

Interview

with

EVALEE S. PARKER

February 5, 2005

by Gerrelyn Patterson

Transcribed by Emily Baran

The Southern Oral History Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Transcript on deposit at
The Southern Historical Collection
Louis Round Wilson Library

Citation of this interview should be as follows:
"Southern Oral History Program,
in the Southern Historical Collection Manuscripts Department,
Wilson Library,
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill"

Copyright © 2005 The University of North Carolina

Transcript – Evalee Parker

Interviewee: Evalee Parker
Interviewer: Gerrelyn C. Patterson
Interview date: February 7, 2005
Location: NC Central University, School of Education in Durham, NC
Length: 1 cassette; approximately 45 minutes

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

GP: This is an interview with Evalee Parker in Durham, North Carolina. It's February Seventh, 2005 and we're in her office at NC Central University. The interviewer is Gerrelyn Patterson. This is part of the Spencer Grant project on school desegregation in the South, and will be used as part of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The tape number is EP2705. Okay, Miss Parker, can you tell me a little bit about how you got into teaching?

EP: Well I graduated from Appalachian State University in 1978, with a B.A. in psychology, which doesn't mean much because with a psychology degree, you really need to go to graduate school. What I was finding at that time period was that in order to go to graduate school, you really needed some work experience, but in order to get work experience, you really needed a master's degree. So I came back to Durham and got a job at Darryl's and was waiting tables. That's about the time that Durham got liquor by the drink, and so I went to bartending school and I became a bartender at Darryl's. I was working one Sunday afternoon, actually I was waiting tables, I think, that day, and John Lucas, my former principal at Hillside, came in and had lunch. I was waiting on him and

we were very close in high school. He told me that he had a position at Hillside. It was [being] a teaching assistant in the morning, and then he needed somebody to help teach a class in the afternoon. And would I be interested? I thought well yeah. I actually went to Hillside and got a job as a teaching assistant in the morning in several different classes, and then I taught a class in the afternoon in government for, it was actually mixed, sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

That kind of, that bug bit me. I thought this was kind of fun and I enjoyed it. I wasn't the best student when I was in high school, so it never occurred [to me] to be a teacher. I wanted to get out of school. But being on the other side of the classroom was a lot of fun and I just kind of connected at that time. So I decided to go back to school and I came to Central first and started in education. I was dating this guy from Asheboro and he was getting to move back there and go into business with his father, so what happened is I went to Asheboro and actually got a job as a teaching assistant in a classroom in Randolph County while I was going to UNCG working on my degree in education. I guess I was a lateral entry teacher back before lateral entry was even-- Well what happened is I got hired as a teaching assistant in this EMH classroom, and the teacher was getting ready to go on maternity leave and they couldn't find anybody to take her spot. They liked me and so what happened is I took her job and I got what was called a B certificate back then. Now it's called lateral entry, but it was a B certificate while I was working on my coursework to upgrade that to an A certificate.

GP: So all of this because you met John Lucas at Darryl's. You said you had a close relationship with him when you were in school, and at least I don't know many people who had a very close relationship with their principal. Can you tell me about that?

EP: Yeah well it actually goes back to junior high school because I was living in Durham when they desegregated schools and I had just finished seventh grade at Rogers-Herr. That summer I was assigned to Shephard. A lot of my friends at that time were going to private schools. My dad is a minister and he didn't feel that it would be right to send me to private school and then get up and preach love your neighbor on Sunday. I went to Shephard with a couple of my friends, so I think I was one of seven white people in the whole school. Because of that, Mrs. Lucas, who was the dean of girls, and I became just really good friends. She kind of looked out for me. If I had any problems, I went to her. We just became really close. I was like, they called me their second daughter and they were my second parents, and like I visited their home. We just had a really good relationship and so when I went to Hillside, I already had that relationship with John Lucas.

GP: When were you at Hillside? What were the dates?

EP: '74 to '78—no wait, that's when I was in college. Hold it. I graduated in '74, but I graduated after my eleventh grade year, so I was only there two years. I was there [from] '72 to '74.

GP: So then when you got there, you already had this relationship established.

EP: He used to do things like I remember when, I can't remember his name now but it was a coach from Maryland, came down to look at where John Jr. went to school, John Sr. called me out of class to give him a tour. I mean we just had a close relationship, so if I had any problems or anything, I could go straight to him, or he would ask me to do things. He was just real sweet to me and I appreciated that.

GP: So what was it like going to Hillside?

EP: I went to Hillside kind of during the heyday—I did.

GP: [laughter] Everybody that I interview says that.

EP: Of the desegregation.

GP: Oh well that's true.

EP: That's what I'm talking about. My brother is four years older than me, and when they did this, he had been at Durham High for two years and he was getting ready to be a senior in high school. He had to move over to Hillside. My sister was in eleventh grade. She had gone to tenth grade at Durham High, so she went eleventh and twelfth to Hillside. Then I was, of course, at Shephard for eighth and ninth grade before I went to Hillside. Now the people that were in my brother and sister's age group all went to Hillside. So it had a pretty good number of white students. When I got there, a lot of my friends that had gone to private schools, had older brothers and sisters that had gone to Hillside and so they came back. So we were all reunited. That's why I'm saying there were a lot of kids, a good mix; it was just a good time. I know after I left, a lot of people began to leave the school and it just wasn't the same. It just wasn't. So that's why I kind of feel like I was there at the right time and there was just a lot of good things going on at that time.

GP: So tell me what a typical day was like.

EP: Gosh I don't really remember. I mean I'd have to think way back. When I was in tenth grade, well when I first got there, there were some people, some kids in the twelfth grade, that had been friends of my sister the year before. They kind of took me under their wing. So I already knew some upperclassmen. Back then, you didn't eat alone. I mean we went out to lunch everyday.

GP: Off campus?

EP: Oh yeah, absolutely.

GP: I didn't even know they had that.

EP: I didn't know they had a cafeteria for a year. I was in eleventh grade before I even ever saw the cafeteria, and I just went down there to make sure it was there, never ate in it.

GP: So where did you guys go?

EP: We went all around the place.

GP: Oh, you had cars.

EP: Yeah, we had cars. I didn't have—I didn't drive because I was a baby, you know, I'm a September birthday. I was young so I didn't have my license until the eleventh grade anyway. So I went with these seniors to lunch, ended up dating one of them, and so that was my boyfriend from October through the rest of that year. That made me feel good. I was dating an upperclassman; that's very cool when you're in high school. Finding him in the halls and stuff like that was a lot of fun. Then a bunch of my friends that had come to Hillside from other schools—I just had a good group of friends in tenth grade and it was like I was more popular, because at Shephard I was by myself. Hillside felt good because I was popular, I had a lot of friends, I had a boyfriend, I got involved in Young Life.

GP: What is this?

EP: Young Life is, I don't know really how to explain it, I guess it's like a Christian group that colleges come into high schools and run. We had a group of students from Duke that ran Hillside and Durham High together, so I got to meet a lot of Durham High students and I went to Young Life. Young life was on Wednesday nights and it was at kids' houses. We had little skits and we sang and it was always fun.

GP: And was that integrated?

EP: Yeah. So that was a good time. High school was fun when I was in tenth grade, and when I was in eleventh grade, but, you know, my boyfriend had graduated and he had gone off to school and we were still dating. So my eleventh grade was I had some close girlfriends, you know what I'm saying? Instead of boyfriends, it was more about my girlfriends. That was fun too, but I had the opportunity toward the end of the eleventh grade, Appalachian was offering a program called the Admissions Partnership Program, where you could leave high school after eleventh grade, go to Appalachian that summer, and take freshman English, which would count as your senior English, and freshman history, which would count as your senior history, both sessions of summer school and then an elective in each session. If your grades were a certain level, then you could stay and you would get credit for those courses, plus you'd get your high school diploma, which I never got, and I'll tell you that in a minute. But anyway, so I decided to apply and was accepted into that program, which was good because my boyfriend went there and my sister was in school there. I was ready to leave.

GP: So it turned out well for you.

EP: Yeah, so I didn't go my twelfth-grade year to Hillside, but tenth and eleventh were good experiences. I'm not going to tell you I learned a whole lot. I had some really good teachers.

GP: Tell me about a couple of teachers that you felt made a difference.

EP: Okay. I remember my biology teacher. I remember my English teacher. I do not like math. I'm not a good math student. Math was just you know, I didn't really care for it or the teachers. The teachers that I really liked were teachers that connected with me, that were interested in building a relationship () and that really made connections. I will tell you something. I didn't have many black teachers.

GP: Really? At Hillside?

EP: I didn't. I had some, but I'm sitting here thinking, one year foreign language was a black teacher. The next year it was a white teacher. For English, both years were white teachers. For biology, it was a white teacher. Chemistry, it was a black teacher. I was on the yearbook staff, and that was a black teacher. That was in eleventh grade. Math were, I know eleventh grade was a white teacher, a white man. I really don't even remember tenth grade.

GP: Oh there were a lot of white teachers at Hillside?

EP: There were a lot of white teachers.

GP: More than (), do you think?

EP: I don't know. I really don't know but I doubt it.

GP: That's the first time I'm hearing about that.

EP: Yeah, and my psychology teacher was white, and that was in eleventh grade—No, that was tenth grade, I'm sorry. That was tenth. It's really weird because my PE teacher was black, () Ms. Poole. We called her her name. So I probably had more white teachers than I did black, which was weird, I thought. But anyway, I thought the classes I was interested in, I did well in. The classes I weren't interested in, I probably did okay. I did well enough to get into college early. But anyway, I wasn't a shining star student; I wasn't.

GP: Well what about other things, were there other activities that you were involved in? I've heard lot about the () and the track team. Can you tell me something about those organizations?

EP: In eleventh grade, I joined the track team and didn't complete the season. I got hurt. I don't even remember it, but I did participate in that. I wasn't a big sports person and

in tenth grade, I never went really to any of the ball games or anything, because on Friday and Saturday night, I was dating. And in eleventh grade, one of the things I remember is that Duke and Carolina used to have some incredible concerts back then. Do you remember that? I don't know how old you are.

GP: No.

EP: But back then, they had some really good concerts and that's what we did around here. We went to these concerts on Saturday night so I remember doing that a lot. I just don't remember doing a whole lot. In eleventh grade, like when my boyfriend came home, we went out or I went up there to visit my sister. But I don't think I ever went to any ball games.

GP: So you didn't hang out after school or the activities or things like that?

Was Mr. G's swing school still there when you were there?

EP: I don't remember.

GP: It was a variety school.

EP: I don't remember that.

GP: I'm not sure that it was still going on in the '70s, but I know that was big at the school.

EP: I really don't remember that.

GP: Can you remember any major event that happened at the school that everybody got really excited about? Homecoming or--?

EP: Not really. That's kind of sad. I remember more about Shephard. I remember lots of things going on at Shephard, but I really don't remember as much, and it's probably because of where my mind was. To be honest with you, I don't remember a whole lot of

people. I'll see people and they'll say, "I went to high school with you," and I'm like okay, if you say. I really don't remember and I guess it's because I was so in love and you know.

GP: Well tell me what it was like living in Durham because I don't have a sense. I grew up in Raleigh in the '70s. I don't know if Raleigh and Durham were similar, but other than the concerts that you went to on the weekend with your boyfriend and your father was a minister, what was it like just navigating Durham? Is it similar to what it is now or is it very different?

EP: Well Durham, you know as a kid, I don't remember the politics of Durham, of course, like I hear now. But I don't remember, it was city and county back then, as far as the schools go—

GP: Oh that's right, because ()

EP: Yeah, we had Durham city schools, which I was in, and then there were Durham county schools, and you always heard like, "Ooh, the county schools." I didn't really get involved in all that so I don't know that much about what that was like.

GP: Well what other kinds of things did you do?

EP: What did I do like as a kid growing up?

GP: Yeah, as a teenager.

EP: I remember as a kid, I don't remember the year, when the civil rights, we had all the riots and everything. We had curfews and stuff.

GP: Oh really?

EP: Yeah. My parents live in a section, it was like Forest Hills is here and Lakewood is here and Duke is here, and they live kind of in the middle, so we didn't really have a--. My dad was a pastor at Lakewood Baptist Church. So I remember walking to Lakewood Shopping Center and I remember when South Square was built. I was actually

in high school when South Square was built, or junior high. No, I think I was in tenth grade actually. But anyway, we used to go bike, like I used to bike-ride over to Duke and go to the gardens with friends. It was quite different then. I don't dare let my daughter bike-ride anywhere now because there's so many cars on the road, but back then it didn't seem to be as dangerous. We used to bike all over the place, go to movies a lot on weekends. I remember every Sunday afternoon I used to go to the movies with a friend of mine when I was in junior high school. Of course I was involved in church youth activities. My parents had tickets to the Duke games. My mom worked at Duke and we went to all of the Duke football games, some of the Duke basketball games, but not as many as the football games. More neighborhood-type activities, you know just friends that live in the neighborhood would get together and play.

GP: ()

EP: Well we moved to Chapel Hill when I was six, after I'd finished first grade, and then to Durham when I was nine, after I'd finished fourth grade. So I went to fifth grade and sixth grade at Lakewood. I hated that. I went to seventh grade in Rogers-Herr. I really liked Rogers-Herr because I was in the chorus and we had a lot of chorus performances and I was in all the plays. That was fun. Then at Shephard, I helped create a lot of programs and plays and stuff, because we had done that at Rogers-Herr and a bunch of us continued that. That was a lot of fun. I was really close to the gym teacher. Her name was Ms.().

GP: At Shephard?

EP: At Shepard. So I went out for cheerleading and I made it. After, I guess it was the first or second game, I broke my arm, not cheering () at school, but I broke my arm.

So that kind of ended that. Let's see, I got my cast off like in December, and in May, I broke it again, or April I broke it again, that year. So I wasn't too coordinated.

GP: () So did you not do theater at Hillside?

EP: Well but you know what, and I'll tell you how I broke it again. I actually became an anorexic during I guess it was the eighth grade. There were a lot of really skinny girls.

GP: There still are.

EP: And I wasn't, you know. So I decided that I was going to be skinny, and so I basically contracted an eating disorder and got down to like eighty-nine pounds, which is pretty dangerous. That was going on during my eighth-grade year, losing all that weight. The second time I fell and broke my arm was kind of passing out due to my eating, so then ninth grade, I gained a little bit of weight. I don't remember as much about ninth grade, but by the time I got to Hillside, that wasn't an issue anymore.

GP: Well it sounds like you worked through that very well and that you were involved in a lot of things throughout the school years. I remember you said that you were in theater and that you started plays at Shephard as well. Did you pursue any theater at Hillside?

EP: No. It didn't seem like there was as much opportunity. I don't know, it just wasn't as big of a deal. Hillside was so much bigger too.

GP: So you went to the Hillside that's right across the street from ()?

EP: () over there.

GP: Right (). Okay, I just have to remember that because I remember that building has moved. It's on ().

EP: I remember Mr. Alston, called him "prop."

GP: What did y'all call him, prof.?

EP: I think it was prof, but we called him prop. That's him. I remember him in his glasses.

GP: Now you didn't have any interactions with him, did you? He was a disciplinarian.

EP: Just in the hall. (laughter) "Let's move it on please."

GP: And I remember Mr. Paige, he was a history teacher, really, really tall and skinny. Did you have him for history?

EP: I didn't have him. I remember Mr. Bowen. That's who I had for chemistry, Jake Bowen, never will forget him.

GP: Why do you say you will never forget him?

EP: Well he was just, I don't know, he was just different. I don't know. Back then, there was *Glamour* magazine was really big in my age group, and there was an advice column called "Ask Jake," and so we used to you know, kid him and ask him for advice. He was just playful, but he could also turn on you and be mean as a snake.

GP: Oh really? (laughter)

EP: Yes.

GP: So when you were there, it wasn't the first integrated class. That was when your brother was there.

EP: Uh huh.

GP: And how was his—well I mean you can't speak, but you were living in the house with him, how did that experience go for him?

EP: Well like I say, I think what they did is they just took a bunch of kids () they were here, and so he was with his buddies and everything. He was only there a year. I

really don't remember him having any problems or being all that upset about it. It was actually closer to our house. He had his buddies; they all were there. It wasn't like he was, it wasn't like my seventh-eighth grade experience, which was I was alone.

GP: Well I know some of the people I've interviewed said that some of the black students, once school integration came, they went to Durham High. They still came back over to Hillside for the activities and events. Was that the case with your group at all?

EP: Uh uh. I think the only interaction I had with Durham High was Young Life, and they just put the two groups together. But other than that, we never did anything.

GP: So there was no feeling of "why are we at Hillside?"

EP: Not by the time I got there, and not for my sister either. My brother may have felt that way, but it wasn't anything that I picked up on.

GP: So why do you think—

EP: I don't think he wanted to go. He has a ring that says Durham High School because they got it in the eleventh grade year back then, and that was before they had integrated the schools. So I think he really kind of felt like they should have grandfathered that group in and let them finish, but that wasn't in the plan and so he went. I don't think he wanted to go, but I think the fact that all his friends went and everything, it wasn't a traumatic experience or anything. They went.

GP: I know you said that your father felt strongly about kind of living what you preach. Do you remember if your parents had any involvement at all in the school?

EP: Oh yeah. My dad did. In fact, my dad, like in the beginning of the year when they had, I don't know, we used to have all the students would meet in the auditorium and have an assembly and he was always invited to give the prayer and at the baccalaureate and

all that stuff. He was always involved, and he was in PTA. My mom worked at Duke and she wasn't as involved, but my dad was very involved.

GP: Why do you think this community seems to value the schools so much?

EP: Well this community is so different than most, and it's probably because there was a real big faction of wealthy black people that lived right here. So Hillside was right in the middle of it and it became an icon, you know. It was very important to these people, just like Central is to so many people. This is where they grew up, this is where they went to school, and they really have that pride and that relationship, and I think it was the same way with Hillside. I think it had to do with just the people that lived here. I don't know if it would've been the same way somewhere else. I think it just happened to be in this community where there were (), just this whole group that lived here that's always been a big part of Durham in the politics. I think that's why it's kind of how it is now, that they have a voice and they want to be heard and they should be heard. They're Durham's history and Hillside is Durham's history. () about that.

GP: I'm going to ask you a few kind of general questions about deseg and education and then we'll be over.

EP: I don't know if we've touched on it much.

GP: No, no, no. Absolutely not. We've touched on it a little bit, but I just want to make sure that I've gotten a whole piece of what school deseg and integration meant to you and your family on a personal level, and I'm hearing that your father was a minister and was adamant about making sure that you were all walking the faith that he preached in church. Is there anything more about what integration did for your family that I should know about?

EP: Well I think it made us a lot more tolerant. It made me understand how it felt to be a minority. It made me understand more when I went into education myself and became a teacher. I think I can emphasize more and understand more when someone—. When I first started teaching, I was in Randolph County and I was in a rural school that had very few black students. I remember always trying to make sure that they felt a part of everything, that they didn't feel left out or that they stood out or anything. I think it helped me understand more about diversity and the fact that you don't not see color, you know what I mean, and everybody isn't the same. You know how a lot of teachers say, "I treat everybody the same. I don't see color." Well I think that's wrong. I think we need to see it and acknowledge it and celebrate it and let people share their cultures, so that we have more of an understanding. So I think that helped me.

It wasn't easy. I'm not going to say it was easy. Shephard was not easy. I got through at Hillside was easy. Shephard wasn't. Hillside was easy because I was a minority but I wasn't *the* minority. (laughter) At Shephard, I was the only white person in most of my classes. I think I had one class where there was one other, but I was it. So that was hard. Then like things happened to me at Shephard. One small thing in particular, a girl burnt my hair. I had real long hair. We were in an assembly. I smelled something terrible. It was "what's that smell?" We were getting ready to leave the assembly and I did this, and my hair was gone. She had burnt it off and that's what I had been smelling was my hair burning.

GP: Oh my God.

EP: So people were afraid to tell who did it. I knew it was Yolanda. (laughter)

GP: But you know ().

EP: And she was, I mean she was strong, very athletic, so people were afraid to name her, to tell. Finally this one girl did tell. So they sent her home for ten days and she kept sending messages back that when she got back she was going to get back. So then they sent me home for two days. (laughter)

GP: Hoping it would blow over.

EP: Then by the time I got back, it did blow over but we were never friends. Things like that, you know. There were other derogatory remarks, names, stuff like that, that I had to put up with. That didn't happen at Hillside. I'm glad it didn't happen anywhere else. I wish it hadn't happened to me there at Shephard, but it gave me an appreciation and an understanding that yes, this kind of thing does happen, and whoever it's happening to, no matter what, it shouldn't.

GP: You're right. You're absolutely right. Since Hillside is kind of considered an historically black school, do you think that there is anything that changed about Hillside once it was integrated?

EP: Well I don't know. It's a tough question. I think the black community did not really want it to be integrated.

GP: You think so? Why do you say that?

EP: Maybe not back then. Maybe back then it was exciting, it was new. We were all going to live each other and love each other, you know, that was kind of the thought. It worked for awhile. But then I think that when Hillside kind of moved back to being a totally black high school, that that was like a choice thing almost, that they liked it and wanted it that way. Then when Hillside moved out to where it's located now, I think they wanted to maintain that, and not that I'm saying that they minded, but I think it's just that they wanted to maintain that it's a historically black school. And that's why they wanted to

keep the name and not change it. I don't think it bothers the community that it is predominately a black school, and I don't think that bothers the white community either.

GP: Well why do you think that is, because in most cases in North Carolina, in school desegregation, the black schools were changed, or given another name and turned into junior highs or an elementary school, or just completely obliterated. But this community seems to be different; it seems to be exactly as you said, that the black community wanted to maintain and the white community didn't seem to mind, and that seems to be unique.

EP: Well like I say, I think it's because of the community itself and who the players are and the key people, because it is a very wealthy and politically active and educationally-motivated community. It's not like, "okay, whatever." It's not going to be that way. They're going to stand up and say no, this is what we want.

GP: So you think the white community feels good about that?

EP: I think the white community is fine with that, but I don't really know people with a lot of—I have a high school-age kid, but we don't live in this area. So I don't know people that have kids that go to Hillside, but I don't think they want to send their kids there with the white people. I think it's because they think they're not going to get as good of an education as if they go to Jordan or Northern or Riverside. But I think the same thing about Southern; I hear the same thing and that's not a black school. I hear the same thing. So I don't know if it's just the school itself. I mean I don't know why.

GP: I don't either and I don't know that we'll find the answer. What do you think schools can do better now to educate students, both black and white?

EP: Well, [pause] here I am working in the school of education and [laughter]. I think a lot of the way schools are run boils down to the administrator and the administrator

sets the tone of the school, in my opinion. This is all my opinion. I think the administrator sets the tone. And if you've got an administrator that's really involved and really takes care of the teachers of the supports the teachers and is interested in the students and interested in programs at the school, I think it's going to make a big difference, because I've known schools, I've worked in schools where the administrator is like incompetent. That's just the best word for it. It plays on the morale of the school and just every aspect of the school is affected if the administrator is not doing a good job. So I think really working with administrators to make sure that they're good administrators, that they're up on the current research and programs and what-not, that's part of it.

Of course, you really do have to have teachers who are interested in kids, who are willing to build relationships with them and are willing to not just get up and lecture but have engaging lessons. I mean really, that's what it's going to take, because so many, especially at the high school level, teachers just get in there and want to lecture. Kids aren't interested. That's why we're losing them. We've got to do something about that to get kids more engaged and offer more programs, and alternative programs, because certain high schools aren't for everyone. For example, some high schools are more geared toward college. Not everybody's going to go to college. Not everybody should go to college. So we need some technical high schools, and I think Durham is headed that way, that they're trying to do some high school reform. I don't see any use at all for twelfth grade. I never have and I don't now. I think you can get what you need and then get out and work. I think, well, that's getting off on another subject. Anyway, it's not the students. Students really do want to learn. I mean it's in our nature to want to learn, but we've got to find what we're interested in. That's what we want to learn.

GP: So just going back to the whole idea of school integration and school desegregation, tell me what you think was gained from school integration and what you think might have been lost.

EP: I think what was gained is an understanding of different cultures. What was lost for some people was identity, group identity I guess is what I'm--. That's not me as far as at Hillside. I felt that way at Shephard. Let's see what else. I think what could've happened is that you could've become more tolerant, but I don't know that that did happen in Durham. I mean Durham is not a microcosm of society. It's just not. It's a separate entity in itself. It's just different and you really can't compare, like Durham with Raleigh. This would have never happened in Raleigh; it just wouldn't. The stuff that goes on in Durham doesn't happen anywhere else. People come from all over the country, all over the world, and I've never seen anything like it. What is going on, it's like way back, you know, way back.

GP: Right, and that's what I'm trying to get to. What is it with Durham?

EP: I don't know. I can't answer that question, but I do think that it came from the influence of the black people that were here at that time. It's not a bad influence. It wasn't a bad influence. I'm not saying that, but I think that that got people fired up about certain things. But you know, it's weird because wherever I go, you can walk into any faculty meeting, you can walk into any cafeteria today, and they're segregated. They segregate themselves. I saw it on the playground when I was a teacher, in the cafeteria, like I say in faculty meetings. It's not just kids that do it. We all do it. We go into places and we tend to find our groups. It's just bizarre.

GP: Picking up on that, what do you think is important for other people to know about the struggle to desegregate schools?

EP: Well that change is slow, I think that we definitely needed to do it, and that we did learn a lot from it. It's just unfortunate that what happened is they kind of went back, instead of going forward went back. I don't know why that happened or how that happened, but it did happen. I don't know how you're going to change it. I don't know if changing the name of the school would've made a difference; it might have. We can't change what is; this is the way it is. I don't know that you are going to desegregate it again or integrate it again, whatever. I really don't know, because they've tried putting IB programs there, and it's just not happening.

GP: Well that was my next question, is how do you think it could have been done better?

EP: I think the only thing they could've done was change the name, and they weren't willing to, and they wanted to maintain. That's why I said, I think the black community wanted it to be that way and that's fine. That's the thing that Durham has to understand is that it's fine. I don't think anybody has a problem with it. It's just that—just stop trying to integrate it and let it be, because I don't think the black community minds that there are not many white people there. I don't think they really care, at least that's not what I hear, that they care. I don't mean that (). I mean that that's fine. Everybody's fine with it.

GP: Well I think we're done. Let me make sure (). Is there anything else I need to know to understand school desegregation and what it was like to go to Hillside when you were there, from your experience, from your perspective?

EP: Well like I say, that was at a time when I really feel like Hillside was kind of in its heyday, that was my perception and I didn't mind it. I would probably mind it now.

GP: Why is that?

EP: Because I think it's a lot scarier now. We didn't worry about gangs and all that stuff back then, we didn't. Now I just mean for me, I don't know how I would be as a kid, I really don't know. I'm just saying that right now, I would be like I wouldn't want to do that in this day and time. It's just a lot scarier. There were things back then that were scary, but it just wasn't out there like it is now. The world has changed. It's just a lot scarier. But I don't know that I'd want to go to any high school right now really. I think it's just scary for that age now; it's a really scary time. High school is not what it used to be. It used to be a fun time. It was like "these are the best years of your life" kind of thing. Now uh huh, they are not.

Like I say, I just had one go through and another one in the thick of it right now. They're not happy times. It's very emotional for them. It's like a rollercoaster, extreme highs and extreme lows. I don't mean just my kids. I find that in all of them that I talk with. It's just not the same as it used to be. That's why I'm saying I don't know that I'd like to go to any high school right now. Kids aren't as interested in the things that we were back then, which I mean that's changing times. I remember when I was at Shephard and Hillside both, to hear somebody smoking pot was like "ooh," or if somebody got pregnant, oh my God, it was like [gasps]. And now, I mean they're having sex in the school. [laughter]. And they're probably smoking in the school and taking all sorts of stuff that we just didn't have that. Somebody drank. I mean we knew the people that were doing these things because they stood out, and now they don't.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

EP: I remember the next day, () it and thinking, you know, yeah I was afraid, but I was a kid. I didn't really understand what all was going on. I remember being afraid of

Malcolm X because there was a building in Durham that had his picture on the side of it and that scared me.

GP: And there was a Malcolm X University or something in Durham.

EP: Yeah, that scared me. There was a big Black Panther thing here one time and I remember being pretty frightened about that. I mean I don't even remember—

GP: Do you remember why you were afraid, just afraid for your physical safety?

EP: I don't really think I was afraid for my physical safety. I just remember being "oooh" (laughter) You know. I don't know. I don't know, but it was just different.

GP: How long did this go on, this curfew and these riots?

EP: The curfews didn't go on that long, probably a couple of weeks, a month at the most for the actual curfews and the rioting. But like I remember when Martin Luther King was shot. I remember his speech; I remember seeing it on TV. I remember all that.

GP: What was the community's reaction to that? Do you remember anything happening?

EP: Not in my particular community. I remember it being sad. Everybody was like, they liked him. I mean I remember thinking he was a great leader and he was doing good things, but I don't remember the adult reaction. I just reaction as a kid going, "oh my gosh. I can't believe--." The stuff that you saw on TV, I remember thinking as a kid, I can't believe that. But I don't know.

GP: Durham is a very unique community.

EP: It is.

GP: And I'm learning much much more about it. I'm going to stop here.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Emily Baran. November, 2005.