

TRANSCRIPT—WALTER DURHAM

Interviewee: WALTER DURHAM
Interviewer: Bob Gilgor
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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

BOB GILGOR: This is January the 19th in the year 2001. This is Bob Gilgor interviewing Walter Durham at Northside.

Good morning, Walter.

WALTER DURHAM: Good morning.

BG: How are you today?

WD: I'm doing just fine.

BG: Good. I appreciate you coming here and letting me interview you. The first question I want to ask is where you grew up and what it was like growing up.

WD: Well, Bob, I grew up about five miles outside of Carrboro, off of Highway 54 West.. My grandfather accumulated about ninety acres of land out there years ago. Most of the family grew up on that land. I was born , raised , and still reside there to this present day.

BG: Did you do farming out there?

WD: We did a lot of farming in the early years. But right now people mostly grow small gardens or whatever, but no farming. Farming is just in the past for them now.

BG: But growing up you did farming?

WD: Yes we did a lot of farming.

BG: Your mother and father lived there with you, your grandparents?

WD: Pretty much. My mother, grandmother, and grandfather lived there. My father died when I was at an early age, when I was about one. So I never had the experience of knowing him. BG: What kind of woman was your mother?

WD: I guess growing up at the time when I grew up, raising eight children, I would say that she was a strong lady. Because today, with me being a father myself and having a wife, it's hard to raise two children. So with eight children, she had to have a lot of strength, a lot of inner strength that a lot of people don't know anything about because you never see it, you just experience it. That didn't sound right. You never know the feeling of them because they worked hard. They went to work everyday, and the little money they had, they made it work.

BG: Did your mother work at home, on the farm, or did she work outside?

WD: She did domestic work. Worked in other people's homes, whatever was needed.

BG: Did she ever talk to you about the work that she was doing?

WD: No. Not that much.

BG: Did you have family around? Were your grandparents nearby, or aunts, uncles nearby?

WD: Well on that ninety acres of land, where my grandfather and grandmother, they had eleven children. And I'd say about seven of them raised families on that land. So it was pretty much uncles and aunts, a lot of cousins. My grandmother passed this past year. She was 101. I don't have the exact numbers here with me, but if I'm not mistaken it was something like fifty-something grandchildren, about eighty great-grandchildren, and a host of great-great-grandchildren, and on down the line. So it was a pretty big family. And at certain times, just about all of us got together at family reunions. We all pretty much grew up together.

BG: So on that ninety acres, you had your grandparents, your grandmother, your grandfather, you had your mother, you had seven brothers and sisters--.

WD: Not me. She did.

BG: Right. Then you had aunts and uncles.

WD: Excuse me. You asked me the question did I seven brothers and sisters. Ok, yes, you're right. But yes, I had uncles and aunts. Just a host of cousins.

BG: Did you look at them as a support system for you?

WD: Yes. Because everything was pretty close at that time. A close-knit family. We depended on each other. What we didn't have, they had, or what they didn't have, we had. So we pretty much shared everything: food, clothes, everything else.

BG: Did you feel as though you had enough food to go around or did you feel like some days there wasn't enough food in the house to make it?

WD: That was one thing that we did have: we had plenty of food. There seemed to never be a shortage of food.

BG: Do you look back at your childhood as happy days, or days of sadness, or problems?

WD: Very happy days. Because you didn't know anything about problems. When you're that close and you're surrounded by all the people that you know, you don't know too much about the outside world's problems. But until you started growing up then you started realizing there's problems. So it was mostly problem-free.

BG: What was your house like?

WD: I was raised in an old home place. No running water, no bathrooms, no lights. Everyone that lived out there, pretty much didn't have running water. So it was pretty much the way of life. It was all right.

BG: Did you have interactions—as you were growing up on those ninety acres—did you have interactions with white children?

WD: Pretty much. The community, people's land that was next to ours, we pretty much grew up with them, became friends to them. We played a little bit. Still know each other today. When we see each other we talk. Didn't have too many problems.

BG: Who was the head of your family? Was it your grandmother, or an uncle or an aunt? Your grandfather?

WD: My grandmother. She was a strong black lady. She called the shots pretty much.

BG: What do you think made her the head of the family? Any characteristics that she had that allowed her to be the head of the family?

WD: Well, my grandfather, very good man but very quiet. He didn't really take a stand. And I guess it was the stand that she took. She'd come from a large family and I think that she was the oldest. She

was used to just being in charge. When she raised a family of her own, she just stayed that way, so it didn't change.

BG: When did you start school?

WD: I started school in '54, '55.

BG: Were you six years old then?

WD: Six years old.

BG: And where did you go to school?

WD: Right here. Northside elementary.

BG: What are your memories of Northside?

WD: Well, I remember the people that I grew up with: the teachers and the principal. And everybody just seemed to be like a community, people you can confide in, people that you can talk to. It seemed like it wasn't a separate group all the same. No one had that much more than anybody else so no one looked down on anybody. It was pretty much more a family than a school, something that you looked forward to coming to every day. You wake up in the morning and you're ready to get to school.

BG: How did you get to school? You lived a long ways out.

WD: When I first started school, we lived on Merritt Mill Road. We stayed in Chapel Hill for four or five years of my life. I used to walk to school when I first started. But the bus always ran from there. So when we moved back there when I was in the sixth grade, we caught the bus, the bus would come by the house.

BG: Did you know the teachers outside of going to school? Were they out in the community, or church?

WD: Well, no I didn't know them too much from outside of school.

BG: Did they visit your house?

WD: No.

BG: What kind of discipline did you get at school if you misbehaved?

WD: Well, you'd get a spanking—you'd get whupped. An attention-getter, if that's what you want to call it. You didn't go unpunished for what you done. And you learned to appreciate that, you learn to know that this is wrong. So I agree with what they did.

BG: Now if you misbehaved in school, you got a switch, or you got some kind of punishment. You got hit in school. Now, when you went home, did your mother know that this had happened to you?

WD: They would soon know it quickly, because the teacher would inform them that they had to do this. So when you got home it was pretty much repeated.

BG: You got it twice?

WD: You got it twice. Each teacher had their own ways of how they would spank you. I had one that would take a ruler and pop you in the hands. I had one that would make you roll your britches legs up. She would take a little switch and make you turn around in circles. It wasn't any abuse. More or less to let you know what you've done wasn't going to be tolerable.

BG: When you say it wasn't physical abuse. Did it go on for very long?

WD: No.

BG: So you're talking about a few seconds of getting a switch or a ruler?

WD: Yes. Nothing you'd have to carry to the hospital or anything like that, and nothing even that was that a bit of a concern. It might sting a little while.

BG: Did kids cry when they were disciplined like that?

WD: Mostly girls [laughs].

BG: Boys didn't cry?

WD: No. Girls started crying before it even started happening. It wasn't that the pain was so great. I guess it's just their nature to even think about it.

BG: So you looked forward to going to school every morning?

WD: Looked forward to going to school. As a matter of fact we used to get to school early because back then we played a lot of marbles. You'd get to school forty-five minutes to an hour before school started. And you're playing marbles way before school let in. And then at the end of school that day, recess or whatever, you're playing marbles again. At the end of school you'd play marbles for an hour before you'd go home.

BG: So that was the big game here at Northside, marbles?

WD: Marbles, yes.

BG: How'd you do at marbles?

WD: I was pretty good. I thought I was. I don't even know how the game hardly goes now. But I was pretty decent.

BG: What were some of the other activities that went on at the school besides the things in the schoolyard like marbles? Did you have singing? Did you have a band? Did you have acting on stage? Drama, things like that?

WD: Yeah, we had a variety of everything. I remember when one class was a little show at doing some thing, they would pull another class in to show the other class how to do it. There was always some sort of activity to keep your attention. Just about every holiday we had some kind of activities and we had to sing something for the parents to come to school to look at.

BG: Like a chorus, a choir?

WD: I don't remember having a chorus or a choir. I think it was just different class activities. Something just for that event, not something that you was in for the whole year.

BG: Did you have books in school, or did you have to buy your own books?

WD: We had books at school.

BG: Did you have an encyclopedia at home?

WD: No.

