

TAPE 1, SIDE A

SAUNDRA DAVIS
May 12, 1998

PAMELA GRUNDY: I am interviewing Sandra Davis at her home in Charlotte, North Carolina, about West Charlotte High School. It is the 12th of May 1998. I thought I'd just like to start with a little bit of your own personal history. Tell me what you're doing in Charlotte. Were you born here?

SAUNDRA DAVIS: Born and reared in Charlotte, North Carolina.

PG: In this same neighborhood?

SD: Really in, I guess you would say, the Biddleville area. That's where I was reared.

PG: What did your parents do?

SD: My mother worked for Belk's Department Store on the luncheonette, and my father worked for, first it was Stratford House Furniture Store and then Stiwalk Furniture Store.

PG: Had they gone to West Charlotte as well?

SD: No, my mother graduated from Second Ward, and her husband was from Union, South Carolina.

PG: All right. Where did you first remember going to school?

SD: Biddleville Elementary School, first through sixth grade. I had about three months left, and then I had to go to Isabella Wyche for three months because we moved to BrookHill [Apartments] I went to Second Ward one year in seventh grade. I didn't like Second Ward. I just had to go because I was living in that neighborhood. From eighth grade through twelfth grade I went to West Charlotte Senior High school.

PG: Okay. And that would have been what years?

SD: From fifty-five through fifty-eight.

PG: Could you just decide that you wanted to go to West Charlotte at that time and go?

SD: No. I always wanted to go to West Charlotte. I have loved West Charlotte all my life. As a matter of fact, I had two aunts, Bernice Craine. She was Bernice Terry when she went to West Charlotte. I think she was in the first graduating class from West Charlotte. I had another aunt, Irene Terry. She went to West Charlotte, and an uncle, William Samuel Terry who went to West Charlotte. But the years they graduated, I can't even tell you. I have forgotten that stuff.

PG: What was it about West Charlotte that made you want to go there?

SD: I was born in the Biddleville area, and that's not too far from West Charlotte. All the people on this side of town really went to West Charlotte. I have just always loved West Charlotte. When we were kids and we moved to BrookHill, I went to Isabella Wyche's for a while, like three months, and Second Ward that one year. I just didn't feel comfortable. I just liked West Charlotte. I was reared on this side most of my life, and that's just West Charlotte.

PG: Did you know more of the students at West Charlotte, was that part of it?

SD: Oh, yes. I knew more people on this side of town, and I always have. I don't know too many people on the other side.

PG: When you were growing up and younger, did you go to the high school for different events like sports events, and things like that?

SD: Not really. No. Me being afraid, because we rode the bus a lot then. And our parents didn't allow us on that side of town. We had to stay over here.

PG: But to West Charlotte had you gone, or you just stayed in your neighborhood?

SD: West Charlotte? I've always gone to events at West Charlotte.

PG: That's what I was asking.

SD: Okay. Oh, yes. To ball games, oh yes. Ball games or football, basketball, different things. Yes. Always West Charlotte.

PG: When you went to these games and things, would you know all the people that were there more or less?

SD: Most people, yes.

PG: Tell me what that was like, going to these events.

SD: It was fun. You looked forward to going to these things. Back then you didn't have but so many things to go to, and you always looked forward to that. It was exciting.

[DOOR BELL RINGS IN THE BACKGROUND. TAPE IS TURNED OFF AND THEN BACK ON.]

PG: I'll let you catch your breath a minute. When you were at West Charlotte, what are some of the things that you remember best about being there?

SD: The best school in Charlotte, I thought. West Charlotte was number one. If you go back and look at the history you will find out that we have always been number one. People don't want to admit it, but we have.

PG: When you say number one, number one in what?

SD: Everything. Most sports, academics. I thought we had the best teachers. The best of everything, really. Mr. Blake, he was the principal there, Clinton L. Blake,

he was the best. Anything that he thought West Charlotte needed that would put us at a high level, we got it. He went downtown and saw to it that we got it. Everybody downtown was very fond of Mr. Blake.

PG: Can you remember specific examples of something he would have gotten for the school that you remember?

SD: Right off hand, no. It was just anything in particular that he thought the school needed. I don't care what it was. We got it. We had it.

PG: What kinds of activities did you participate in when you were at the school?

SD: The only thing that I really participated in was intramural basketball, that's the classes, during school time because I worked after school. I didn't have time to participate in the band. I really wanted to be majorette, and I wanted to play basketball, but working after school I didn't have time to practice.

PG: Was there a girl's basketball team at West Charlotte at that time?

SD: Yes. Oh, Lord yes.

PG: Tell me about that.

SD: I tried to think if we won the championship that year. I know we won. When I graduated it was fifty-eight, and the football team was state champion. As far as the girl's basketball team, I can't remember whether they were or not. In fifty-eight I was homecoming queen that year. Nineteen fifty-eight. Since then, like forty years later which is this year, they had me running for the queen of our class. That was a very nice event. It was the maroon and gold ball. It was great.

PG: How did you get to be homecoming queen? How did that come about?

SD: Each class would nominate a queen to run for their class. Then it's really like a money thing because each class would sell so many tickets, and whoever sold the highest amount of tickets the person who was running from that class would be queen.

PG: Oh, I see. Okay. So who did you sell the tickets to?

SD: Oh, my God. Everybody. Neighbors, friends, businesses, just anybody that would buy them from you.

PG: Now was this to the homecoming game that you were selling the tickets to?

SD: Yes.

PG: That's interesting. Did you ever want to be a cheerleader?

SD: No. Never a cheerleader. Believe me, my mouth is big enough to be one. My voice carries. But, no I didn't. Not cheerleading. No.

PG: You were more interested in the majorettes.

SD: The majorettes, band, whatever. I am the oldest of seven children. There were seven of us, but I had a sister get killed in an automobile accident, and then I had a brother get killed in Atlanta so there are five of us now. The sister that got killed, she was a twin. The other sister is in Atlanta now. My brother, Stanley Jones was the drum major at West Charlotte from, oh Lord, let's see. I think it was sixty-two to sixty-four. I may be wrong about the years. He was the best drum major West Charlotte had. He was. That's my brother. I'm not bragging on him, but he was the best. Any time they were in the parades when West Charlotte came through, it looked like the whole of Charlotte would follow that band. He was the drum major, and then my twin sisters were little girls. They used to tear up the parade because so many people would follow them. So they got to the place instead of West Charlotte being say in the middle or first, they

would put them at the end so they wouldn't tear up their parade. Everybody followed West Charlotte.

PG: When you say this parade, what kind of parade was it?

SD: That was the Christmas parade on Thanksgiving Day.

PG: Where would that go from? Where would you march from?

SD: They marched from the old Sears building down to I believe it was Marshall Park.

PG: At that time was it as prestigious to be in the band as it was to be on the football team, for example?

SD: I don't feel like it was so prestigious, it was just the things that the children really liked to do. I don't feel any pressure there as far as I was concerned. No, I don't think so. They just really liked it.

PG: Did you ever play an instrument?

SD: Oh, Lord, no. No, no, no. Never played an instrument. I can't sing because I can't hold a tune from the back of my throat to the front of my mouth. No. I'm more sports inclined. I used to play basketball, even football with my brothers and the guys in the neighborhood, and softball. I played them all, but now I have a respiratory condition and I can't play like I used to. If I could I'd be out there right now with my grandson and all the rest of them. Every now and then I'll go across to the basketball court with my grandson and play basketball with him. Just a little bit, maybe five minutes because I have to stop.

PG: I talked to Mary Alyce Alexander, do you remember her? She played basketball. She would have been before your time. She's Alexander Clemmons now.

SD: That name sound familiar. I cannot place her.

PG: I think she graduated in forty-nine. She was before your time.

SD: Okay. Oh yes. Almost ten years before me. I really can't place her.

PG: But I guess Miss Blake was still coaching the girl's team?

SD: I think she was. I think Miss Blake was still there. I believe she was.

PG: Did you have her in physical education?

SD: Yes I did. She's sweet. I love Miss Blake. She's a real sweetheart.

PG: She was busy. She was still getting out, going to visit the old folks and doing all those different things like that.

SD: I think she's got, what do they call it now, dementia? She's not able to be out and about like she used to. As a matter of fact, I don't think they even allow her to drive any more. It's best. I've seen her coming down Beatties Ford Road, and she really shouldn't have been on the highway. But she's still a sweetheart.

PG: She's a lovely person.

SD: She is.

PG: Did the teachers at West Charlotte live in the same neighborhood where you all were living?

SD: Let's see. Off and on you may have had a few teachers that I think rented from some of our neighbors, but on the whole I don't think we had too many teachers from West Charlotte in our neighborhood, over here in University Park I'd say. As far as from Northwest back this way there were quite a few teachers that used to live in that area.

PG: Did you have any particular favorite teachers when you were in school?

SD: We all had favorites. Really, as a whole, I did like all of my teachers. I feel like I had the best teachers. They were all real good, and they were all concerned about every student in their class. Now, I also took cosmetology when I was in eleventh grade. My instructor was Miss Lillistein Moore, and I thought she was the best. I really did. She taught me more things about life than any of the others. She was really my favorite.

PG: What did she teach you about life?

SD: Oh, just everything. How a young lady should be, the mannerisms, the everything. She taught me a lot. She was sort of like a mother to me. She was really number one in my book. I'll never forget her, never. She lives in Salisbury now. She finally got married in her later years after she was at West Charlotte. I don't think Miss Moore married until she retired. If she had it was a very few years that she was married before she retired. I think her students came first.

PG: You always had that feeling?

SD: Yes.

PG: What kind of a person was she? Can you describe her a little bit?

SD: Oh, gosh. A pretty lady, beautiful. Not only her personality but as far as looks, she was a beautiful lady, and she was always a lady as far as mannerisms. You know how some people you can see out sometimes, or you may see them walking, or even in school, they're not the same, but she has always been the same.

PG: Had she been there for many years? Was she there for a long time?

SD: Yes. To my knowledge Miss Moore probably was at West Charlotte when they moved up here in fifty-six? They may have come up here in fifty-five. I can't remember whether the cosmetology class was there then or not. It seems like it was there

in fifty-six. She had been there I know up until—let's see, my daughter graduated, one of them graduated in seventy-eight, she was there. Angela came out in eighty. I know she was still there in eighty, I believe.

PG: So she was there a long, long time.

SD: Yes, she was.

PG: Did either of your daughters take classes with her?

SD: No. They did not. I had a godchild down the street that took cosmetology, and she likes Miss Moore, too. Then when I was in class, they probably have more now, but we had two guys in our class and that was very strange back then, and they were football boys.

PG: Really?

SD: Football guys, and she just stayed on them all the time. You know most people think when you say cosmetology, they think you come in and just learn to do hair a little. But you've got to learn about the body. You've got to learn everything about the body. You've got to know what to do for burns and everything else. They thought it was a play thing, but she made them learn.

PG: Did either of them ever use it when they got out of school?

SD: I don't think they did. One of the guys is at the Post Office now, and I think the other guy went into the medical field, but I'm not for sure. I had heard that he did, but how far he went I don't know. Really, cosmetology is like the basic training for a nurse. You'd be surprised. You've got to learn about bones, muscles, all of that.

PG: All of that. What interested you in it? Why were you interested in cosmetology?

SD: I have always liked to do hair ever since I was a little girl. I guess it was instilled in my from my aunt because she used to fix our hair, my mother's hair, the children's hair. It fascinated me, and I just always wanted to do hair. As a matter of fact, I used to do hair. Then I got married, then I went to Southern Bell. I used to renew my license every year, but I said, "Oh, no. I'm not going to do hair any more. I'm just going to make this a career." And that's what I did until I got sick and had to take an early retirement.

PG: Had your husband gone to West Charlotte as well?

SD: My husband went to West Charlotte. He graduated in 1954. My husband went to West Charlotte. I went to West Charlotte. My three children went to West Charlotte, and my grandson is at West Charlotte. Before that, I had two aunts go to West Charlotte and an uncle. Then, let's see, on my husband's side he was at West Charlotte. He had a brother that was next to him that was in my class. He went to West Charlotte, but Jack died. That's his picture right there. Jack died in fifty-six, I believe it was. He had heart trouble. The brother next to Jack, which is Alfonso, he graduate from West Charlotte. Now the baby brother, it's amazing. He graduated from West Meck [West Mecklenburg High School] They live on LaSalle Street, right down here. They live on this side of the street. The children on this side of the street back then had to go to West Meck. His neighbor right across, those kids went to West Charlotte. On the same street. They broke them down like that, which I thought was terrible.

PG: That's funny. Now, West Meck, was that a black school then?

SD: No. Integration had started.

PG: That would have been in the mid-sixties?

SD: Seventies. Oh, okay. Yes. Let me be sure now. I got married in fifty-nine. Yes, it was in the seventies when Sedrick graduated.

PG: When did you move back to this neighborhood?

SD: I lived in BrookHill when I was in sixth grade. That was back in fifty-five, I believe. We moved to Englehardt Street in fifty-six. I got married in fifty-nine. I moved back to BrookHill, and we stayed there about four years. I moved here in sixty-five.

PG: To this house?

SD: Yes.

PG: So you've been here for a while?

SD: That's right. It will be thirty-three years in December.

PG: Good heavens. Why did you pick this neighborhood?

SD: I love this side of town. I just love this neighborhood. I didn't know that it was going to be as enjoyable as it has been. I knew I always liked it, but I don't want to live anywhere else but here. My son is always saying, "Well, mom, you ought to just give me this house and you all move somewhere else." That would be fine, too, but it's always going to be my house, my home. I don't care if my husband buys me a million dollar house somewhere else, this is where I like right here. I want to be here. I just love it.

PG: What is it that you like about it?

SD: I like my neighbors. Everything is convenient. There's the school, () center. My children growing up, they loved to go to the center, even my grand children. It teaches them a lot.

PG: What kinds of things do they teach them?

SD: They used to have after school classes. They don't have too much of that now, tutoring sessions. After school, kids could go and do their homework. That's a big help if the parents are working. When they come home they've got somebody there that's overseeing their homework. That's great. It's the basketball, football. They have all types of little league things, too, for them. My grandson's playing basketball for them now. He played baseball. They teach them t-ball. All different things. Not only for boys, it's for girls, too. During the summer they go over there to camp.

PG: That is a lot. It's in walking distance.

SD: Right across the street, right there.

PG: That's really nice to be able to do that.

SD: Yes, it is. Any emergency comes up, all they have to do is call me if they're sick or anything happens I'm just right there. It's just great.

PG: Have most of your neighbors lived here a long time as well?

SD: Yes. As a matter of fact, I think, I'm almost sure that's what the salesperson told us. We bought the last house that they had for sale back then in University Park.

PG: Was it a new house when you moved into it?

SD: Yes.

PG: So it had just been built?

SD: Yes. Now, these neighbors were there, too. It was Mr. and Mrs. Dixon, the elderly couple. Now his son lives there because they moved back to their home house. His son is there, but it's still in the family.

PG: So that's the way it works.

SD: Yes.

PG: People keep the homes and then the children come. Well, that's nice.

SD: It is. It really is. I just love it. It's just like a family place. And then there's people here, the Dixons. I was a Methodist when I was growing up, and we all went to Simpson Gillespie, but after I got married I joined Mt. Carmel Baptist Church. I've been there thirty-some odd years.

PG: Is that right here in the neighborhood as well?

SD: On Tuckaseegee. It used to be on Campus Street around the corner from Johnson C. Smith. Then we had so many people we needed a bigger church and bought the church out on Tuckaseegee.

PG: Well, I'm sure the church was also an important part of people's lives when you were growing up.

SD: Yes. You'd better go to church on Sundays. If you didn't go to church you didn't do anything else. I think that is really good. I think people should instill that in their children now, because we need to be back to the church. More prayer. They're taking prayer out of schools, but they need to put it back in there.

PG: You think.

SD: I know they do. And I know we have a lot of people that are atheists and devil worshipers and everything else, but I don't care what they say. If it doesn't come from above, from the almighty, hey, even the devil. When something happens, who do they call on first? They don't call on the devil. It's always, "Lord have mercy. Help me." No, they need to get prayer back in the schools.

PG: Did you have prayer when you were going to West Charlotte, for example?

SD: Yes, there was. As a matter of fact, we used to have morning devotion. We would have somebody in the office and it would be over the intercom. Sure we did.

PG: Were there other times as well in school as well?

SD: Not to my knowledge, unless maybe a group wanted to get together or something like that. I think the year that I was at Second Ward they taught bible. That was back in what, fifty-five? They used to have a class. Have you heard of Mildred Baxter? Mildred Baxter Davis?

PG: I think so.

SD: I think she was the one that taught bible at Second Ward.

PG: So you were mentioning, when you were talking about the two sides of the road, the beginnings of school integration, and I guess in the earlier years of it when the first white kids started to come to West Charlotte, that was a pretty turbulent time. A lot of things went on.

SD: Yes. A lot of things went on, but normally West Charlotte was really quiet. I think West Charlotte was more like a model school for everybody else. Any time something would happen that they needed to try something out, they would try it at West Charlotte. West Charlotte is number one. We always make things go smooth. It seems like we had the personnel to do it. I wasn't there when the integration started, but my children came into it when they were in elementary school. My baby girl, Angela, had to go to Rama Road, and that's way, way on the other side of town. She was bussed all the way over there. We've just been fortunate, blessed, lucky because in the end they got to go to school right across the street. They came right back home. They had to be bussed a few years, but you put up with that.

PG: What did you think about that when it first began to start and when you were faced with having to send your children away? What was your feeling about that?

SD: I'm going to tell you right now. I'm frank. I'm honest. I'm blunt. I'm going to tell you what's on my mind. I didn't want my children to have to be bussed out of the neighborhood. I really didn't. But if that meant my children getting a better education, yes. Let them be bussed. Somebody had to do it. The ice had to be broken somewhere. For the simple reason the white schools have had the better things. When they finished with them they passed them to our kids. I know my children are just as good as anybody's children. Not only my children, every child in the world should be treated equal, because they're taking our tax money just like they're taking everybody else's tax money to do these things with, so why make our children suffer? They've suffered enough all the years of their life. No, I didn't want my children to be bussed, but I didn't let them know that that was the way I felt because if I had let them know what I felt they wouldn't have learned as much as they could have. I always instilled in them, go to school, learn everything you can, and do the best you can. I felt good about them going, the computers and everything. They enjoyed it, too. It wasn't the hand-me-downs. They got it first hand.

PG: Do you think that made a big difference?

SD: I think so. But the only thing that bothered me, and still bothers me, our children, the black children as a whole, they are bussed, and bussed, and bussed. But in the white neighborhoods they do all they can to keep their children there. I don't care how they try to break it down or what they do. I can see it. Nobody is crazy. But if it's taking the bussing to get our kids where they should be, fine. But you have to think

about it, too. How can a child get up at five o'clock in the morning, catch the bus, got to be at school at seven or seven-thirty, how in the world can they learn what they should be learning because they're are not getting enough rest? They are not. And that's sad. And everybody's saying they want to go back to the neighborhood school. I know they do. It would please me nothing more in the world than for our kids to go back to the neighborhood school, but by God, make sure that everything that is in one school is in all schools. Even if you go back to the neighborhood schools, it's still going to be integrated some. It may not be at a seventy/thirty basis, it's going to be integrated some because people are moving everywhere all around now. But, I don't trust the people. I don't.

PG: Well, you certainly have reason not to.

SD: Right. I'm the type of person who speaks my mind. I'm not afraid to speak my mind. I don't care who it is. I'm not afraid of anybody but Jesus Christ. Just like West Charlotte. As well as I love that school, they have been trying for years to close West Charlotte. They have, but when we know anything about it it's almost closed. Then we've got to fight like hell to try to keep our school. That is not right. They might as well not think about doing it because we're going to do all we can to keep it open, and we've got some powerful black folks around here. You all might not think it, but we have. We'll do what we have to do to keep that school open. But, like I said, West Charlotte had problems last year with kids cutting class. Children have been doing it all their life, but I think it was more last year. We had this incident where we've got a lot of foreigners coming over here now. Nothing is wrong with that. Everybody wants the better things in life, but instead of those kids staying up there in school they were coming down here on the parking lot almost every day. That was the beginning of this year when

they started all that coming down here. They used to come last year, but not like it was this year. They used to come across up there, but when Mr. Simmons had the fence put around everybody griped about that. But you know what? That's the best thing that he could have done, because that was keeping the traffic from down here from going through the school yard. It was keeping those kids up there better, but they got smart. They started coming down the hill and coming over here every day. I can put up with a lot of things, but one day they had had some type of trouble up there. I didn't know about it until later on that afternoon. Then the next day they started gathering here in this parking lot. I said, no, no, no, no, no. We're not going to have this. So I called the school and I told them, "These kids are down here." It was like gangs of them. I called the school and they took care of it. They sent people down here to clear that parking lot, and it didn't take them long to do it. I was very grateful for that. After that the foreigners started coming in droves. They would be over here behind the dumpster, down here behind trucks. They even got so bold they were out here sitting right on this man's driveway next door. So I even called him and asked, "Do you know these kids are sitting out here on your property?" Some of our people are afraid to say anything, but I'm not because I'll die and go to hell for my property and my children. I will. I just called right up there to Mr. Cline, and I told him what was going on. Bless his heart, he told me any time that anything happened to let him know, and he would be glad to help me because he was going to help me clean up this neighborhood. And by God he did. The next thing I knew the kids used to park over here in this parking lot, they're not allowed to park over there any more. I didn't request that because the kids had to have somewhere to park, but I didn't want the loitering around. I didn't want that. He cleaned

it up because they don't park over there, they park up here. They must have had enough parking spaces up there, so that's good.

PG: It seems like it's important for the school to have people like you who are concerned about it living right around here.

SD: I am concerned about that school. Anything that goes on in my neighborhood I am concerned about. Not only this neighborhood, any other neighborhood if I can be of some help, especially to the children. I love children and elderly people. That's my thing. You have to take care of home first. You know that.

PG: It won't take care of itself.

SD: That's right. And anything I can do around here, if I see something that isn't right I'm going to report it.

PG: It's as interesting to me to listen to people from the school talk about how much they appreciate the people in the neighborhood who have supported the school and looked out for the kids almost forever.

SD: Yes. When I was growing up I guess it was instilled in me, just like Clinton's wife said, Hillary, it takes a village to raise a child. She is not lying. It takes more than a village, believe me. When we were coming up if we went to our neighbor's house and we did something wrong that parent wore us out, and then we got another whipping when we got home. It was the same at our house. If somebody came to our house and did something wrong our parents chastised them. It was just like that because we want our children to grow up to be respectable children. Hey, you can't hardly speak to a child in a high tone now because the parents say, "No, no, no." It's not the same any more.

PG: What do you think happened? What do you think has happened to make that change?

SD: You know, I'm going to tell you the truth. To me it seems like it's just more, I hate to say drugs, but drugs just really got to a peak here. It seems like there's too many younger parents now that are in that world, and they don't want you to say anything or do anything to their children, but they're not doing anything for them either. It's sad. You have to really know whose child to say something to and whose child not to say anything to. It's sad, and being like that I think has rubbed off on some of the good parents. It's just difficult. I said, "Lord, I am so glad that my children are grown and out of it." But, look at my grandchildren. They've got to go through this, and that hurts worse. I doubt if you have any grandchildren because you don't look old enough to have any. It makes a difference. They always told me there's something about your grandchildren. You love your children with all your heart. You do, but it's something about those grandchildren. I don't know. You let them get by with a little more than you let your children get by with. My grandchildren know. They go to school to learn. They have to obey, and we tell them if the teacher, or principal, or whoever is wrong we're in their corner. If they're wrong, they know we're in their corner, too, because they're going to get it. We don't play that foolishness. No, school is to learn.

PG: If we could get back for a minute to this period of integration. You said when you read the histories of integration in Charlotte, they said that the big change came when people in South Charlotte agreed to send their children to West Charlotte. That's sort of the story. Tell me what you think about that.

SD: You know what? If I was living in South Charlotte I would want my children to come to West Charlotte, too. West Charlotte had been the number one black school ever since it's been a West Charlotte. West Charlotte has been number one. I would be a fool if I lived in South Charlotte and wanted my child to go to Second Ward or go to another school, if they were going to be bussed to another black school. I would want mine to come to West Charlotte. I feel like we have the best of everything. I really do.

PG: It seems like when there were discussions, when people were talking about it, for a number of the blacks this was not seen as a good thing. They didn't understand about West Charlotte. What was your perspective on that when they were talking about who was going to have to go to West Charlotte?

SD: Because they don't understand black people as a whole. I think that's the whole thing in a nut shell. They have one concept of black people. Everybody is not the same, and they had to come to realize that. I guess they felt like West Charlotte was rowdy and down class. But we're number one. We're the top. In other words, West Charlotte was just like Myers Park was. This is the black Myers Park over here. They just had the wrong concept about black people on the whole.

PG: Do you think that that changed after students came to West Charlotte?

SD: I think so. I feel like you saw more black and white kids mingle together on the whole. I'd go to ball games at other schools. I'm very observant. I'm going to always look to see what I can see, what's right or what's wrong. Even then at the games, it seems like you can tell West Charlotte's crowd because they're more like a family. You've got the blacks and whites mingling with each other. I notice when these kids go

off to school and they come back with their black friends, black teachers, white teachers, whatever, they're black and white. They're always hugging each other. The affection is there. I guess maybe they do it at other schools, but I haven't seen it done as much as at West Charlotte. I can be at a mall or somewhere, you can hear black and whites talking about West Charlotte. It's always West Charlotte, and it's a good school. I feel like the kids from South Charlotte came over here. They got the better kids up here, most of them, and the better black kids up there, too. Don't fool yourself. They've got most of our good black kids up here, too. I don't care what they say about bussing. You've got good black kids everywhere, but you check West Charlotte and see.

PG: Do you think that that helped, having the sort of upper level of students?

SD: I think so in the beginning. I think every child should have a chance. I feel like if they break it down and scatter people everywhere, the rich here in the poor section and the poor over here in the rich section, I think it would be better. Everybody needs to learn about everybody's culture, to let everybody know that everybody is not alike, and we've got to help each other to live in this world. That's the only thing that's going to cure it. It's easily said, but the people that are downtown they don't try to keep doing this. They'll do it for a little while. They'll send a few here and a few there, but to really integrate it like it should be done, they need to clean that board up. They need the people downtown that really know what's going on and that haven't been sitting up somewhere drinking coffee, playing bridge, and talking to their friends all day. They don't know what it's like out here in this world. They need the people down there that really know what's going on and that are not afraid to get in there and voice their opinion. Don't

worry about what Mr. John said or Mr. Brown said or anybody. Do what's right for everybody.

PG: What do you think needs to be done, what kinds of things need to be done?

SD: For the first thing, as far as the bussing goes, there's nothing wrong with the kids being bussed because the white children have been bussed all of their lives. We used to walk to school, and they were passing by us on the bus going to school. There's nothing wrong with the bussing, but don't bus the kids so far. They can do something that's better than—.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE A

BEGINNING OF TAPE ONE, SIDE B

SD: To me that's taking away from their learning, and I don't think it's right. They're talking about all these SAT scores and all these scores. The teachers are griping and fighting because they've got to take these tests. Why not take them? If they don't know the material, how are they going to teach it to the children? Then they're going to flunk the child. That's another thing. I cannot stand to see any teacher flunk a child. I don't believe in Fs for the simple reason if a child is going to class every day, and if they are trying to do something—I shouldn't say I don't believe in Fs. If it's a child that's in there doing nothing, causing trouble all the time, I can understand that. But a child that is going to class every day and putting forth some effort, no. To me that discourages a child to even want to go to that class. He'll say, "Well, I'm going to get an F anyway, and I'm doing my best." Then children start dropping out, cutting class. It's terrible.

PG: Do you think more of that started happening after integration?

SD: On the whole, yes. Now we had teachers in the black schools that would give you an F, too. If that teacher knew that you really weren't trying, if you just caused trouble. We didn't have too many kids like that, but I really do. You may say that I am and people might say that I am, but I haven't to my knowledge heard anybody say that I am prejudice. I have noticed in going from class to class, from my children on down to my grandchildren, a lot of these white teachers, now you may not believe me and there might be a lot of people that don't believe me, but they're not interested in our children.

PG: You still feel that?

SD: I do. I certainly do. It's not all of them, mind you, because we've got some beautiful white teachers. Some of them do care about our children because they are good teachers. I feel like a good teacher doesn't see any color. I don't see any color. I guess I'm just color blind, because either you're right or you're wrong. I have seen it down through the years. If you go up there now and check my children's records you will probably see where I've been to that school. Any time there was a problem, I'm going to see about my child. I don't care whether he's right or he's wrong, I'm going to see because I want to know what the problem is. If I go there and a teacher or a principal has really been wrong, hey, I know that's on the record, too, because I don't play. I don't play with them, and I don't play with my children. When it comes to learning, they're up there to learn. They're going to do what they're supposed to do, and the faculty and everybody else, they're going to do what they're supposed to do by my children. I'm just that type parent. It is still in the schools, but you say you can't put it all on the teachers because this is the way they were reared. But, hey, they've been to school. They've been to college. They've got degrees now. You've got to test what your brain is for.

You've got to make a difference. My mother told me a lot of things when I was a child that I don't agree with. You change it when you get grown when you can do better. They can't hand me that.

PG: It seems like a lot of these folks have had a long time over which they could have gotten it.

SD: Yes, exactly. Our school system, on the whole, is not as bad as a lot of the other school systems, but we've got a lot of room for improvement here. It has to start at home first. We can't look down to South Carolina or up in Canada to see what they're doing. We've got to start it right here.

PG: It seems like even to keep the school system where it is, its taken a lot of effort especially on the part of black parents to keep pushing.

SD: That's right.

PG: For example, as you've said, I think there have been a series of times at which people have thought about closing West Charlotte.

SD: Sure. I know it for a fact. You've got to put your foot down, and you've got to go down there. Hey, look, just like I said. We pay taxes just like everybody else. What is not right, they're taking our tax money and doing more for the whites than they're doing up here. It's not fair. It is not fair. I'm going to give you another example of what I'm talking about how it's not fair. You look out here at this playground. Our children had playground equipment down here, right through here there was playground equipment. We had some up here on the hill. They came last year when the children started camp. They waited right until those kids went into camp in June, and they came out here and took this playground equipment up. They declared that they were going to

put some more down. Its been almost a year. Where is the equipment? I asked the director over there, I said, "Where is the equipment for the children?" She's trying to get an answer. I said, "Well, okay. That's fine. I'll find out who your boss is, and who her boss is or his boss is. These kids need some playground equipment over there because our tax money pays for it over here just like it does over there. All these other playgrounds have it. That's not fair."

PG: Right. You have to make some noise.

SD: Oh, I'm going to.

PG: You have to do that. Let's get back for a little bit, if it's all right, to your children and their experiences at West Charlotte. You say they went away for a number of years. They got bussed out to other places.

SD: Right.

PG: Then they came back here to high school.

SD: Right.

PG: Did you know all the time that they were going to be coming back to West Charlotte?

SD: I was hoping that they would get to come back to West Charlotte. I kind of felt like they would, but I wasn't sure. There have been kids down here on the lower end, they have been bussed out to different high schools, then they made like the magnet schools.

PG: Open?

SD: Open school. I said, "Well, okay. That's fine. They'll get to come back to West Charlotte." That I was very glad about, because I didn't want my child to have to

go live with somebody else just to get to come back to West Charlotte, and me living right here at West Charlotte's door. Are you going to give up your guardianship? No. I would have been downtown. I would have been in the paper, on the news and everything else for my children to go to West Charlotte.

PG: Would you have been willing to do that, to send them to live somewhere else in order for them to get to come here?

SD: That would have been my second option. My first was to go downtown to the board and to anybody else it took for my children to stay at home. My husband and I are supposed to raise our children. We're supposed to raise our children. I don't even know whether my husband would have agreed to it or not. He probably would have said, "Well, they'll just have to be bussed." But, no. I will fight to the end.

PG: Did you know families who sent their kids to stay with other people in order to be able to get them to go to West Charlotte?

SD: Some people let the grandparents. They just give up the guardianship. (). The kids would go home on the weekends. Then they've got to come back and stay at grandma's house all the time just so they can go for schooling? No, that's not right. Then you have people that are going to start lying about it. I can't live behind a lie, because if you tell one lie you've got to tell another lie to back it up. That's just me. I can't. I've got to be truthful. It's got to be done right or don't do it at all. That's just me.

PG: Do you think that your children's experience at West Charlotte was similar to yours in a lot of ways, or was it different? How would you compare those experiences?

SD: Since it was integrated already when they went, maybe I would say to a certain degree it was similar to mine. Until, just like I said, it comes down to the teachers. I had my oldest daughter making straight A's in a class, and the teacher's going to have her coming home in tears because she's going to flunk her because she didn't want to spend her lunch hour typing on a typewriter because they didn't have enough typewriters for her to do her work in class. No. I was at the school. My name is probably on her record for that. No, no, no. I went through her papers when she came home and told me this. She's always been a smart child. I went back through all of her papers, and her lowest grade was a ninety-eight. Oh, no. You're not going to flunk my child, just like I told the teacher, even if it meant me getting a lawyer and your losing your job. I told her, I said, "First, I'll go to the school board. If they can't do anything about it I will get legal help." And that I meant.

PG: Did it surprise you when that happened?

SD: Yes. It did. If it had been a situation where she was sitting in class and a typewriter was available but she wasn't doing what she was supposed to, I could understand the teacher. But they didn't have enough and this child is making one hundreds and ninety-eights, and then she's going to tell her that she's going to flunk her? No mam. I couldn't buy that. No. That was not my daughter's fault. She still should have given her her A even though she couldn't use that typewriter, and she wanted her to spend her lunch hour to do it. What is that telling you? Do you think you would want your child to be in school all day long with nothing to eat? Oh, no. I'm not going for that. Never.

PG: You'd think that something like that wouldn't happen when you were in school.

SD: No, I don't think so, not on a lunch hour. Now they may have taken our recess from us, but our lunch hour? You've been in school all day, and they're not going to let you go to lunch? No. That's against the law. No. I really don't think any other teachers to my knowledge, I haven't heard of any cases, but I can imagine that it is. Even with the kids in elementary school, they will tell you, "I couldn't go out to play because I misbehaved." But no, you go to lunch, even if you go to lunch and they separate you, put you at a different table. They're going to let you eat your lunch. But a kid in high school and you're going to tell them, "You've got to go on your lunch hour because the equipment is not available?" No mam. It will never happen, not in this household, not if I know about it because you will see me on the news. I've got grandchildren in school now, and Lord have mercy. They'd better not mistreat them because I will die. That's just like me telling my children, and I'd be kidding when I said this, "Okay. You're not allowed to whip them but I can because you don't know how." It's just something about grands. Some things are better, I think, in the schools. One reason is, I guess, because there's been so much publicity about it. But it will do all right for a while, then it flares up again, so what does that tell you? Are we making progress or are we not? I don't feel like we're moving too far ahead now. I don't. I feel like the only things that they have really done is because they were forced to integrate. Forced to integrate. I feel like if it had been done by the people ourselves instead of the law making us do it, it probably would have been better if the people had carried it out. But when you start forcing people to do things, now you know how that is. Because if somebody forces us to do

something, hey, I'm not going to do it because they're forcing me to do it, or I'm not going to do my best. I'm just doing it because they made me do it, just show that I'm putting forth some effort.

PG: Do you think when you are talking about these changes, do you think that your grandson's experience is different from your children's and yours? Is West Charlotte a different kind of school now, or maybe it's hard to say?

SD: I'll say it like this. It's hard to really compare because of the fact that I wasn't in the integration itself. When I went to school we weren't integrated. Since it has been integrated now our children get some chances, but I still feel like the white children have the better chances. I really do. The better choices, they get more scholarships. They get to go more places. They get to do more things. There's no way in the world that you're going to open *The Charlotte Observer* and look in that paper and see all of these white kids with all of these scholarships, Morehead and all the rest. Excuse my French, but I'll be damned if that's so because we've got plenty smart black children around here. We have plenty of smart black children around here. They are not getting the chance. My grandson will graduate in June, and I'm going to have to go to the school myself because this boy has been making straight A's, too. He hasn't made them all the way through school, but I know his average is high enough to be in the honor society. Do you think they have inducted him into the honor society? I told him, I said no. Here he comes now. Bless his heart. There's no way in the world. Those teachers should be up there checking all of the student's records. If they have the average, I know it takes more than an average. It takes personality and a whole lot of different things. But this child, and I'm not saying it because he's my grandson, but he is number one.

Everybody talks about what a sweet person he is, as far as personality and everything. He should be in the honor society, and I am going to find out why not.

PG: It seems like last year that principal Simmons tried to make some changes at the school. What did you feel about the changes he tried to make and how he went about it?

SD: From what I heard, the changes he tried to make, I think they were good. I really do. The problem is, whether you believe it or not, they say he was trying to get more black teachers up here. There should have been more black teachers up there. He tried to do different things to help the students. To my knowledge, I didn't hear them say he was just trying to help the black students. He was trying to help all the students. But, from what I can understand, because he was the principal, he was supposed to be the principal and make the decisions. The people, just like you said from South Charlotte, the other big shots over there they didn't like it. They want to run the school. They don't want the principal to run the school. That's not right. If Mr. Simmons was the principal up there, he was supposed to make the decisions. If he was too far out of hand, I could understand it, but he wasn't too far out of hand. He wasn't out of hand at all. To me downtown stepped on him, and that was wrong. Smith is sitting down there right now still making decisions and tell lies and doing what he wants to do, because he's going to do what those people want over in Myers Park, Foxcroft, wherever those rich kids come from. He's going to do what they want to do because money talks, but it's not right. It is not right. You watch what I tell you now. Any time you get a superintendent down there that doesn't do like those other people want him to do, he doesn't stay long. But it's not fair. What they should do is make the ones down there making decisions come

over here and go to school for a while. Let them sit in the classrooms. Let them go to the activities. Let them be up there as a student for about a year. I don't mean no thirty days because you can't tell. Make them go to school up there and they'll find out. That's the way I feel. I'll tell Smith to his face and anybody else. Do what's right. That's all I say.

PG: What do you hope for the future of West Charlotte, if you could look in the future and say what you'd like to happen for the school?

SD: I would love to see West Charlotte stay right in that same spot where West Charlotte is. If it means adding more buildings like they're doing now, add to the school. Have West Charlotte integrated like it's supposed to be. Have the best teachers that they can get and the best principal. I feel like even though I hated to see Mr. Simmons go, I feel like Mr. Cline is doing a superb job. I really do. When you've got to come back and try to straighten things out, that's a job, and he has done wonderfully well. He really has. I want them to leave West Charlotte alone as far as trying to close West Charlotte because I think there should always be a West Charlotte as long as we've got a Charlotte, North Carolina. I don't know why they keep trying to close West Charlotte. I wish I knew why. The way I feel is that the reason they're trying to close it is because they don't want their children bussed over here. That's the only reason. They don't know. Yeah, they know, too, that's why they don't want them bussed over here. Most of their girls are with these black guys over here. Hey, if that's what they want to do, if you leave the children alone they'll work it out. The more you try to pull something away, it's going to spring right back. Just leave West Charlotte as a school. I want to see West Charlotte there, and I still want West Charlotte to be number one for as long as I live.

PG: It seems like it's really important for a community to have an institution that stays that way for so many years. In Charlotte it is very unusual, there's not a white high school that's been in the same place as long as West Charlotte.

SD: That's right. I don't care where you go, somebody knows something about West Charlotte, so to me West Charlotte is speaking for itself. As long as you get the right faculty, principal, all the overhead. If you get the right people up there you're going to have the best students coming from West Charlotte, regardless, and it's going to always speak for itself.

PG: Well, I think that's pretty much what I was interested in talking about. This has been wonderful. Is there anything else that you want to say about the school that maybe we haven't covered that you feel ought to be said?

SD: No, not really. But I just still want them to give West Charlotte what's due to West Charlotte. Give West Charlotte the best of everything. Not only West Charlotte, all the schools. All the schools should be on an even keel, but leave West Charlotte as West Charlotte. We don't want to change the name. We don't want to change the colors or anything. Let that be West Charlotte because that was West Charlotte. Why come and change it? Don't change it. My daughter was there. She was in the band. Instead of having maroon and gold uniforms, they had West Charlotte marching in black uniforms.

PG: Really?

SD: Why? Why. No, no. I was in the midst of that because I went up to the school and voice my opinion about that, too.

PG: What did they say about the different color?

SD: Something about it was more classical, or more something. I told them that wasn't the point. When they chose the colors for West Charlotte Senior High School it was maroon and gold. Black wasn't in the program for West Charlotte Senior High School. Let West Charlotte High School still have its roots or its background. When we go to the other schools they've still got their class song and everything. The alma mater, or whatever. Why change? Why do you have to change it?

PG: It seems like they did at the beginning try to make some changes no one wanted.

SD: They did, but we don't want it changed. Just like they don't want theirs changed, we don't want ours changed either. We have got the people from West Charlotte that have gone to West Charlotte that really loved that school. I think that they are just like I am. They're willing to die for their school. Like I said I'd die for my grandchildren, I love West Charlotte. I do.

PG: When you say you love West Charlotte, what is it?

SD: I am a family oriented person. To me West Charlotte is more like a family. It seems like everybody cared about everybody. We wanted to see everybody succeed. It's just something there that to me wasn't in the other schools. When you go to them you just don't feel it. You know how you feel out of place at some places? That's the way I felt. To me West Charlotte is just like family, and it always has been.

PG: That's a good note to end on.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW