there were just groups like that, you know, on the outside [unclear]. We

would get words, word, you know, that they might, you know, come on campus, try to cause some trouble. They never did. But we kept getting rumors, you know, to the effect, which kept us on our toes all the time. But they never did come on the campus during the school day. They came at--they didn't come really until, to try and make any demonstration until graduation. And we, we blocked that very well, I thought.

WL: How did, how, was the graduation ceremony itself fairly successful, fairly smooth?

RG: Yeah. See we--Grimsley was a big high school, it was big then--two thousand, twenty-one hundred students, you know. And we had a big senior class. And it was--we did it in the gym out there. And we had a speaker, but we always told the speaker we'd like for them to keep their remarks short and to the point, fifteen, twenty minutes at the most. But then we read the name of every graduate as they walked across there, you know, to get their diploma. So you're talking about reading the names of five, six hundred seniors. Well, it takes a little while to do, but, you know, we could move our graduation out there and be out in an hour, an hour and a half at the most, and that's what we did.

So the graduation--the night that Josephine graduated, it went just as smooth as all the rest of them did, with the exception of that effort on the part of the KKK out there in the front of the gym, you know. They finally gave up before it was over with and left. They saw they were not going to be allowed inside the gym so they just finally decided to go ahead and give up.

WL: Where do you suppose the Klan comes from, and who would be in it?

RG: There was a group here in Greensboro. Yeah, I know the names of them, the names of the people. The leader, the head man of the Klan at that time here in Greensboro, had two sons enrolled here in the high school.

WL: Who was he?

RG: Well, his name's George Dorsett.

WL: And they had--was it a certain section in Greensboro that they came from?

RG: Well, this particular man lived on, over in the Glenwood section. And the fellow who was carrying the flag over that night--they were the ones trying to cause the problem--his last name was Webster. I don't recall his first name. But there was a group like that. I think they caused more problems at other schools than they did at Grimsley. I think they caused a lot of problems down at Gillespie.

WL: Just more, at that point, facing integration was more pressing.

RG: Yeah, right. It's unfortunate you can't talk to the principal at--the man who was principal at Gillespie at that time was Banks Ritchie. He was a fine gentleman. I worked with him when he was--we taught together that year I taught at Lindley Junior High School my first year. He was a teacher and coach over there. He was a fine gentleman. He taught math and he coached the football team, basketball team, and everything. He had winners year in, year out. He was principal at Gillespie when it was integrated down there, and he really, he had a rough time. And I think that's eventually what caused his death. He developed arthritis, a severe case of arthritis during the first year or two of integration, because of all of the stress and everything that went with it, you know. And eventually it cost him his life.

WL: Was the Klan fairly act[ive]--the Klan was active in a number of different schools, then, in this kind of thing, that is in making a presence?

RG: Yeah, yeah. It was fairly active. I wouldn't say it was very active. It always appeared to me to be kind of a half-hearted thing. It seemed to me like it was just an effort on the part of a few people to get a lot of attention. That's what it appeared to me personally.

WL: Media attention?

RG: Yeah. Yeah, they wanted to get plenty of attention in the media. Yeah.

WL: Were there any other groups that were organized against the integration issue?

RG: Not to my knowledge. I never did--I don't recall any other groups who were organized in any way to oppose the integration of the schools or the desegregation of schools. I don't recall any. It was--of course, a lot of the opposition was kind of subtle. For instance, it came out in the paper the first day that Josephine was in school, it came out in the paper that I followed her around, you know, to make sure there was no problem. That was in the paper that night. Greensboro had an evening paper, the *Greensboro Record*. Well, that night I started getting threatening telephone calls, you know. People would call me on the phone, call me an SOB, nigger lover, and everything like that. And then pretty soon a black-owned taxi would show up in front of the house. And the next day, a load of coal came from a black-owned coal yard, which I hadn't ordered. I hadn't ordered the taxis. That's the kind of opposition that you, that we encountered from all this stuff.

WL: That kind of thing, the verbal violence--

RG: Yeah. You know, they didn't have enough guts to come out and say, "Well, this is so-and-so, and you're just an SOB." You know, they would get on the phone and call me at two or three o'clock in the morning and stuff like that, you know. And one time I got a postcard threatening to kill me, and I turned that over. That was turned over to the FBI and everything. They never found out anything about it. But that type of thing, you know.

WL: Do you probably think that would be sort of sporadic rather than--sporadic or organized?

RG: No, I don't think that was organized. No, I think that was just a sporadic type of thing. I'm sure there were people--some were people who were opposed to integration, you know, and they read that in the paper and thought by doing so, "Well, I'll get him." At eleven or twelve o'clock at night or whatever, send a taxi out here. Or ten o'clock the next morning they decide to send me a little wood or a little coal or something like that. That's what it was.

WL: Would you--how would you characterize the support that Josephine Boyd had in the school? Did she have much in the way of--

RG: Students?

WL: Students or community? She must have had support in the community.

RG: She had support in the community, yeah. Of course, I think the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] was very instrumental in selecting her, being sure, you know, that she was the right person [unclear--clock chiming]. But she had--there were students in the school who befriended Josephine, made her feel at home. They ate lunch with her, you know, after they got her to eat in the cafeteria, and that type of thing.

WL: That must have been a hard year for her.

RG: Oh, I'm sure it was a hard year but she, she apparently made it all right. Mr. Routh talked to her more than I did. I was always kind of on the, you know, kind of outside of the circle making sure that nothing happens. That's what I was doing, and trying to find out who might be the people, you know, that would do something to her. That was my job, that was the responsibility I had. Mr. Routh talked to her more than I did, talked to Josephine more than I did.

WL: But she had the full support of the administration?

- RG: Yes. Yes, she did. We were determined that they were not going to--no outsiders or anybody inside the school were going to commit any acts of violence against her or do anything to try to close down the school or anything like that.
- WL: What was the school board's position? Do you remember?
- RG: The school board position I think was really at that time what the superintendent said, that the Greensboro city school system would comply with the law when it was time for it to be applied to the Greensboro system.
- WL: Following this year, what--are there other black students who come?
- RG: Yes, there were black students that year after, not very many. There were no more, I don't recall ever more than thirty-five or forty at the most, and some years not that many between 1957, when she graduated, and 1971. There were just--no black students were ever turned down. If they wanted to enroll, they enrolled. But they were just, they just never were there in large numbers like they were at some of the other schools. There was always a rather large number of black students at Page. I don't know if it was whether because they lived closer to Page. I'm sure that's what it was. But there were no black communities anywhere near Grimsley, see, not like the black community around Woodmere Park and northeast Greensboro, pretty close to Page. And the same way after Smith opened up. There's black communities closer to Smith than they were to Grimsley. In fact, when Grimsley was totally desegregated, all the black students were bused in. They were bused in from Ray Warren Homes and from Hampton Homes to go to high schools. But there were just no black communities anywhere close to Grimsley like there was other schools. So, as I say between 1957 and 1971, there were just never many black students enrolled at Grimsley.
- WL: What, how, what was their experience there? Was it pretty much a normal thing?
- RG: Yeah, yeah. Never had any problems to my knowledge. In fact, I think I would have remembered it if they had. No, they seemed to just blend right in with everything and got along all right.
- WL: Is there--when did the other high schools open? Page and Smith?
- RG: I'm trying to think. I think Page opened up about 1957, '58, somewhere along there. And Smith, well, maybe, let's see now, I don't recall. It might have been a little bit later for Page. It seemed to me like '57 or '58 when they opened, Page opened up, but I don't recall. And it was a few year after that before Smith had opened.

WL: So by the mid-sixties, both--

RG: Yeah, by mid-sixties they both, Smith and Page, were open.

WL: At this point, let's say 1964-'65, all the high schools, predominately white high schools in Greensboro, all had opened admissions. [unclear, both talking at once]

RG: Yeah, they had black enrollments. And then junior highs were the same way.

WL: What's going on in the elementary schools as far as you know? Are you aware?

RG: I don't recall. I don't recall, but I don't believe that there were many black students in the elementary schools, especially over in the northwest section of Greensboro, because there again you were not close to black communities. But I think in the elementary schools down near the southwest sector and the northeast sector, they were closer to the black communities. I'm pretty sure they had black students in the elementary schools.

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

WL: --a little bit about the post-1969 or post-1971 period when you begin to have comprehensive integration at Grimsley. Did you pretty much see it coming? I guess you did several years in which--

RG: Yeah, I think we all realized it was coming, just, you just didn't know when, you know, and how many, and so forth. I think everybody felt that integration was coming and it was time to integrate.

WL: Fairly strong support?

RG: Yeah, I feel like there was. I don't think anybody would admit it, but I think everybody felt it was time to, you know, get this thing out of the way, so to speak. Get it going and get it out of the way.

WL: What kinds of--once you get integration, comprehensive integration, 1971, I guess--was it '71-'72 the first year?

RG: I think that, I believe that was the year. That--the suit was filed, you know, and Judge Gordon handed down his ruling. I believe it was '71 to '72 that we had full, massive integration. Prior to that, like I say, there were just very few blacks in the school, but I

think everyone knew that this was coming, and it was time for it. I think that we were just waiting for it, really.

WL: Where there, during the first year of integration, were there programs or efforts on the part of the schools to ease the process?

RG: Yeah, the schools--the Greensboro school system did quite a bit in their workshops and various kinds of meetings to get the teachers and administrators ready for integration, you know. A lot of our, almost all, well, all the workshops, and all the meetings, and all the seminars and everything were integrated. We went on seminars at Chinqua-Penn for three or four days away from Greensboro, blacks and whites together, worked together, talked to each other, made plans. There was a lot of that that went on to try to, you know, try to smooth over the initial phases of integration.

We knew that there was going to be a mixing of two cultures, really. And we had the white teachers and administrators who had been dealing with whites for a very long time had a lot to learn, and the blacks did too. And so, we attended a lot of meetings and did a lot of in-service work, seminars, and so forth together, and did a lot of down-to-earth work to get ready for it. Now, I don't think there was a whole lot done as far as students were concerned. I don't recall anything being done as far as students were--there were seminars and workshops done for student leaders, you know, like student council, things like that. But not the, you know, not the total student bodies in predominately white, predominately black schools. I guess that was just too big an undertaking, there was no way to do it on a mass scale.

WL: Was the--how did it proceed?

RG: Well it--the seminars and all the meetings and everything seemed to me like they went very well. In fact we thought we had a pretty good grip on things when it was over with, with all the in-service work we'd done. And you know, the first year or two of integration did go pretty smoothly.

WL: What, to what extent was the faculty integrated?

RG: It was integrated just like the student body. In other words, the integration ratio at that time was supposed to reflect the ratio in the community, which was 70 percent white, 30 percent black. And that's the way the faculty was integrated, 70 percent white, 30 percent black. So--and this was really a touchy thing--was to integrate the faculty. And the way it--what really happened was the administrators--when I'm talking about administrators, I'm talking about the superintendent, the assistant superintendents, and the supervisors, and directors, and principals--all sat down, and just simply transferred people back and

forth.

And you had to make sure that you didn't lose your key leadership in what had been the predominantly black schools and in what had been the predominately white schools. You tried to retain your key leadership, because these were people you needed to try to make the transition smoothly, you see. And it was done--as far as I can say and as far as I can tell--was done just about as fair as it could be.

People, if they didn't like their reassignment, they, they had a chance to appeal. And a lot of them didn't like it. And it was kind of bad the way it had to be done. But, you know, I still say there were people who volunteered to move. That was taken care--that took care of some of it, but not a whole lot. The rest of it just had to be, simply, had to be done by administrative decision, that was the only way to do it. Because, you know, after you got all those who volunteered to transfer, in other words, if you had--if I had teachers at Grimsley who volunteered to go to Dudley, that's well and good, but I didn't have many to do that. And Dudley didn't have a whole lot that volunteered to go to Grimsley, or to Page, or to Smith. So it had to be done by administrative decision.

And it seemed kind of, it seemed bad at the time, and it seemed unfair at the time, but what other way could you do it? If you just reached in a hat and pulled out names, then, you, you had to do something, like I said a while ago, in maintaining your key leadership, your people who did things like the yearbook, and the newspaper, and your department chairman and things like that, you see, and the people who had been most active in your in-service work to smooth over the transition for integration. So reaching in a hat and pulling names didn't cut it either. So the only thing you could do was to just simply to do it administratively, and that's what was done and that's the way we did it. And in retrospect, after all these years thinking about it, I'm convinced, and I've been convinced for a long time, that's the only way we could do it.

And you had to make sure that, for instance in athletics, you had to make sure that you were going to get people who would--blacks who would be coaches, you know, in what had been a predominantly white school. Same token, you were going to have whites who were going to be coaches in what had been predominantly black schools. You had that, you know that kind of, type thing. And we tried to balance everything out, you know, and tried to be as fair about it as we could. Same thing with department chairmen. If we had seven out of ten department chairmen, seven of them were going to be white, three of them were going to be black. So we tried to work things just like that. We tried to stick to that ratio initially as best we could, and I think we did a good job at it.

You know, it seemed at that time, and for a few years after that--I've said this many times--there were a lot of people, you know, who didn't, who, you know, after the schools integrated, they didn't like it. They got mad, they were mad at somebody because of what had happened. Sometimes they were mad at the school boards, sometimes they were mad at the Supreme Court. Sometimes they were mad at the principal. Sometimes they were mad at the teacher. But--and it was the same with blacks and whites. And,

because the blacks had learned that, you know, they had their school, and they had their traditions, and everything, and this was all blown away. And the same thing with schools like Grimsley and Page and Smith. They had their traditions, which had been mostly all white, you know. And these things all had to change, and a lot of people got mad. And, like I said, they seemed to be mad at somebody about something all the time.

I don't know, I think we, I think we did a real good job, considering the situation and the way it affected people, you know, because it was a real, a deep-seated feeling on the part of a lot of people, you know, their allegiance to their schools, their tradition if you will, and especially so in the black community. That was the only thing they had really, in the way of what you might call their own.

WL: There is significant opposition in the black community to massive integration.

RG: Yes there was. Well, not open opposition. Not open, but underneath the surface there was opposition to massive integration. And at the same time they wanted their schools to have the same advantages as--what had been their predominately black school--the same advantages as the predominately white schools. And you know, you can't blame them for that. There was feeling both ways, on the part of blacks and whites, about this integration. I think it was, I think it was a couple, three years after we totally integrated that this strong feeling, though, began to surface. That's when I first noticed it. The first year of integration really went smoothly, and the second year. But about the third year, there began to be some, well, I don't know how to describe it--some strong feelings on the part of blacks and whites. Things were not like they wanted them to be.

WL: How was it expressed?

RG: It was, it was--a lot of it had to do with cultural things, or social things, really. For instance, the kids at Grimsley High School had always had dances after ball games, after football games, what you call open house. And of course, white kids liked a certain kind of music. Black kids liked a certain kind of music. They would always have their dances, or open houses, and their dances were different, which had--this was really the problem for administrators, what to do about things like that, so that there'll be some degree of satisfaction of both parties. But this is what you got into. And not only for social events, but for student council, in-service clubs, and all kinds of things like that, you see.

And some of the black students felt like, you know, things were not fair, and they began to get somewhat upset about it. White students begin to think, well, you know, they shouldn't be complaining about this and complaining about that. And you had a certain element in both races that you had to deal with and be careful about, because they had some pretty strong feelings about this. So it got a little bit tougher about the, oh, I would say about the second year of integration, the second, third and fourth year. Then

after that it began to slow down a bit. We got some kinks worked out, you know.

This business about social events, like the dances--you know, you'd bring blacks and whites together, and say okay, you all get together and plan the kind of dance you want. And I'll tell you, those kids, they had really, their opinions were, they had strong opinions. It took some real, real--well, not persuasion, but you had to do a lot of talking to get both sides to come together and agree on things. And that's the way it was really in planning activities on the student council, in-service clubs and things like that, you know.

WL: What, what kinds of changes did you see in the identity of Grimsley as a result of integration and [unclear]?

RG: Well, I, you know--of course, things changed in all schools. I think the thing that bothered me more than anything else was the changes in the curriculum. One thing that always came up in the in-service programs that we had to smooth things over as we integrated was whatever you do in academics, don't lower your standards. But when we got into the teaching of English and math and science and all your required subjects and everything, a lot of your black students were at a disadvantage. A lot of reading problems. In fact, I was just, I was just thunderstruck at the number of black students who could not read at all, or could not read well enough to know what to--to understand what they were reading.

Now, I had already encountered this with the black students back in the--I mean white students back in the fifties, especially from youngsters who came from low economic and socio-levels, like kids out here in Pomona, for instance. But we just took it upon ourselves to make sure that somebody would make an effort to try to teach these kids to read. So we'd take an English teacher and give her a study period at such-and-such a time during the day, and then assign these kids who were having reading problems to that English teacher. I went over to Peck Elementary School and borrowed textbooks from the principal over there for that English teacher to use to help teach these kids this. In other words, we didn't go to the superintendent and say, "We need ten thousand dollars to set up a program." We just did things on our own. That's what we did.

And, then, lo and behold, you know, with the integration and the fact that so many of your, your black youngsters came from very poor circumstances and from homes where there were no--there was only one parent, and in some cases no parent at all, but living with an uncle or aunt or a sister or something like that. And they had never had any books to look at. No one had ever taken any time with them to teach them to read, you know. And so a lot of those kids, they were helpless when it came to your regular English classes, or math, and so forth. So the whole curriculum, see, had to be changed. And the one thing that people said in those workshops was, "Don't lower your standards," but that's what happened. Standards had to be lowered, and they were lowered for everybody, because your curriculum rests in English, language arts.

Here's a good example. You used to have English II, III, and IV in grades ten, eleven and twelve, that's what it was. Or you could have called it English ten, eleven, twelve. Sophomore English, every youngster took a half a year of grammar, and the teachers taught, you know, grammar in there. It was sentence structure and everything, spelling, all of it. Then the other half they went into literature on the sophomore level. In the eleventh grade, same thing--half a year of grammar, half year literature. Then the senior year, the same thing, only your senior year you wrote a term paper, and it had to be a term paper with flip notes, notes, everything. And in the school store at Greensboro Senior High School, we used to sell a little pamphlet on how to write a term paper. And that book was purchased by practically every senior in the senior class, because they had to, they had to write a term paper and hand it in, and pass it in order to pass the English course that year.

WL: In order to graduate.

RG: To graduate. The black kid had never experienced anything like this, and just simply can't do it--the majority--I mean the ones, you know, that couldn't read. And, so the total curriculum had to be changed, and it was changed. They went to what they call Introductory Language Arts, which was, which was experimented with at Page. It wasn't nothing in the world but just a series of one semester courses, like "Man Today" and "Personal Identity," and things like that. And when we started teaching things like that, I just, it just, I just couldn't see, I just couldn't see where that was doing the youngster any good.

And what I thought they should have been doing was, you know, taking these youngsters who couldn't read and developing a real good, comprehensive course to take them through grades ten, eleven and twelve, and hopefully by the time they got to be seniors they could read and understand what they were reading. And eventually, that's what we got around to doing. We had started doing what they called Special Education, you know. But initially, they, that, that wasn't the case. Not too long after total integration, it had to be, they had to start doing that because it was just absolutely necessary.

But the same thing happened to math. These kids used to take Algebra I and II and then geometry, and then either college algebra and trig[onometry], or college algebra and something else. But we had to go to what we call general math and [unclear]. So the curriculum changed all the way around. And it watered things--in my opinion, it was watered down.

And in 19--let's see in 19, late 1960s, in the mid-sixties, we had two youngsters to score perfect on the college boards. Boy by the name of Larry Reid[?], class of '69, scored sixteen hundred. That was his score on the college board. One boy before him, Dave Grimes[?], who eventually was the freshman class president at Yale or Harvard,

one of them, I've forgotten--he scored perfect. And me and Mr. Routh administered the first college board exams given to high school students in Greensboro in the old girl's gym over at the Grimsley High School--Greensboro Senior High School years ago when it first started. And the students scored very well on the college board for years--in the eleven, twelve, thirteen hundreds. But then after the curriculum was changed around, and they didn't have to do this required work that they'd been doing, and a few years after that, the college boards started falling--for all students. And that was--I think that was the thing that bothered me more than anything else.

And I don't, you know, I just don't think that we, we--somehow or other, we didn't know that the black student--there were so many black students that had this problem. We didn't know their home situation, you know what I mean. And so no--there was no program ready and available to start with them. There should have been. Now, there were programs for the handicapped--what I'm talking about is the mentally handicapped, the learning disabled. But I'm talking about the kid who, who you know, was in school everyday but he couldn't read, because he'd never been exposed to, or no one had ever taken the time, didn't have the background, or didn't have the family member that would help him.

Like I used to take my--I have two children, both of them graduated Grimsley--and my daughter, Cathy, you know, I used to sit down with her at nighttime and read her a story. I'd do the same thing for my boy, you know. And I knew what it was. I knew that I was helping them. These kids never had anybody. Usually there is a person that they lived with like an aunt or an uncle or a grandfather or grandmother--they couldn't read. You know what I mean? It's a bad situation. That bothered me as much as anything else.

And I was forever, in the twelve years I was principal at Grimsley High School, I was forever looking for a way to try to teach these youngsters to read and to read better. And I worked on that constantly. I worked on workshop after workshop, I finagled money out of the superintendent, and stuff like that, because that was a real drawback to so many of these black youngsters. But, you know, there were white kids too that couldn't read, and they were included in that program, but it was--the majority of them were black kids.

WL: In retrospect, how would you, how would you evaluate the impact of desegregation? Would you say it's mostly good or partly good, partly bad?

RG: I think in the long run it's good, yeah. There's no question about it. You can't, you know, you can't, you can't send no, the young people in this country in two different tracks--one for black and one for white. It can't be done. No, I think that was best for the whole country, not just for black and white young people, but for the whole country, for society. Yeah, there's no question in my mind about that. And I'm just glad we have the biggest portion of it behind us. They still have problems, as you know, as we read in the paper

from time to time. But, you know, it's going to take, it's going to take years. We said then it would take years for this thing to really smooth out. But it's smoothing out, each year. And it'll get better. But I think that was, I think that was the right thing to do. And I think Greensboro, really--the Greensboro city school system did a real good job when you compare it with some other cities and some other states. I think we did a real good job getting this thing going. But I wore myself out, really, trying to set up programs for these youngsters and trying to make things better for them, really.

WL: It must have been a hard time to be a principal.

RG: It was. A lot of pressure on. Like I was saying a while ago, when I was talking about people were mad about something, and they were. And usually they'd take it out on the principal. I might not have had a thing to do with it, but I was the one who was most available so that you could really chew out. It was the principal, you know. And the fellow that retired, Mr. Routh, I'd known him all my life--and he's eighty-three years old now, still see him every Wednesday at Rotary Club--he told me a many time, he said, "Lord" he says, "I sure am glad I left when I did." [laughs] I said, "Well," I said, "I'm glad you did too, Mr. Routh," because he wouldn't have been able to--he was an entirely different personality. He had a short fuse. [snaps fingers] And, you know, you just can't be that way around young people. And you couldn't have been that way around when the schools desegregated either, because, like I said, everybody was mad about something. And, you know, you just had to be, you just had to be understanding and not get mad about everything [laughs] that they said to you.

[End of Interview]