BG: Did you have a dictionary at home?

WD: I don't think so, no.

BG: Were there books at home? Did you have a supply of old books or new books at home?

WD: Pretty much just the books that we saved from school.

BG: You looked at your teachers as part of a family. Can you describe that feeling a little bit more? What is it that the teachers did that made them family to you?

WD: I remember a case. I stayed with my grandmother in the country. We were staying in town at that particular time. My sister was supposed to bring my lunch money to school next day and she didn't come. So I was left without any lunch that day. And the first thing that the teacher noticed was that I didn't have any lunch, and she took care of it.

You know, anybody, not just me. It was just a concern to me because they were the last one to leave. They stayed more involved in your life. If they would spank you, they wouldn't leave it there. They would notify your parents that you had done such and such a thing.

Today I see that a child may get in trouble fifteen times before you would know it at home. Once you know it at home, they got a whole list of things that go back, six months ago or last year at the school—his trail right here. "Well why didn't I know it back here so I could do something about it?"

You know, someone that you could talk to. And I just saw it as being someone that cared for you. And I didn't realize that. I didn't realize that until I went out to Chapel Hill High School.

BG: You feel that at Chapel Hill High School, that wasn't the way it was?

WD: That wasn't the way it was. Very separate.

BG: Let's talk about that in a little bit. Let's just go on and talk some more about your community and Lincoln High School and then we'll go on to Chapel Hill High if you don't mind. I wanted to ask you if you, growing up, saw in the African-American community much alcohol abuse or you saw physical abuse? What you're describing to me are very happy times, close-knit family, but every society has some bad things about it, too. And I'm wondering how much of this you saw in growing up.

WD: Well I saw a lot of alcohol abuse. I saw physical abuse. In growing up, I saw people get shot, people get cut. And I saw a lot of both sides. Not that much within my family. But I did see wife or spousal abuse. I saw a lot of good and bad.

BG: Was there anything in particular that stood out to you, on the good side or on the bad side?

WD: Nothing that I can really talk about at this present moment. Maybe later on in your questions I might be able to.

BG: So you graduated from Northside in sixth grade?

WD: Yes.

BG: And then, where did you go from there, Walter?

WD: Frank Porter Graham.

BG: So that was what year? Nineteen--?

WD: I want to say I left then '59. I think we left Northside in '58. Went one year to Frank Porter Graham.

BG: And was Frank Porter Graham a black school, or was it integrated?

WD: Black.

BG: And how long did you stay there?

WD: One year.

BG: And then where?

WD: To Lincoln High School.

BG: Can you tell me about Lincoln? What was Lincoln High School like?

WD: Well it was pretty much a very disciplined school. Very strictly run. It was just about none tolerance school. Had a principal at the time that I didn't like. But I didn't understand what he was trying to do, either. But I learned to like him after we left Lincoln. Then I understood what he was trying to do. It was a school that you could go in, no paper on the school campus, hallway shined like new money all the time. You could drink out of the commode in the bathrooms, it was kept just that clean.

If you got in trouble there, the biggest person probably who would spank you when you were in high school was the gym coach. They had their ways at Lincoln High School, we called it the coal mine. If you would get caught doing something you had no business doing you could get sent to the coal mine. The coal mine was under the school. The janitor would shovel coals into the furnace to keep it warm, whatever. And if you got in trouble, you were sent to help him, or you'd be sent to keep the school clean. Whatever you had done, people knew that you were under punishment.

BG: They could see you?

WD: They couldn't see you in the coal mine. But your classmates knew where you were.

BG: Could they tell by the coal dust getting on you that you had been down there?

WD: [laughs] No, it wasn't that bad in getting coal dust on you. But you'd probably stay down there for a whole class period.

BG: So you'd shovel coal for an hour?

WD: Yes.

BG: Besides being a very disciplined school, what are your other memories of Lincoln and the teachers there?

WD: Most of them took time out to teach. You know, didn't take a whole class and just move ahead and if one or two was left back there they were left on their own to get it. It seemed like they took the time and pulled everybody ahead at one time. And I liked that. It was more to me back then when you got bad grades, the teacher would work with you one on one with it.

BG: So they really took time and cared for you?

WD: Yes.

BG: Did you feel like they were your advocate, or your friend helping you?

WD: Well I took it as being your parents, number one, and your teacher, number two.

BG: So they were more like an absentee parent to you?

WD: Yes. And somebody that really cared for you.

BG: Were most of the teachers that way, or just a few?

WD: Well I had my share of problems. The majority of problems that I had I created myself.

BG: What kind of problems?

WD: Like I said I grew up without a father. And I would challenge just about anything. I would push things to the limit. So it wasn't a major problem—it wasn't a problem that you would go to jail for or something like that—but I had a hard time with authority and I had a hard time with people telling me what to do. I thought I was my own man. And being in a household with eight, and I was the third child—my brother, he was the oldest, but he always stayed with my grandmother. So I was mostly—then the next one was my sister. So I was caught doing a lot of things. I had to draw the water and cut the wood, and all the things that a man would have done if he was in the household. So I considered myself as being growner than what I was.

BG: You had a lot of responsibility in the house? Different things that needed to be done there?

So Mr. McDougle was the principal, I take it, when you were in school at Lincoln?

WD: Yes.

BG: And he was a strict disciplinarian.

WD: Yes. He was very strict. He would come on every morning on the intercom getting to school, about five minute talk before class let in. And when that bell rings for the school to turn in, then you'd see

him going to the front door to see who going to come in after that bell ring. And you just may get sent back home. It all depends on what time you come and what kind of excuse you have for being late.

BG: So he was at the front door most mornings, greeting the children?

WD: Yes.

BG: Did he know your name?

WD: Yes.

BG: Besides being a disciplinarian, did he ever ask you about your grades, or encourage you in any way?

WD: I can't remember that. Can't remember that part.

BG: Any particular teachers stand out in your mind, Walter?

WD: There's a lot of teachers I can see in my head, but I can't call their names. I should have wrote these names down when I was thinking them. But most of them was pretty good teachers.

BG: What are the kinds of things that you did that got you in trouble, Walter?

WD: Well, like I said, wasn't any of them worthy of going to jail for. But most of them just being class clown, something like that, just pulling little tricks, gags, just to make somebody laugh, just to be seen, whatever.

BG: Were you into any outside activities at school like sports or band or singing or acting?

WD: Well, I played football. I grew up in a baseball family. And I played some semi-pro baseball once I got older. I come from a baseball family. The majority of my cousins and stuff played baseball. And that was one thing that I was very looking forward for in going down to Lincoln High School because I thought we had a good baseball team. But once I got old enough to play baseball, they cut the baseball team out at school. So I did play football, but I got hurt and got put in the hospital and the doctor asked me not to play any more.

BG: What did you do?

WD: Well I got my leg burnt when I was a little bitty boy, three years old. Playing around the wash pot. Britches leg caught on fire. And then the guy came by and spiked me on that same leg. Cleats on the football shoe didn't have that little rubber thing. It was about three weeks later before I went to the doctor. It had gotten infected. I hadn't planned on going then, but one of the football players saw it when

we was showering. They noticed I was hopping real bad. Then he went and told the coach, and the coach took me to the hospital at that same instance and they kept me for about a month.

BG: Oh, my. Must have been bad.

WD: Yes. They had to cut it out, graft skin from my back to put over that spot, then that graft had to take and all of that stuff.

BG: How long did you play football?

WD: That was my first year out [laughs]. I was pretty good at it. But it saw the end of me. I probably could have still played, but I took it from the doctor.

BG: What kind of football team did they have at Lincoln?

WD: Probably the best in the State. The year that I was there, probably wasn't the best team, but they lost one game that year. They have had teams that they didn't lose a game. Out of ten games, nine of them the team didn't score on them. They beat Mount Holly 106 to 0. They was running up scores then, about beat Pittsboro something like 88 to 0. They beat Hennison, I think that was the lowest score that we played, and that was 36 to 0. On record we probably had the best team in the State.

BG: How big was your class? How many students in the class?

WD: I want to say, if I'm not making a mistake, the whole school wasn't about 300-some students. If you want to just say the eighth grade, probably about fifty. And you had about three classes at that time for each grade.

BG: So you had about fifteen to twenty students in each class?

WD: Pretty much.

BG: That's a real small school. Did you play small schools, or did you play larger schools?

WD: We should have been something like a 1A, and we played 3A. It wasn't because of the size of the school, it was because of the athletes that Lincoln was producing.

BG: What made Lincoln so good at football?

WD: I couldn't tell you. Well, we had a very disciplinary coach, you would have to start it from there. But you had great athletes, good athletes. Back then they ran a three-man backfield. And any one of those three guys they could have handed the ball to and could've run a 90-yard touchdown. And I'm talking about on the first string. And then you had a second string that could do just as well as the first string. In

due time they got their glory, but you can just go back from year after year after year and you would look at this and say, "Man, where did these guys come from?" I guess there was more heart. But it would be hard to account for why they were so good. But they was. They were just really good.

BG: Did you have any help with your coaching from the university players? Did they ever come by and help the team practice?

WD: No. There were guys who would graduate from high school. A lot of them went on to college. Some of them would come back and help during the summer or something like that. But the head coach was the man that was pretty much working by himself.

BG: Did you get any of your equipment from the university?

WD: That I couldn't tell you because we always had pretty good uniforms. I think we did. I'm not for sure.

BG: Did you play any scrimmages at the university?

WD: No. Chapel Hill High School wouldn't play us. We always tried to line it up to scrimmage or play them or something but they wouldn't play us.

BG: Why do you think that was?

WD: That I couldn't tell you. I don't think that they were sort of afraid, but if you would had to go on the record saying that we () over and over and over, I'm thinking that they was a little afraid to play. Or either they just didn't want to break any ice or whatever.

BG: So you were at Lincoln High for two years?

WD: Three years.

BG: What grades were you there?

WD: Eighth, ninth, and tenth.

BG: And then in eleventh grade, it was what, 1966?

WD: '67. Well, hold it, hold it, hold it. Went there in '66. '67 was the first class of that year. Started in '66.

BG: Started in '66. And what were the differences that you saw between Lincoln High School and the new Chapel Hill High School that was integrated?

WD: Going into an entirely new school system, from one extreme to the other one. It was just something entirely new, entirely different. Never experienced before, never knew it even existed. Different people, different attitudes. People that don't want to be with you and don't want you there. The welcome mat just wasn't rolled out at all. Everything that's come from Chapel Hill High School, that's what they adopt in the new Chapel Hill High School. Nothing from Lincoln High School that they accepted. Even down to our sports record. Everything that came down from Lincoln, you either were assistant or they didn't hire you.

BG: When you say you were either an assistant or you didn't get hired, do you mean sports?

WD: Sports, principal, everything.

BG: What about the teachers? Were any of the black teachers hired from Lincoln to Chapel Hill High?

WD: Very few. Very few. I guess some of the old teachers was hired.

BG: So you had the feeling that the welcome mat wasn't out?

WD: Oh, no. It definitely wasn't out. Even though several of the people I know in my class, even down to Nate Davis, they started going to Chapel Hill High School when it was at the old Chapel Hill High School. So I think people really started going to that school two years earlier that the doors opened. So I think it was more of an experimental thing that they were doing there.

BG: Were there fights between blacks and whites at the new high school?

WD: Constantly. Continuously, over and over.

BG: What were the things that you would fight over?

WD: What would trigger little fights? I guess when hot and cold come together it don't take too much of a thunder to start it. It don't have to be too much to start a fight. Anything would trigger a fight. You'd bump into each other in the hallway. Then you had six or seven white guys walking around and six or seven blacks walking around. Things are pretty much planned before they were even carried out. You would look for trouble before trouble even find out. It didn't take much for a fight to break out. The tension was just there.

And I don't think the school system did enough to calm the tension down. I think once they opened the school they could have done a little better in race relationship before they opened the doors.

BG: How do you mean that, Walter?

WD: Well, like I was saying, they dropped everything that come from Chapel Hill High School. The school colors, everything like that.

BG: So the school colors were Chapel Hill High School colors? And the mascot? But I thought that when they started the school, that the mascot was the Lincoln High mascot?

WD: No. They was the Wildcats. About two to three years later they changed.

BG: And what about the school colors?

WD: Chapel Hill High School.

BG: And they changed that when changed the mascot?

WD: Yes.

BG: What about other things that were at Lincoln that meant a lot to you?

WD: They didn't take trophies or nothing out to Chapel Hill High School. As a matter of fact a lot of trophies that was down to Lincoln High School still on display was throwed away. People got information about four, five years ago. Somebody saw them in the trash can and got a lot of them together and started giving them away to people--championship trophies just throwed away. So no trophy case out to Chapel Hill High School baring any trophies or memories from Lincoln High School.

BG: They obviously meant a lot to the black community, to the black students, who worked to hard to get them.

WD: Yes. And that's when I started seeing the change in Mr. McDougle.

BG: What kind of change did you see in Mr. McDougle?

WD: He became a very distant person. He was more or less hurt because of not to really do a job. I think he was hired as a token, and he knew that. So I think they broke his spirit. So I began to feel his pain, and me and him began to communicate. Like I said I didn't like him at Lincoln High School. But I didn't know what he was trying to do. He was trying to mold us instead of being what we thought was a mean man. But I could see it when we went to Chapel Hill High School. So he went from an enemy to being a friend.

BG: You had mentioned that he greeted you at the doors when school opened. You had mentioned that he would get on the loudspeaker when school was opening and give messages in the morning. Others

told me that he would roam the hallways when classes changed to make sure there was discipline. Did he do any of that at the new high school.

WD: No. You would see him here and there. But he didn't have the same type of glow that he had at Lincoln High School. I don't think he had the authority at Chapel Hill High School that he had at Lincoln High School.

BG: Did you have an easy time getting to talk to him at Chapel Hill High School? Did you go to his office and talk to him?

WD: Yes.

BG: Why would you go there and talk to him?

WD: I could confide in him. I could talk to him. Because, like I said, when we first went out to Chapel Hill High School, everybody else seemed so distanced from you and you had a hard time communicating to anybody. I couldn't communicate to the teachers out there. With the person that I was, a lot of anger grew up within me also.

I remember one time, my mother gave me and my brother three dollars apiece. We went down to the five and dime, I don't know if you remember when the five and dime was down on Main Street or not. And she gave us three dollars to go down there and buy some sneakers. And it was the first time that I ever had a piece of money in my hand to go anywhere. So I had the money very tight in my hand. So when I get to the five and dime and I get into the shoe section, I took and put my money in my pocket. And as I was putting my money in my pocket, a policeman reach and grab me and throws me against the wall and searched me. And I don't know that he thought that I was going to steal something, I don't know why he'd done it. But he reached and grabbed me and threw me against the wall. I was about--I think I was about the third and fourth grade. And it scared me so bad, I didn't get no shoes or nothing. I ran all the way home. We were standing down on Merritt Mill Road and I ran all the way home. If I go into a store today, whatever's in my hand, it stays there. I don't go to my pockets. If my son's in the store with me, don't even play like you're going to your pockets.

Little things like that. I remember when we started having marches and things in Chapel Hill. I was still about in the sixth grade. I had on a freedom button. () I would just go in there a lot when I'm

heading home, and buy a little candy or whatever. And I had the freedom button on me. And he snatched it off and cursed me out. I ran home again. You know. Little things growing up like that.

Going into the dairy bar. I sit down one day. I was about--[tape ends].

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

BG: So you were saying that your brother snatched you up when you sat down at the dairy bar?

WD: Yes. And the same thing happened across the street from the drug store.

BG: Colonial Drugs?

WD: Yes. I sit down in there one day. We were coming from First Baptist, from church, Sunday school. And I didn't know nothing about the sitting down rules or why we couldn't sit down. So I just sit down--everybody else what sitting down--so while my brother was ordering the ice cream and stuff I sit down. Big John, he was about to say something to me, but before he did my brother snatched me up again. So I pretty much grew up with a lot of anger.

BG: Towards segregation and white people?

WD: Yes, pretty much. Pretty much. Because I saw a lot of things that would happen. Me and my brother were raking the yard one day. And we raked the yard all day long, all day long. I was about in the eighth grade. And the lady promised us a certain amount of money. And then when we finished working, I was using an old rake, the rake belonged to the woman, and the rake broke. So at the end of the day, she wouldn't pay me my money because of the rake. She said I broke the rake. So I had to pay for the rake. You know. Some things back then that you couldn't take it home to your parents. Your parents wasn't going to go to your rescue because they was scared themselves. And I just grew up with all that that stuff balled up inside of me.

So when I get to Chapel Hill High School all this stuff started coming back again. And you could see it. You could see the favoritism. People getting dissed because of who they are or what they're about. It's not because that you met that requirement but because of who you were. And they didn't try to hide it. The teachers didn't try to hide it.

BG: So you saw favoritism toward the white students. Is that fair to say?

WD: Oh yes. And they didn't try to hide it. You get up there and you got your hand raised up to answer a question and don't nobody call on you. That's not a coincidence. That's not a coincidence. You get to the point where you don't want to ask a question. You don't want to go to the teacher for anything. Next thing you know you're falling behind in your grades because the communication is not there. I got kicked out of school the first year I went to Chapel Hill High School. I got kicked out in December. I couldn't go back no more the rest of that year. Strictly because I challenged the system and my spirit was broken so bad. I got to the point that I got moved. They classified you when you got there. I was in Class 2 English, you know. My grade was so good that I got moved to English 1, the smart class. The teacher there, we started having problems from the first day, from the first day. And everybody seemed to be having problems with her. But the way that I was--the feeling that I had inside of me came out in more anger. Other people could take it, but I wouldn't. I became branded as a troublemaker in the school system. Then after I had so many problems with so many teachers, then my grades just went down real bad. And I didn't care. I didn't care if I stayed in school or got kicked out of school, or whatever.

BG: And that was your first year at Chapel Hill High? Now what kind of a student were you when you were at Lincoln?

WD: Like I said, the little trouble I got in was such a little class clown--. My grades was pretty good. Especially in math, stuff like that.

BG: Did you like school when you went to Lincoln?

WD: I liked school.

BG: Same as when you went to Northside? You wanted to get there every day?

WD: Yes.

BG: And this changed when you went to Chapel Hill High School?

WD: And the hate started coming out of me. And it led to a lot of things later on in life. A lot of things when you're young, I reckon that you don't understand. And you don't know how to deal with them. The anger's just coming out of you. You let your anger be known and let it be seen. That was the only way that I thought that people would recognize you.

BG: Were there courses that you took where you had black teachers?

WD: Not me. I didn't have no black teachers at Chapel Hill High School.

BG: All your teachers were white?

WD: Yes.

BG: Were there any white teachers there who didn't see color? Who treated the black students the same as the white students?

WD: I'm not going to say that. Because at this point, I wasn't going to allow it anyhow. And I guess it was more me seeing white and there was so much anger bottled up into me. Even leaving Lincoln High School. We didn't have a choice in the matter. We was asked, and we had to sign a note saying did you want to go or did you want to stay. The majority wanted to stay but they didn't—I don't even know why they sent the question around.

BG: So you signed something saying that you wanted to stay at Lincoln? And you think the majority of students wanted to stay at Lincoln?

WD: I know it was.

BG: Did they tally up the ballots and let you know?

WD: Yes. They let you know that a majority—I don't know exactly what the ratio was.

BG: Who did this vote?

WD: It came from the school system. A lot of people I talked to don't remember that.

BG: When did they do that vote?

WD: I think it had to have been the end of the year '66. Because next thing we know, we got letters in the mail saying that you're going to Chapel Hill High School.

BG: When did you find out you were going to Chapel Hill High School?

WD: I think it was during that summer.

BG: So you didn't know until, what, a couple of months before school started?

WD: Yes.

BG: And you got the letter from the school system?

WD: Yes. And they rushed us so fast. When we got out there it was three or four months before the cafeteria was even ready. So the school wasn't even completely ready the year that they sent us there.

BG: Do you know whether the school was going to open as integrated or whether it was going to open as all-white originally?

WD: Well like I said there was a few people already going to Chapel Hill High School. So they had started integrating it then. But little did we know that they was going to close Lincoln and send everybody—I'm just going to assume that they did, when the first brick was laid. But we didn't know.

BG: Were there other things that occurred, when you went to Chapel Hill High the first year that you noticed were different from Lincoln High?

WD: Remember when I was telling you about you could drink out of the commode? Stuff like that. The whole system changed. We went from being scared to drop a piece of trash on the school ground until litter was everywhere. People would take a whole roll of toilet tissue and put it in the commode, and do their business on top of that. We could see that all over the whole school. It was trashy. And I couldn't point a finger to who was doing it, but I know we left one system for another system. We left a system that you better not litter to a system that you could see litter very visible.

BG: What about the dress code? Was there any difference in the way you could dress?

WD: Pretty much. When we was at Lincoln you couldn't walk around with your shirttail out. Stuff like that. You would have to be neat. Even though you didn't have no clothes. There wasn't no whole lot of clothes you had. But what you did have you had to wear it presentable.

BG: What about hats in school?

WD: No. But when we first got to Chapel Hill High School, you couldn't wear no hats either.

BG: What about hair styles? Was there any difference between Chapel Hill High School and Lincoln? Could the girls wear their hair any way they wanted?

WD: I didn't see any difference.

BG: And discipline? Was there a difference in the way you were disciplined at the two schools?

WD: Yes. Very much. Very much difference. When you was at Northside, you would physically get spanked. You didn't have that at Chapel Hill High School.

BG: So you could get away with things at Chapel Hill High that you couldn't get away with at Lincoln? Is that fair to say?

WD: Yes.

BG: Do you think any of the black students intimidated the white teachers?

WD: Pretty much. I don't know was they intimidating them. They was always good to [call the law?]. I said something to a teacher one day, we had a few words. And I was letting him know that that wasn't going to happen, that this right here would happen. The first thing out of his mouth, "Is this a threat?" I said, "Well you take it the way you want to take it. It's not a threat. I wasn't threatening you. I was telling you that this right here would happen." So I know what he wanted me—he wanted me to say that it was a threat so that he'd call security or the police. So the telephone number was so quick and the police was so geared to come by there at any time that, the littlest thing that you done you was always in the office for.

BG: Were there any fights between teachers and students?

WD: None as I know of.

BG: Was there smoking in the school yard or in the school?

WD: Yes. It wasn't permitted, but it was going on.

BG: So you weren't really allowed to smoke at Chapel Hill High even in the yard, but the kids did smoke?

WD: Oh yeah.

BG: What about alcohol? Was there alcohol in the school yard?

WD: Pretty much.

BG: Could you get away with this at Lincoln?

WD: I'm not saying that you couldn't. I'm saying that if you smoked a cigarette it was way off the school grounds. I never known anyone to smoke a cigarette on the school grounds at Lincoln High School. Which I'm not saying they didn't do it, but I didn't see any. At Chapel Hill High School, even though you're not supposed to do it, you could see it a little bit anywhere.

BG: Did you see any alcohol at Lincoln?

WD: I didn't see it but I remember the class of '65 that one guy really fell out. It was during graduation. They was practicing graduating and he was graduating class one and he fell out because of alcohol [laughs]. I didn't experience going to prom at Lincoln High School but I heard guys would pretty much have alcohol in the car. But just during school days, course of the day, no. But at Chapel Hill High School, yes.

BG: Did you go to Chapel Hill High almost with anger within you, or a chip on your shoulder, upset that you weren't still at Lincoln?

WD: I didn't go there with a chip on my shoulder. Didn't get long for it to get up there. Because I didn't know what it was going to be like. Once in got there, like I said, and started experiencing things I started experiencing, and all these little things that happened to me in the course of my life just started coming back to me. So it started, it just put a chip on my shoulder.

BG: I understand that you were thrown out of school in December? And when did you come back to school?

WD: The next year. I couldn't come back no more that year.

BG: So you came back in--?

WD: '68. Well, '67.

BG: So you were out, what, a month or six months?

WD: Um, five months.

BG: Five months. I need to go back over the dates again. The school started in--?

WD: '66.

BG: And I understand that there was a riot at the school, or an uprising, or a protest, whatever you want to call it in the second year that the school was open?

WD: Pretty much, yeah.

BG: Can you describe what happened during that protest? Why it occurred?

You know what? I have to leave. Unfortunately. But I'm very interested in hearing about this. I'm wondering if we can continue this interview another time.

WD: What about Monday?

BG: Monday? Let me look at my calendar [tape ends]

INTERVIEW CONTINUES

BG: This is January 26th in the year 2001 and this is Bob Gilgor interviewing Walter Durham again at Northside.

Good morning, Walter.

WD: Good morning.

BG: I want to focus this morning on a couple of areas. The first that I want to ask you is, all of your memories about Lincoln High School--anything you can remember about the traditions there, what stands out in your mind?

WD: What really stands out in my mind is—and I have to look at that first, and then I had to look at the other things second before I could realize what was going on there—one thing that really stands out in my mind is the discipline that Lincoln had. Most people that you knew there was people that you grew up with and that you communicate with all the time. And it wasn't a burden. When you go in your own house you know everybody there. And it wasn't so many people that you only know fifteen or twenty in the whole school. That you can call everybody in the school by name. And I thought that was neat. Even knew every teacher, versus just knowing the teachers that teach you. You knew all teachers, even though they teach you or not, you knew them all. Basically just the communication that I liked. The family-like atmosphere.

BG: Were the teachers there for a long time, or did the teaching staff turn over a lot?

WD: Well the three years that I was there probably about one or two came in. But pretty much—I don't know how long they was there before I got there—but I heard my brother talking about, just the same people was there for years. It may be one or two would change every year, but it was pretty much the same people.

BG: What time did school start, and what time did it end?

WD: If my memory serves me right, I think the school let in at 8:15, between 8:15 and 8:30, and I want to say it let out about 3:15 to 3:30.

BG: Was there any ritual about going into the school?

WD: Repeat that again.

BG: Was there any ritual? I mean did you line up in the yard and march in or did you just sort of walk in? Did anyone see you when you came in? Was there a safety patrol there to organize you? Do you remember anything special about that?

WD: It was pretty much—it was always a place that people would go before school was let in. Just layed around a little store that you drank sodas, whatever. People would meet there early, sometimes as early as seven o'clock. It was a very short distance to school. You wouldn't march in school. You would just pretty much be in school before the bell ring. No one would be on the outside. It was pretty much a disciplined school. You either got to school on time or else you wouldn't even come.

BG: What if you got there late? Was there anyone there to greet you?

WD: Pretty much. Mr. McDougle was usually there to direct you or wanted to know why you were late. Then you had to have a good excuse.

BG: Did he ever send late students home?

WD: I have heard a student saying that he sent them home. I heard one say that he made a comment that, "You're too late for today and too early for tomorrow."

BG: I heard that before from several people.

WD: I never actually really heard him, but I heard enough people say that he did say that.

BG: What was the name of the store—you said a soda shop, a soda store?

WD: Yes. We called in Miss Kelly's Store.

BG: Miss Kelly's Store? What did you do in there before school?

WD: It was just a little meeting place. She just had a large room there. It was just a place you could go and communicate. A little place she had that after school you could go and dance. But no alcohol or nothing like that involved. Just was a place of communication.

BG: What was it like walking in the hallways in between classes?

WD: We had what we called hall monitors, safety patrols. You would have a badge. You would have a little shoulder strap thing that came across your shoulder and around your waist. Once you got to a certain rank you got a badge. If you went down the hall, each side you would have to march on the right hand side. If I was going down the hall I would have to stay on the right side. So there was no jumping from side to side. And the patrol () is there to make sure that you walk the right direction.

BG: Was it real noisy between classes?

WD: No. There was a little communication. If you would have to say the way the noise is now when classes is changing. If you would have to say 100 percent volume now then you would have to say about 25 percent of the volume then.

BG: Did you have lockers in the school where you kept books or clothes?

WD: No lockers.

BG: What did you do with your clothes when you came to school?

WD: You either kept them with you or you had a certain place where you would stash them, but there was nowhere really just putting your stuff down anywhere.

BG: So in the wintertime when you came in with a coat, you just sort of carried it with you the whole day?

WD: Just carried it with you.

BG: What about assembly? Did you have assembly where the whole school met anytime?

WD: Quite often, quite often. And if my memory serves me right we had assembly about once a week.

BG: What sort of things took place at the assembly?

WD: Well, if you got into trouble during that week, you may be exposed to the whole school.

BG: At the assembly?

WD: At the assembly [laughs]. But most of the time it was just to go over some things that had happened during the course of the week. Most of the time it wasn't anything bad. Just a moment of time just to come together.

BG: Did you have prayer?

WD: No we didn't have prayer.

BG: Did you sing during assembly?

WD: I don't think we did.

BG: Were there performances, or was it just information?

WD: Information, mostly.

BG: How about during lunch and during recess? Were there games or things that people did that you could remember?

WD: We had a lot of intramural games. Whatever was in season. Classes versus classes. Softball, basketball. Played a lot of kickball, baseball, football during lunch hours. You went to cafeteria according to your class. It wasn't that everybody went to the cafeteria at one time. You went by your class. After then you could pretty much break up into what you wanted to do according to how much time you had left.

BG: Did you pay for your lunches?

WD: Yes.

BG: What happened if you didn't have money with you?

WD: You could always get your lunch and bring your money later. I never found that out as being a problem, that people would go without food.

BG: Could you work off that lunch? Could you do some work in the cafeteria to work off the cost of the lunch?

WD: I couldn't tell you. I don't know, really.

BG: Did you ever see teachers giving money to children to pay for their lunch?

WD: No.

BG: I understand that there was a cloakroom in the back of the class—I don't remember whether it was at Northside or whether it was at Lincoln—that the teachers would notice students who had holes in their shoes or poor clothing. There was a box, a cardboard box with shoes and clothing and sometimes they would take the students back and give them another pair of shoes or clothing. Do you remember anything like this at Northside or Lincoln?

WD: I don't remember that part. But I would have to say that if it was at one school most likely it was at this one.

BG: At Northside. Because you didn't have cloakrooms at Lincoln?

WD: No.

BG: Can you tell me about the prom? Did you ever go to a prom?

WD: I went to a prom at Lincoln but I was just a chaperone. In the lower grades you can go to Spring Ball but you're not allowed to go to the prom. We had Spring Ball for the lower classes.

BG: Tell me about that. What was the Spring Ball like?

WD: Well it probably wasn't as of a higher standing as the prom was, but you went with your suits on, you dance, communicate. I guess we had someone playing music. It was the form of a prom but it was just a different level.

BG: Who played the music?

WD: I'm thinking that it was—it wasn't a band.

BG: Records?

WD: Yes.

BG: And how long did it last?

WD: I want to say that the Spring Ball lasted until about eleven o'clock. The prom lasted twelve.

BG: So when you went to the prom you didn't go with a date? You were a chaperone?

WD: Yes. I was more or less a servant. Fortunate enough I had a lot of kinpeople that was a year ahead of me. They were the ones who picked who would be the servant.

BG: So was this part of the tenth-grade experience? The tenth graders did the serving?

WD: Yes.

BG: Can you remember whether parents came to the prom?

WD: There was a few. There wasn't many. There was a few. And it was just an experience that you would never forget because you'd never seen anything like that.

BG: Was it formal?

WD: Formal, yes.

BG: So the students who went wore tuxes?

WD: Wore a tux.

BG: Where did you hold it?

WD: Right here. It was in the cafeteria.

BG: The prom was in the cafeteria, not the gym?

WD: Excuse me. It was the gym. It was in the gym. And then again I still want to think it was the cafeteria.

BG: Did they decorate it?

WD: Yes.

BG: Did they have a big ball in the center with lights on it?

WD: I can't remember that part. I don't think they did. I think I might remember that if they did.

BG: You know, it may have been done differently at different years. It's possible they could have had it in the cafeteria one year.

WD: If my memory keeps serving me-- I know when we had Spring Ball it was in the gym. The cafeteria wasn't big enough.

BG: Did they have decorations?

WD: Yes.

BG: What kind of decorations did they have?

WD: I can't remember.

BG: Can you recall the sports events? The football games first, whether there were any traditions that took place before, during, after the games?

WD: One thing that I remember: we always fed the visiting team after the game.

BG: After the game?

WD: Yes. They were very well fed before we sent them down the road.

Another thing that I remember: when we came off the Trailway—we had a big Trailway bus with a big tiger on the bus—probably was one of a kind. Mister R. D. Smith, do you know him? He drove the bus. And it was a big Trailway, nice bus. And it would carry the football team wherever they went. And when they come off the bus—one tradition that I guess was followed down, I don't know who started it—but your shoes always had to be shining, and you had to have new shoestrings every week.

BG: Your football shoes?

WD: Yes. The captain of the football team always made sure that you were presentable, number one, that you was clean! Then they would run off the bus. They would take a full lap around the field. And then they would meet on the fifty-yard line. We would always sing a song, "Born on the Mountaintop, Tennessee." And it was a way that they would do it, sing it and then hit your pads, then you go down and touch your toes, then come back and hit your pads again, and come up and—everybody would be all in sync, song sounding good. And the other team's over there looking and started having fear in other teams before. It was always a show. Lincoln always took a show everywhere they went.

And—I don't know if you're familiar with Hillside band—they always be in the band, always be in the Christmas Parade, and always bring excitement to the Christmas Parade. But the band director at Hillside now was at Lincoln. So what he got going on at Hillside, that's the way Lincoln used to be. Lincoln would always have the tradition of having the best band around. I guess you have to take that back to the director because that's the way he trained them here. And the band director, always had to have to a little show with him, too, so it was always--.

BG: Now you got a baton in your hand () so did he lead the band out there? Was he high stepping?

WD: Yes. High stepping and doing some of everything. You might see him up in the bleachers, anywhere, dancing and--. He was just a show that people would just look at him. He would put on a half-time show, a before-the-game show. And so when you went to a Lincoln High School football game, you couldn't get into the stadium. It would be just standing room only, white and black. White and black. It just mean a white came out and see them, then did black. We used to leave a football game--it was out in Carrboro at this particular time, the stadium was there—and it would be a line of people a mile long coming back into Chapel Hill that just left the football game. People lived for Friday nights to get to a football game.

BG: Sounds like it was a big show.

WD: You would have had to been there—I'm trying to tell you the best way I can—but you would have had to been there to enjoy the excitement. Like I told you last week, one year we went un-scored-on. We were beating people 108 to 0, 88 to 0. So it was a show, plus you saw the football game, and you just didn't get that out of that head. Cheerleaders, you couldn't get that out of your head, because they had a show. And it was a full-time show the whole time that you were there.

BG: Sounds very joyful.

WD: Very, very. I tell you, kids today that didn't have an opportunity to see one of those shows. You can't tell them what they miss because sometimes you don't miss what you've never seen but—those were joyful times. Joyful times. But you go to a football game now—and I saw more come out this year than I seen in a long time—but the stadium out in Chapel Hill High couldn't hold the people that—for sitting down.

BG: You had more people at the Lincoln High games than you have now at Chapel Hill High games?

WD: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I mean, people from Hillsborough, Pittsborough, Durham. () people just come to the game. People you never seen before. Bleachers be rocking. I'm talking about, you go to a game now it seem like a (). I mean, you know, it would be rocking. It might be cold and you might see five or six trash cans or barrels of fire going. It was just a time to remember.

BG: Did the students who played football and would come in with these shiny shoes and new laces on their shoes—would they run around the field and do the same meeting at mid-field singing "Born on Mountaintop, Tennessee" at home games as well as the away games?

WD: Yes.

BG: So that was the tradition? That was in your face kind of psychology?

WD: I didn't look at it as being that, but I guess you could very well say it was that [laughs].

BG: Were there any other traditions after the game? Did they sing a school song, did they go in front of the fans who had supported them? Did the team do anything special after one of the 66 or 88 to 0 games?

WD: Well the football coach sort of didn't allow it. It was more or less business once you got on the football field. If you ran a 100-yard touchdown, you couldn't even come back to the sideline rejoicing. He would simply tell you you didn't do no more than you supposed to have done.

BG: So there was none of this dancing in the end zone, or spiking the ball, or jumping around?

WD: The show starts before the game. Then, during the game, the band, the cheerleaders, and everybody else, they did the show from then on. The football team was strictly business.

BG: Now, you had a coach, Coach Peerman. Did he have assistant coaches?

WD: No.

BG: He just coached by himself? One man?

WD: One man.

BG: Offense, defense?

WD: Offense, defense.

BG: Kicking?

WD: Everything. And I put that on a—after I studied it down through the years—you do this during training, in the summer, before football season starts. So everybody else pretty much will know their role. Everybody know who's going to start. When he say the kicking team go in, you would know who went in. It's not a good stuff how the twelve men end up on the field. If twelve men end up on the field, somebody been knowing what they was supposed to be doing. So it was pretty much well, that you knew what you were supposed to do.

BG: It sounds like the same kind of discipline that existed at the school in general, maybe even more?

WD: He was one man I feared. I didn't mess with him.

BG: Was he a big man?

WD: Big man. He weighed about 260 pounds. Without an ounce of fat. And he had a bass in his voice. When he tell you to move, you move. He tell you to go to class, you go to class. He tell you to sit down, you sit down. But he was a very mild man. But he was a no-nonsense man.

He got me one time. () he had made. Me and another friend we was playing volleyball during gym. And at the end of the session, you stopped playing and go to the dressing room and get dressed and you had about five minutes left to go before the bell ring. So we were waiting on the bleachers, waiting for the bell to ring and another friend went out on the gym floor playing volleyball with a piece of paper. And we knew we weren't supposed to be out there with our shoes on. You didn't walk on his floor with your shoes on. And he walked out of his office and saw us. So there was a stage in the gym. We had to go and stand up on stage. And we had to go and bend down and grab our ankles. He had this palette. And he hit us three times apiece. But he was a big man. He could [draw that palette back?].

BG: [laughs] You remembered that, hunh?

WD: Oh, boy, do I remember it. I'm probably still stinging from that! From then on, I never crossed him any more. I didn't fear him. I respected him.

BG: After the football game were there parties or other things that people did that you can remember?

WD: They had a little place up here on [pause]. You know where Chapel Hill newspaper's at? Well that little street, when the right light? Take that red light, take a right, that little section of the block right there? There was a grill there.

BG: Is that Merritt Mill Road over there?

WD: Merritt Mill Road is the other street. This is before you get to Merritt Mill Road. That's Graham Street, I think. Pretty much about everybody would pretty much leave there, come up there to get a chicken sandwich, whatever. Every now and then there would be a dance going on down at the community center. It wasn't always activities going on after that. But people who didn't go home would come up there and just stand around and talk for a while. That would be pretty much ().

BG: Are there any other memories you have of Lincoln High School that you haven't talked about?

WD: I would say the food. The food. The food was home-cooked food. You ate food at the cafeteria the way you ate at home. It was just Southern cooking. Good food.

BG: What kind of things would you eat there, Walter?

WD: You know, fried chicken. Greens, home cooked. Potatoes. It wasn't a whole lot of—I'm talking about home-made yeast rolls and – [tape ends].

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

BG: Did you want to say anything more about the cooking at Lincoln High School?

WD: No. It was just good home cooking.

BG: We haven't talked much about your experience at Chapel Hill High School, the new Chapel Hill High School that was integrated. I wanted to ask you what the issues were that you think led up to the protest or riot that occurred there in 1969.

WD: '68.

BG: '68?

WD: I guess it was really just tension. There was just a lot of tension. Like I said no one there tried to bridge that gap or tried to cut that tension off. To me it was pretty much on your own. And they had certain teachers there. I would want to say that today you had certain people there in place that was in place to pretty much keep you in place. Certain black teachers that they hired. I'm not going to say that they hired then especially for that. But anything that would happen, that another black would get out of line, they would send these black teachers to sort of like steer them back into line—not to sympathize with them, but to steer them back into line.

BG: So they didn't listen to the things that were bothering the students? Is that what you're saying? Neither the white teachers nor the black teachers?

WD: Right. Who I really could confide in, and who helped me to cope with some of the problems that I had—Mrs. Peerman was one, and Mr. McDougle was the other one. Those are the two I could really go and take to. And I always found Mrs. Peerman to be a jewel because it seemed like she would always give you a word of confidence—not only confidence in moving to the next level, but a word of comfort in your problems. So I would go talk to her a lot.

BG: What are the kinds of things that you would talk to her about?

WD: She was a counselor, so a lot of times it would be just personal stuff. A lot of times just something to talk about. She always put a smile on her face, and that's what I needed.

BG: When you say that tension was building up at school, can you remember what were the causes of the tension? You mentioned one of them, that people weren't listening. What were the things that they weren't listening to?

WD: I was thinking of segregation. Segregation is all right. But there's still segregation, people still have a tendency to operate within their own room. And segregation don't have to be segregation between black and white. You got skinheads and you got certain groups that segregate themselves from other groups. But when you build a wall there, between that segregation. When that wall is built there, and then you cannot communicate because there's a wall built there, and you see one getting special treatments over the other one.

I remember this one special time. Governor Wallace spoke over there in Durham. And they was letting people go to the speech. And there was a lot of students coming getting their dismissal slips signed.

Well, for some reason, the assistant principal, whoever it was, wouldn't sign a black dismissal slip. So you had several of them standing there, and they were signing every white that came there. So then we had to go in to talk to Mr. McDougle [phone rings; tape stops].

BG: Let's go back to this George Wallace talk in Durham. I assume that at this time George Wallace was still a racist and a segregationist, is that right?

WD: Yes. Why it was so important for everybody to go over there, I don't know. But this was just a big event. Everybody was getting out of school to go over to Durham. Once we got over there, there was a lot of tension going on.

And then, you know, every time that you would look at TV you would see Alabama, whatever, them sicking dogs on people, sending water hoses, stuff like that. Even though that you wasn't a part of it, still it was just tension, tension.

BG: So you felt what was going on in the rest of the country?

WD: Yes, very much.

BG: Did your friends feel the same thing you felt?

WD: Several of them. Several of them. If they did it wasn't a lot shown.

BG: Did you talk about what was going on in the country, the problems that were being faced in the South, among your friends?

WD: It's just wasn't a topic of conversation. It wasn't something that we sat around and talked about all the time or something like that. Maybe if we were just fortunate enough to be sitting down together someone would discuss it. But it just wasn't a topic of conversation.

BG: Mainly, I hear you saying that the tension was because of this wall that existed. When you say wall are you saying that the whites and the blacks just didn't talk to each other?

WD: Right. It was just like oil and water. And everybody just seems to--went their separate ways. Then, next thing you know, you're walking down the hall, you see a fight, something like that. Whites came with their prejudice ways, and blacks would be responding to it. You had a lot of whites that I guess was raised up in their house to be like that and they didn't see us as being human. So those were the things that you have to deal with? "Why are they out here? Why are they in our school? Who allowed them to come to this school? This is our school." So we was invading their privacy.

BG: Did you feel that, or did you hear that?

WD: I felt it. And sometimes you would hear it.

BG: So they would actually ask you, "Why are you here?"

WD: I never had one ask me that. I never heard one ask anybody else that, just that blunt. I heard them say, "Go back down the lake." You had some that was big and bold enough to do that. And say that. And probably would have fought you too.

BG: Were they still calling names and using racial epithets that were offensive to black students?

WD: We had, the first year that we came here, my first cousin was quarterback down in Lincoln. They didn't have anybody at Chapel Hill High School that they knew that was going to be able to move him out of that position. They went and tried to get somebody from out of state to come here. They intentionally done that.

BG: So they wouldn't have a black quarterback?

WD: So they wouldn't have a black quarterback. But it didn't work. Because the guy that they brought here couldn't move. He went somewhere in Cincinnati and quarterbacked. He was a pretty good quarterback. It wasn't the right time to have a black quarterback.

BG: So he didn't start?

WD: Yes.

BG: He did start.

WD: Yes. So what they tried, it didn't work for them.

BG: Did you see that in other areas as well, besides football, where there were black leaders or black athletes who weren't allowed to show their excellence?

WD: They were their first year and it pretty much dropped off since then. I went to a meeting last night and some parents were concerned that blacks were not playing on different school teams. Not sports, nothing like that, but student government bodies and all of that. And it's pretty much were in place who they going to get. And I went to a meeting before, about the first couple of weeks of school, and the people say things like, "Who's on the PTA now." People on the PTA now, the head of the PTA or whatever, appointing other people to be on there. These are parents appointing other people. You see what I mean? So you're not getting there by votes.

BG: You're getting there by appointments.

WD: Yes. Who they know. They're picking people to take their place. It was strange to hear what this woman said last night. And this was the same problem that we saw in '68. And here it is in '91 now, and this problem still exists. Trying to remember that position that they just hired at Chapel Hill High School, trying to bridge the relation gap between black and white. That's something that should have been in place many years ago. You have a problem that's been existing now over thirty-some years. Now you want to try to correct that. It ain't never too late, but it's a lot late for a lot of people. I don't care what you do or what you say, as you say you was very fortunate when you was coming up. So you don't remember going to the bathroom out in the outhouse. You can sympathize with me. But you never experienced that so you really can't put your hands on it. Regardless of what any whites say, they can sympathize with me as much as they want to, but without you coming to the mainstream of things, you could never write this story. You could never write this story, go to some whites and ask them how did blacks feel back then. They could tell you what they think they feel, but they can't tell you how they feel.

BG: You'd have to be there, you'd have to be that person.

WD: That's right. That's right. And to bridge that gap, you can't bridge that gap between race with two white (). There's got to be a black involved in there so they can bring their concerns to the front.

BG: When you talked about the schoolboard appointing new people to the schoolboard, I want to be a little more specific and make sure I understand you correctly. Are you saying that there are white leaders in the schoolboard who are appointing more white leaders so there's not enough black representation on the schoolboard?

WD: Not the schoolboard. The schoolboard is being voted upon. The PTA.

BG: I'm sorry. Let me rephrase it. Are you saying that the PTA leadership--which is, I'm assuming, white--that they're appointing more whites and they're not appointing blacks or not enough blacks so there's not fair representation in the PTA? Is that what you were saying? I don't want to put words in your mouth.

WD: Yes. Right.

BG: Was there one single spark that set off the protest that occurred in 1968, that you can remember?

WD: If I would have to say one, I would think that, although all the tension was building up and it was just waiting for one moment to explode, I believe it's when Martin Luther Kind got killed. That was just, boom! It just happened.

BG: How long after his death did the protest occur in school?

WD: I want to say it was at the same time.

BG: It was in the spring of the year?

WD: I would say so.

BG: There was an issue with school monitors. Do you remember any of that?

WD: No.

BG: Was there planning that you can recall for the protest?

WD: No. It wasn't sit down and organized. It was just one or two started doing things, then it was just more of a separate thing. Everyone pretty much went off on their own--a group of people here, a group of people there. People was pretty much doing what they wanted to do. There's probably a lot of things that happened, that I probably don't even know today who done them and who was involved in it. Because it was pretty much where people was going on their own doing a lot of things.

BG: Can you remember the things that occurred that you were involved in, that made people call it a protest or a riot?

WD: Well, me and a few more guys we took some chains and locked up the school. We locked up the whole school. And I guess we probably beat a few people down. Wouldn't go to classes and stuff like that. Once things got started and it was a lot of people involved, that's when the main group of teachers that would be involved in not hurting people but making people go back to class. They pretty much got things back in line.

BG: The black teachers?

WD: I guess I was the one that wouldn't do what they say do, and then I had the police called on me by these teachers. So I pretty much got back in line after then.

BG: Did the police arrest you?

WD: No they didn't.

BG: Didn't pat you?

WD: No. We left. And then I guess that's pretty much what we wanted to happen. As long as I got out of the hallways, stuff like that.

BG: Did you break any windows, or did you see any windows get broken?

WD: I don't think any windows was broken.

BG: How about property destroyed?

WD: I don't think a whole lot of property was destroyed.

BG: How long was the school locked up?

WD: Well for about an hour or so. Couldn't nobody get in and couldn't nobody get out.

BG: Did you see fear or panic among the students when they knew that they were locked in?

WD: Yes.

BG: Is that something that you were aiming to produce?

WD: Like I said it wasn't a strategy, it wasn't a plan. It was just saying, "Let's do this." And we felt like if we could do this, that we could put fear in people. But I think a lot of blacks got mad at us for doing that because they was locked up in there too.

BG: So it wasn't every black in the school cheering you on?

WD: Well they was cheering us on until they got locked in. And when they couldn't get out to be with us or whatever--if we let them out then the whole school would have been out--I guess after then they sort of grew mad at us for that particular moment.

BG: When you unlocked the, unchained the doors, unlocked the school, was there something that made you do that?

WD: Unlocked? Nobody made us do that.

BG: Why did you unlock it?

WD: Well there were a lot of people coming on campus. A lot of students started calling their parents and stuff like that. So we thought it was about time for us to unlock the doors.

BG: Did you march on campus? How did you disperse?

WD: This was just a bunch of unruly teenagers with no direction. We didn't march off campus but I guess that's the one thing that didn't cause us to get what we were after because there really wasn't no structure in it. It really wasn't organized. People were doing things and they might last for an hour or two.

In a week or two, a couple of people would be doing things but pretty much as a whole there wasn't anybody doing anything. So it was pretty much well that we had this back in order. So until I left school--I left school in '69--there was a lot of things didn't change but I had left school.

BG: So you didn't see many changes after the protest?

WD: Right.

BG: You say you didn't get what you were after. Take it back: what were you after?

WD: Well one of the things that we said was going back to Lincoln. Another one that we thought that we were after was to tear the walls down: let us be a part of, let us belong to this school, let us be a part owner of this school, that we can come to school every day and enjoy school like everybody else did. And feel free to do that. Just didn't feel free as a whole that we could do that.

BG: What was it about Lincoln High School that you wanted to go back to? What was at Lincoln that you didn't have at Chapel Hill High School?

WD: That family atmosphere. Always feel that once that you got people on your side you can always divide and conquer. And the same people that I knew down in Lincoln, they was in separate groups. If I get this group over here, and I said "If I had this group of people, they would be happy. But yet still I don't have to satisfy other people, as long as we can keep a few happy." I still see that now. That a few are being made happy. And so if you would get somebody to speak out for you just like they had a few black teachers that would speak out for them and they kept the other ones in control.

BG: When the riot occurred, were the school colors and the school mascot still the mascot of the old Chapel Hill High School on Franklin Street, the white school?

WD: Everything was the same. When they left Chapel Hill High School, they brought everything that originated in Chapel Hill High School.

We went and joined in with Central High in Hillsborough a few times. We went in and joined in their cause. I saw them as being more organized than Chapel Hill. I see them operating all the campus in a large group of people trying to organize. And that was one thing that didn't happen in Chapel Hill. We didn't sit down and organize. We didn't see which direction we wanted to go in. We didn't see a list of demands. We might have a list of demands but this list of demands might come from two or three people instead of a group of people.

BG: You did have a group, a small group, those who talked to May Marshbanks, the principal, right before the riots (). Do you remember any of that?

WD: That's what I was saying. You had a lot of people, a lot of different groups, going off. And for some apparent reason I don't remember that. I heard somebody say that, but I don't remember that.

BG: Are there other things that you remember about those events, before or after?

WD: None that I can call. Mostly events that like I said earlier is (). Nothing led on to anything major. When we was in school, you couldn't go off campus.

BG: At Lincoln.

WD: At Chapel Hill High School. You weren't supposed to. That was something we done very (). And I was thinking back today, why they allowed us to do that, why there was any particular reason why they let us do that. They just didn't want to try to bring us under control, or what.

BG: Are there other things that you wanted to remember--oh, I wanted to ask you, did you go to graduation?

WD: Yes.

BG: What was graduation like? Did you feel that there was still tension at graduation, or that things eased off at all?

WD: Graduation for me was a moment of getting out of Chapel Hill High School. So I didn't see any change that night except walking across the stage and getting my diploma and getting out of there.

BG: Sort of a relief.

WD: Sort of a relief. It was a big relief to me. I don't know. I was free.

BG: What was graduation like at Lincoln High School. Did you ever go to any?

WD: No.

BG: I hear in all of this--maybe this is just my interpretation--you came from a school where there was a family atmosphere, where there was very strong discipline, where life was organized. And you went to a school where there was no family feeling, where you didn't feel welcome, and in your eyes was disorganized?

WD: Yes. Pretty much.

BG: Sort of shocking.

WD: Well, it was shocking then. But I still see the same structure. So nothing surprised me, that happened. It don't surprise me now that it did happen. Because I can see certain family structures now. And I understand why it was in school.

BG: Can you explain that a little further? I don't understand you.

WD: I can see very loose some of the principles that a lot of households grow up with. I don't see a lot of structures in the homes. I can see a lot of the things that a lot of people stand out against or a lot of people stand out for, that is morally wrong. I can see the school system filling up because the child have their right in their home. I don't feel like a child should have their rights in their home. They don't have no rights. When my child get old enough to pay his bills, when my child get old enough to be responsible for himself. A thirteen, twelve-year-old child don't have no rights in my home. He don't have no decision on how to run my household. He's not of age yet. He never went through nothing yet. But I see three or four years old on these talk shows and their parents say they can't do nothing with him. If you can't do nothing with a three or four year-old, then when he get ten, you might as well leave the house to him and go head on back to (). When they come up like that, they when they get up to some age, they don't have no structure. A lot of structure that was at Lincoln High School, it wasn't main reason because of the teachers. A lot of it left home with them. If a child ain't raised at home, I don't care, you can't raise him outside the home. You, me, the parent or nobody else can't raise that child outside the home. It starts within the home. So a lot of things that happened then and that happened now, they didn't get it straight at home and they can't get it straight now. And now those same principles--the whippings that we used to get when we was young, coming up--you get a whipping for everything that you do, not every little thing, you didn't get killed, but you got punished for it--gave you something to think about. Gave you something to say, "Don't do that no more." But my mother now tell me I shouldn't spank my child. The same woman that--

BG: Spanked you.

WD: Spanked me. Principles are changing. She done started accepting other people's ideas. The same was that she kept me in line is wrong now. So that's the way I see it I the school system.

BG: The problem begins at home.

WD: The problem begins at home. You leave home, you come to a school system that don't have no structure, that don't have any strong rules.

Don't have a dress code no more: kids walking around with their pants--. When we was in school you couldn't wear a hat to school. You can wear anything now. Girls wearing dresses, they bend over, you can see everything they got on. Boys wearing pants, you can see their underwear and all of them. When we was coming up you had to wear your shirttails in. Ain't that no more.

There's no more structure. And if it's that bad now, what's it going to be like in the next ten years? Somebody's going to get it back in line, somebody with some type of principle or some moral right. I feel that when you start having certain rights, everybody have their own rights, and that's the problem right now. The law says that you cannot go in your child's room unless you got permission. Your child can be back in his room with I don't know how much dope or anything else in his room but you can't go in his room unless you got his permission. But he can take you to jail for going into his room without permission. The house that you bought? He got his rights, animals got their rights. We live in a society that too many people have their own rights.

But it wasn't designed like that. God put rules and regulations on this earth. The guy that went downtown and shot all those people downtown, now he want to say that he wasn't represented right, now he wants to sue his lawyer--not his lawyer, his doctor, said he didn't get the proper medication. So we are not held accountable for what we do anymore. And you was held accountable for what you done down in Lincoln. You pay for what you done. People are not paying for what they do no more. So that's my stance on that.

BG: I think that's a good place to end, Walter. I appreciate your sharing so many of your feelings and memories with me. Thank you.

WD: All right. You're welcome.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW