

TAPE 1, SIDE A

JEFF BLACK
March 29, 1999

PAMELA GRUNDY: This is Pamela Grundy , and I'm here at West Charlotte High School interviewing Jeff Black. It is the 29th of March, 1999. I guess I just want to start by asking you how and why you arrived in Charlotte.

JEFF BLACK: I was born in Milwaukee. My father was in the Air Force. He was also a commercial airline pilot with Piedmont Airlines. That forced us to move from Milwaukee. They moved the hub to Greensboro, I believe. Then from Greensboro we moved to Charlotte about ten years ago.

PG: Where did you move to in Charlotte?

JB: I moved to Autumn Wood which is a neighborhood right by UNCC. At the time we moved there there was absolutely nothing out there. Now it's just growing and growing. There's stuff everywhere now.

PG: How come you all moved out there in the country?

JB: I think it was pretty much my dad's idea. His dream is to have a lake outside the house and have a boat and all this stuff. So he's been trying to work with us at that, and that seemed like the best he could do without putting us somewhere where we couldn't be at a good school or get the same type of education we would in a public school system.

PG: Where's he from originally?

JB: He's from Little Rock, Arkansas. My mother's from Lake Charles, Louisiana.

PG: How did they meet?

JB: I think they got introduced in an elevator while he was in college at Valparaiso. My mother went to Grambling. I think she was visiting a friend, and he was a friend of her friend and they got introduced.

PG: Do you have brothers and sisters?

JD: Yes, I have two older sisters. One sister, Stephanie, is twenty-two. She was born in Big Springs, Texas. That was during the military time. My other sister, Sherilynn, just turned twenty, and she was born in Lake Charles.

PG: So your family has moved around, but you haven't moved around?

JB: Right. I didn't get the big huge moving experience that they did, but I had a little bit of it.

PG: When you think back on it are you glad you didn't have to move, or do you think it would have been fun?

JB: I'm sure it would have had its ups and downs, but I think I'm glad that I didn't have to because I have a lot of friends that have parents in the military. They've gone to four or five different high schools and just don't see any kind of consistency with what they're doing.

PG: So how did you come to be at West Charlotte High School?

JB: I started out at Newell Elementary School which is right by my house. After that my oldest sister, Stephanie, got into Piedmont Open Middle School with their open program, and we decided we all wanted to be part of that. We liked the learning styles at Piedmont so we all went to Piedmont, and Piedmont automatically filters into West Charlotte. West Charlotte houses the open program for Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools, the high schools.

PG: You had a pretty good ride from your home to Piedmont then.

JB: Yes, a pretty good ride.

PG: What was the appeal of the open program?

JB: It's hard to explain. It just seemed a little bit more free. You had a little bit more freedom in a lot of the classes. Instead of listening to a teacher lecture all the time you would get assigned projects or have a little contract. It seemed like you were doing independent study, even though everybody in the class was doing it. It was more like an independent study thing. You got to work in groups more, and just feed off of each other it seemed.

PG: Was this something that you really wanted to do, or was this really a decision that your parents made for you?

JB: Initially my parents played a major part in it. I was in fifth grade. I didn't know anything. It was their idea, but they explained it to me and it sounded like it would be interesting. I was sort of apprehensive about leaving my friends, but I got over it. I found out that there were a lot of people that I did know at Piedmont.

PG: So there were a number of people from your neighborhood who would go to Piedmont?

JB: Most of the people from my neighborhood went to J. T. Williams, but there were still a few people that I'd known from Newell that left Newell and went to Irwin which is the school that automatically feeds into Piedmont.

PG: Thinking back to your experience at Piedmont, is there anything that really stands out to you regarding the open program regarding things you learned?

JB: Gosh, I'd say ninth grade. Every year our classes at Piedmont took a field trip to somewhere. Sixth grade we went to DC. Seventh grade we went to Cherokee. Eighth grade we went to Six Flags, I don't remember why. Ninth grade in my biology class we went to Virginia Beach, and we went whale watching. Biology class seemed like the class with all my friends in it, and we worked really, really hard. That was the first year that we were able to offer biology at school so we all took biology, and we took the field trip and went whale watching. It just seemed that it culminated everything that we had learned. We got seasick. It was a great experience.

PG: That sounds really neat. Who were your friends? Were they mostly friends from school, or were they mostly friends from your neighborhood who went to your school?

JB: I'd say they were mostly friends from school. I still kept in contact with all the people that lived in my neighborhood that went to J. T. and other schools, but I just didn't see them as much because I did things after school which stopped me from doing that all the time. I'd say most of them were probably from school.

PG: What would you do after school?

JB: After school, gosh. Football practice or track practice or meetings of some sort.

PG: So you were real involved in school activities?

JB: Yes. I was really involved in school activities, and I was heavily involved in scouting and had to go to meetings at night. So I stayed pretty busy.

PG: And then you came to West Charlotte.

JB: Right.

PG: Now had either of your sisters come to West Charlotte before you?

JB: Both of them had. One was a ninety-seven grad and the other one was ninety-five.

PG: So you had a sense of what West Charlotte was going to be about?

JB: Um-hum.

PG: What were your thoughts upon getting ready to come to West Charlotte?

JB: Oh, gosh. I just expected it to be a whole lot bigger. West Charlotte was looked upon by all the other high schools, by everybody as, gosh, West Charlotte is the hippest school you can go to. We used to go to the football games when I was in eighth and ninth grade. The band and everybody just seemed to have so much school spirit. It's like, "Man, I'm going to be a part of West Charlotte. I'm going to be part of the huge football team." They were at the top of everything. I think that I just was really, really excited to come.

PG: When you got here did it meet your expectations?

JB: I'd say it did in some aspects, and it didn't at other times. I'd still say tenth grade was probably my favorite year. I was in the marching band, and the marching band has always been really, really good here. It seemed like it sort of fell off my junior year and has been going down hill since, unfortunately.

PG: Didn't the band director retire? Is that right?

JB: Um-hum. Mr. Davenport. He stayed tenth grade year, and then he left after that. A big part of West Charlotte left with that, just because the new people that were coming in hadn't had all the experience he had, and didn't have all the spirit, and didn't

know what West Charlotte was really about. It seems like some of the pride sort of slipped from there, but I feel they're coming back.

PG: What is West Charlotte really about?

JB: Gosh. West Charlotte is about being an individual but still being part of the whole. Through my experiences at West Charlotte I've learned who I really am, I think, and what I want to do. You have opportunity to do whatever you want to do here. You can go down a lot of different paths. I think it's just where I've had the opportunity to make my choice, and make the choice for myself of what I want to do. Everybody is still connected by the fact that we still pull together at all sporting events or pep rallies or anything. We all support each other. I think that that school spirit and that pride that everybody has is what makes West Charlotte such a good school.

PG: You say that it helped you figure out who you are. How did it do that? Can you think of specific things that happened to you or certain decisions you made?

JB: I think it deals with the people that you're around and the faculty as well, very diverse faculty. It comes from all different kind of backgrounds. Everything, and the people that come here. We have people from the open program that I was used to, and then people that live right down the street. You have people from all over Charlotte that come to West Charlotte. You meet so many different kinds of people and just get so many different views. It forces you to shape your own beliefs. You hear a lot of different perspectives, and you get to form your own opinions.

PG: Again, can you think of an encounter, maybe with someone or in a class that really brought that home to you?

JB: Actually, once I got here in tenth grade. I used to hang out primarily with the people from Piedmont. Once I got here, here were all my friends from Newell and from my neighborhood that I didn't really spend as much time with. I made a decision to come back and sit with those people at lunch. People from Piedmont were like, "Well, what are you doing?" It's like, "Hey, we don't have to fight about this, everybody just needs to meet each other." I think that was probably the first or second week in tenth grade when everybody sort of started mingling and just got to know a lot more people.

PG: Did you eat lunch inside or outside.

JB: Both really. In tenth grade and now I have primarily moved inside just because it's more convenient. You get to sit down and don't have to worry about bees and things like that.

PG: People talk a lot about West Charlotte and its diversity. It seems like that's a real significant part of it. Also, of course here in Charlotte, West Charlotte is known for its diversity primarily regarding racial integration. Is that something that is meaningful to you here at West Charlotte?

JB: It definitely is right now with my position in student council. We have little committees that we have divided up into. I'm head of the race relations committee. Right now we're working on a project to end de facto segregation in the cafeteria, primarily, because no matter how well we get along in the classroom and in the hallways at lunch time it still seems like everyone sits by their specific race. You have exceptions to it, but when you look that's still primarily what you see. So we're trying to organize a day now where everyone just tries to reach out and sit out with somebody they normally

wouldn't, or sit with somebody of a different race, just somebody that they wouldn't normally sit with so that they can meet different people.

PG: Why do you think that happens? Why do you think that shook out that way in the cafeteria?

JB: I think it's just people are more comfortable with things that are similar. Even if they have the same people in their classroom, they just haven't taken the time out to venture out during lunch or during free time or hang out on the weekends or things like that. I think it's gotten so it's isolated in the classroom instead of everywhere else.

PG: So in the classroom, in general, people mix pretty well?

JB: Yes, I think so.

PG: Ned was talking about how much he enjoyed the interaction in history classes between different folks. You've kind of got a smile. Is that something you enjoyed?

JB: Yeah. Gosh, class with Ned is fun. Like our Spanish class. It's extremely diverse. We have a great time in there. You just get all different perspectives. It makes you take a look at your own beliefs.

PG: What have you learned from some of these different people? Can you think of particular things you've learned?

JB: I'd say I guess that everybody loves to party. Everybody. That's that one connection. Everybody loves to get together and have a good time. I think that that's where you find a lot of the similarities. You may hear a bunch of people talking after a weekend. Like, "Yeah. I went to the mall. I did this. I went to this movie." If there's a party, a lot of people know about it. Everybody is talking like, "Yeah, I went to this

party.” “Yeah, you were there. I saw you.” I think that’s what brings everybody together, the fact that we’re all young. We all love to have a good time. I think after spring break you’ll hear a lot of the same stories.

PG: Do folks go to the same parties, or do they separate out like they do in the cafeteria do you think?

JB: I think it’s yes and no. There have been some parties that have been really, really mixed, and some of them where it’s just all one race and one or two exceptions. I think you have both, and I think that can be expected.

PG: Which parties do you go to?

JB: I go to all of them that I can. If it’s somebody that I feel like I’d have a good time hanging out with then I’ll go. But a lot of times parties these days don’t last very long just because the police break them up after like ten minutes. It’s like, “No. You all can’t gather here. No. You have to go somewhere else.” I think everybody loves to party.

PG: So you are on the student council. I guess that’s an elected position.

JB: Yes.

PG: What are politics like in West Charlotte? Whose support do you have to get to get elected to student council?

JB: Oh, gosh. I’d say in tenth grade when we all came from different schools and finally met everybody, I think that was more of a popularity contest than anything else. I guess it just came down to who had the speech that got the crowds the loudest at that point, because nobody really knew each other and they didn’t know the capabilities of each person. But I think that after that when people started seeing who was making

things happen in the student council then they started making more conscious choices. I was on class councils my sophomore and junior years, and this year I'm on student executive council. That's where you have to be voted on by the entire student body. I think that's where you really have to rally the support of everyone. When people see that you're doing the right things they'll vote for you, I think, because everybody wants a better school.

PG: What are the kinds of things that need to happen to make West Charlotte a better school?

JB: Longer lunches. [Both laugh.] There's a lot of things that could be improved. Longer lunches is definitely one of them because the cafeteria is extremely crowded. Just more school spirit activities. After tenth grade where we went through the whole administration change and big faculty turn over. We're still healing from that, and I think if we can get the pride level back to tenth grade and years before that, then I think we'd be in good shape.

PG: What kinds of things are you doing to try to do that?

JB: More pep rallies. Trying to get people involved in things that they normally wouldn't do. We normally don't have that many people at soccer games or at track meets. Everybody comes to the football games and basketball games, but try to get people to come to see everything that West Charlotte has to offer because we're really good in a lot of different areas that people really don't know about.

PG: Such as? You've got soccer and track. What else is good?

JB: Chess. I believe we won the chess state championship this year, and nobody knew anything about it. Things like that. Debate. Drama. It doesn't necessarily have to

be a sport for people to come out and support it. Like modeling clubs, step shows, anything. Just anything that has our school name on it I think should be supported by the school.

PG: You mentioned the administrative problems that happened during your tenth grade year. What was that like to experience as a student?

JB: As a student it really was a shock to everyone that I talked to. In my opinion it was purely a faculty problem. It really didn't involve the students. A lot of us were just kind of like, "What is this?" You pick up the paper and nine out of ten days there's West Charlotte on the front of the paper talking about these huge racial problems that they have. None of us were really aware of them. It's like, "Uh, I didn't know that." I think it was really with the faculty, and the students didn't really feel much effect at all. The one thing that stands out that I do remember that kind of shocked me was that we had an assembly one day in tenth grade. We all went to the auditorium, and they called this meeting. It seemed unnecessary to me. They were like well, "We looked at the test scores," from whatever test it was, "and it's showing that black males are the lowest scorers" on whatever test this is, "and you all need to work on this." It just seemed like they were yelling at us for being black males and scoring low on a particular test. I didn't really understand that. Then at the end they were like, "Yes. There are some people that are doing well, and some people that are very courteous," and all this, and they pointed out like one person. I don't know. It just seemed like, "Why are you telling us this?" I don't know. It seemed kind of stupid to me. But that was the only thing that stood out.

PG: This wasn't anything that you noticed in the halls or the classroom or anything like that?

JB: No. It was just like, "Well, we looked at these scores, and we looked at this survey, and this is what it's saying so you all need to shape up." I'm like, "Okay. Sure."

PG: That does speak to an issue that people talk about sometimes particularly in relation to school integration which is this question of tracking, the stereotype that you get white kids in the high level classes and black kids in the low level classes. Do you see that at all at West Charlotte?

JB: Last year I took five AP classes. In my AP chemistry class I was the only black person in there. I didn't even really notice it just because I had been with these people at Piedmont. It was primarily a class full of Piedmont people. I didn't even notice it just because I hung out with these people. I didn't really notice until there was an interpreter that was there, and he made a joke. I was like, "Hold on. Wait a minute." He didn't know me at all, and I didn't know him. Everybody thought that was a little out of line.

PG: What kind of joke was it?

JB: I had a habit of spilling stuff on myself in chemistry. I went up to the teacher and asked her if it was toxic. She was like, "No, it will stain your clothes." He was like, "Yeah, it'll turn you black." And then everybody in class just sort of turned around. It was like, "What?" Once he noticed nobody was laughing I think he sort of understood that that's not cool. No, don't do that. So I guess that situation sort of ended. But I don't know. It seemed odd that I was the only black person taking AP chemistry, but this year it's the complete opposite. Last year the teacher was asking me. She was saying

she didn't know why there were no black students taking AP chemistry. She asked me if I could do something to try to help recruit, but I didn't really know what to do. I just took the class because I enjoyed the way she taught and I enjoyed chemistry. I don't know. I guess teachers have to go out and recruit sometimes for the sole purpose of diversity. It really shouldn't be like that, but in that case that's the way it had to be.

PG: Did more people end up in AP chemistry?

JB: Yeah, this year it's a very diverse class, but last year it wasn't.

PG: Were your other AP classes more diverse? Was chemistry kind of an exception?

JB: Yeah, chemistry was pretty much the exception. If you ask me, that's probably the hardest class at this school, AP chemistry.

PG: Did you take the test.

JB: Yep. Got a four on it. I think everybody that took the class passed it with the exception of one or two people.

PG: That's pretty good. You're obviously very interested in academic achievement and taking AP classes and doing all this. Why is that?

JB: I guess I don't like to be bored. I like to stay busy. I'm not saying that these classes are making me any more busy than I would be normally even though I guess they should. I guess I'd say that I just don't want to be in a class where I'm not challenged. The AP class is the highest we have and that's the biggest challenge I can have. So that's why I took the class, because I want to be challenged in classes.

PG: Are you interested in science?

JB: I want to do sports medicine and orthopedic surgery when I get older.

PG: What made you interested in that?

JB: My participation in athletics over the years and seeing how sports make so many people happy. When I'm doing sport, when I'm working out it makes me feel good about myself and just makes me feel good in general. I've seen so much talent, especially here, I've seen so many talented people go down just because of an injury. We've had people that could have been professional athletes just get hurt one time and ruin all their plans, ruin all their looks from colleges and just everything. I think anything I can do to help people get back to what makes them happy, seeing that that's the same thing that makes me happy, I think anything I can do to help speed that process, that's for me.

PG: You say you do track and football?

JB: I used to do football. I stopped playing football once I got here, just because it was a huge time commitment. I still do track.

PG: What are the differences to you between track and football in terms of what you get out of them when you are doing them?

JB: Football is a lot more physically demanding. In track I just throw discus. Don't get me wrong. It's not easy or anything, but it's easier than football is just because football is always a team effort, always. Discus is an individualized event, and you just try to score points for the team but it's not a team effort whereas you have to practice this amount of time. The reason I didn't play football was not only the time commitment, but also you have to take weight training if you take football. I just didn't have room for that in my schedule, so I couldn't do it.

PG: Is that a problem for football players who want to do well academically to have the time?

JB: I guess they learn how to manage their time. I guess I just analyzed it and found that it wasn't that important for me where I was going to have to possibly suffer academically. If it means a lot to you, by all means go for it.

PG: Give up other things.

JB: Right. Sometimes you have to sacrifice what's important to you.

PG: Fewer parties?

JB: Right. That happens. Sometimes you've got to miss out on some parties.

PG: Well, of course West Charlotte is really known here in Charlotte, in the community around here, as an historically black school. It's the only high school in Charlotte-Mecklenburg that used to be an all black school and still has all of these connections to the community. How do you feel about your relationship to that history? Do you feel that you have a relationship to that history of West Charlotte as a black school, or not?

JB: I think if you come here you have no choice but to feel like you belong, just because you see the huge amount of support that you get. You look at the football. There's people that graduated from this school fifty years ago that still come to all the games. There's just a tremendous sense of belonging in anything that has the West Charlotte attachment. You find that people love this school, and they support it. It's supported by the community. It's supported by all the alumni. Once you come here you just can't stay away I guess.

PG: Do you think that black student have a different experience at West Charlotte than white students?

JB: I think white students that have been in a primarily white school are probably going to get an eye-opening experience just from surroundings. But, other than that, I don't think so. I think that if everyone chooses to get involved in everything then I don't think there's a real difference, because I think everyone gets along pretty well here. But if you stay to your self, and if you just decide to stay with your race and you don't go out to try to meet other people, then, sure, you're not going to get the same experience as if you ventured out to try to experience everything.

PG: You've had a real integrated experience all along, I guess.

JB: I'd say I've had an extremely integrated experience.

PG: Do you live in an—?

JB: It's a fairly integrated neighborhood.

PG: If you don't feel like you can speak to this don't feel like you have to. Do you think that there are some of the black students here for whom West Charlotte is a new kind of experience as well. You talk about the white kids for whom West Charlotte might be an experience. Do you think there are black kids for whom the integration of West Charlotte is something of a new experience?

JB: Yeah. I'd say there probably are a few predominantly black middle schools that people are coming from and that's a new experience. But I don't know. I guess there is. It was different for me just because I went to a predominantly white middle school. But I don't know. It didn't really make a difference to me because I wanted to

see everything, and experience everything, so I don't really think it made too much of a difference for me. I think you're going to have your extremes on both ends.

PG: So Piedmont was actually predominantly white?

JB: When I look back upon it, that's what I remember. I think it is.

PG: I guess especially after being here.

JB: Right.

PG: But you're saying that didn't seem that much different to you?

JB: Right. I don't know. Maybe I came to expect it, but it didn't really seem to be that big of a deal. Race does not seem to be that big of a deal at that school.

PG: Except that you do have your race relations committee.

JB: Right.

PG: What else do you work on? You talked about trying to break up the cafeteria a bit. What else do you work on in our committee?

JB: We just started that committee. That was the primary thing. We took suggestions, and that was one of the things that came up, the de facto segregation thing.

PG: Why did you start the committee?

JB: I didn't start it. I don't know when it got started, but we've always had that as a committee at West Charlotte with the student council. I'm not exactly sure when it got enacted, but we've had that committee for student council for a while. I'm not exactly sure, but our goal is to insure racial tranquillity at the school.

PG: What do you think about the debates in Charlotte now? There's a lot debates going on related to schools and bussing and neighborhood schools. Do you have a perspective on that?

JB: It sort of worries me. Ned and I both are on the () committee, which is Dr. Smith's little advisory group on education. My primary concern is I just don't understand how they're going to break up Charlotte into racially diverse and equally diversified sections. I don't see how that's going to happen. I've asked Dr. Smith, and he hasn't really given me a clear explanation as to how it's going to happen. I'm just really concerned about that, about how it can very possibly turn into a neighborhood school situation. You're going to have schools that are going to be primarily one race, and I don't think that people would get the same experience if they don't experience or interact with different people.

PG: Is that something that's important for your parents since they moved to this integrated neighborhood and since they send you to all of these schools? Is integrated experience important for them do you think?

JB: I think it's very important to them that we become well rounded people and learn how to interact. It's just fact that in the world there's going to be different types of people, and you're going to have to know how to interact with everyone. You can't just say, "Well, I'm going to stick to my race, and I'm going to stay over here." If you want to achieve anything in this world you're going to have to have the ability to work with different types of people.

PG: Do they talk to you about that?

JB: Yeah, we talk about it all the time.

PG: You do?

JB: Well, we did. Now they pretty much accept that I know what I'm doing.

PG: When would you talk about it?

JB: Gosh, at dinner we'd just talk about stuff that was going on in the news, and my mom loves to talk about school so we'd talk about it a lot.

PG: Would you tell her things that happened at school during the day?

JB: Um-hum. They'd ask, "How was my day?" My dad loves doing this. He just loves asking me, "Well, what do you think about this?" I think his goal in asking me stuff like that is just to make sure that I'm able to voice what I think. I think he's just trying to make sure I stay abreast of things in preparation for scholarships, interviews, and things of that nature and that I know how to express myself. I guess that's his goal.

PG: Do your parents ever talk to you about their own experiences or their own pasts in relationship to any of these questions?

JB: They haven't as much as I'd expect them to, but I think that's only because they realize I know who I am now. They don't have to reiterate to me all the time, "Well, you know, back when I went to school we didn't have this, and you need to take advantage of this." They see that I have initiative enough to go out and try to make a difference and try to experience everything. I guess they don't feel that they have to.

PG: Sometimes when I talk to people about West Charlotte, one of the interests of this project is integration. One of the reasons that we picked West Charlotte was it was an example of a school that both had this history as a black school but that also had this successful period in integration. But sometimes when I'm talking to people and I ask a lot of these questions I wonder if those are really the most important questions to ask. Asking about race relations. Asking about how students interact. If that really is what sums up the experience at West Charlotte, or if that's kind of going off in a different tack. What's your perspective on that?

JB: I'd say that the race relations issue tends to be stressed a little bit too much, but I think that was just because of the stuff that's happened over the past few years. Yes, I could expect for people who weren't here to be inquisitive about it. But I think that you find, I guess it's with anywhere, any school that you go through, if you care about your school then you're going to have that sense of belonging and that everybody will pull together. I think that's what makes West Charlotte so beautiful. It's that everybody pulls together for things. Most things are supported extremely well. At a football game you'll see white people sitting next to black people, black people sitting next to Asian people, Asian people sitting next to Hispanic people. It doesn't matter because we're all there for the same thing.

PG: How do you get that sense of belonging? How does the school create that?

JB: I don't know how it started, but whatever it is it's contagious. People just, gosh, I'm not sure. It's hard to describe. I just felt like, "Hey, this is West Charlotte. This is my school. We're doing great things, and I want to be a part of it." I think everybody just wants to be a part of something. Once you're at the top I guess everybody wants to stay there and everybody is willing to come out and support it.

PG: Is there anything else about West Charlotte that you think is important that I haven't asked you about? About your experience or the person it's made you or anything like that?

JB: [Long pause.] I think it's concerns about West Charlotte in the future. Once this whole pupil assignment things goes through, I'm just concerned about what it's becoming or what's happening. I see certain facets of West Charlotte improving. I see race relations improving at West Charlotte again after all the stuff that happened with the

faculty. But now I also see things that have been tradition like the marching band, that's changed drastically over the past few years with Mr. Davenport leaving. I'm concerned about the direction that's taking. The marching band has been the main thing. This has been my disappointment in the school over the past few years. I wasn't even in it this year just because I wasn't going to be a part of that. I don't agree with what's happening. It seemed like people were like, "We have to change this. This isn't right." No. I don't think they understood a lot of the things. We used to do breakdowns and dances on the field all the time. The administration came down my eleventh grade year and was like look, "You are all not going to do that." Like, "Why not? What's the matter?" Like, "No. That's not proper. That's not West Charlotte." What they didn't realize was that is West Charlotte. They just haven't been there to see that. There are some things that are just tradition at West Charlotte. We did a field show this year. It wasn't even a high step routine. It was just like corps-style marching. That's good that the band knew how to do that, but people didn't want to see that. That's not what West Charlotte's known for. It's like people are thinking we're a ghetto school. People are thinking that's all we do is dance. But some things are just tradition, and that's what concerns me. The type of changes that are being made just strictly based on perception instead of what West Charlotte has always been about.

PG: Do you think that perception is the concern that West Charlotte is going to be perceived as being too black?

JB: It seems like that was the motivation in the changes that were made with the marching band. Gosh, I don't know. The crowd seemed to enjoy it. Everybody else seemed to enjoy it. I don't see why we have so much trouble within our own school.

PG: Was this mostly an administration concern?

JB: It was mostly administration I think.

PG: That's very interesting, because everybody talks about the band when they're talking about the school.

JB: It got so bad they threatened that we weren't even going to be able to compete. Like, "Well, no. We're just going to take you all off the field if you all do that."

PG: Really?

JB: Like, why? That's what we've always been about. But, that's what we're not going to be about now. We're taking West Charlotte to bigger and better things. I don't think that what we've done has not been any bigger or any better than what we were doing before as far as the marching band.

PG: That's really interesting.

[PHONE RINGING IN THE BACKGROUND.]

JB: Wonderful phone. I've got an idea.

PG: That doesn't help. Do you see that concern in other areas of the school? Perception is a very interesting thing related to West Charlotte I think.

JB: I don't think it's a problem anywhere else but with the marching band, it's just the one thing. It's like, "Come on. What are you all doing?" That's been one of the main things. When we went to the games in ninth and eighth grade, everyone knew the fight song to West Charlotte. Even that was changed at the beginning of the year. I think eventually they went back. They said, "We didn't have the music." It's three notes. You can tell it was an excuse being made just because of the perception thing. They've

added some things that are interesting. Now we have flag girls instead of just dancing girls. That's interesting. I don't think that you should sacrifice what entertains the crowd for something else so that you all could be politically correct. I just don't think that's a sacrifice you should make. You don't compromise yourself for a perception.

PG: This is something you hear just being out in the community, the concern about keeping white kids wanting to come to West Charlotte. There's no question that there's going to always be lots of African-American kids who want to go to West Charlotte because of it's history, because of where it is, because their parents went there. These kinds of things. There's concern about whether white kids will keep wanting to come. Do you ever sense that?

JB: I sensed that right after we had the huge administration change where everybody was like, "Well, Vance and Butler are both opening up." People were like, "Hey, I'm going there." A lot of the baseball players left because that was supposed to be this huge baseball school. They were putting together this huge all star team. Like, "Hey, it's going to have a great baseball team. Hey, my favorite teacher's leaving here, and I want to follow this teacher." Stuff like that. It seemed like we lost a whole lot of the white kids that were here. I don't know. They've been replaced. It doesn't seem like there is a big change in the percentages or anything. There's a whole lot of freshman walking around. That's just one big change that we've all had to get used to. The freshman class walking around.

PG: In terms of freshman class, meaning?

JB: Before there was just tenth, eleventh, and twelfth.

PG: Now you've got the ninth grade.

JB: Yeah. It's getting a little bit more crowded. Just a little bit.

PG: This has just been great. I really appreciate your taking the time to talk to me. Again, is there anything else quick that you have to say?

JB: Oh, gosh. No. I think I've pretty much covered everything. June 3rd, 5:30
I'm ready to graduate.

PG: Ready to graduate and go on to Chapel Hill.

JB Oh yeah. Four days until spring break.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

SPELLING QUESTIONS

PAGE ITEM

- 1 Sister's name: Sherilyn
- 2 Elementary School: Newell

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