

Shelia Florence
Interviewed by Bob Gilgor
20 Jan 2001

BG: This is January 20, 2001. This is Bob Gilgor, interviewing Sheila Florence at Ted Stone's home at 312 McDade. Good afternoon Sheila.

SF: Good afternoon.

BG: How are you?

SF: I'm fine

BG: I appreciate your sitting here talking with me on a Saturday afternoon. The first question I want to ask you is what was it like growing up in Chapel Hill?

SF: As I think back, it was good for me growing up. My school years, I attended Northside Elementary School and I had good teachers. I had teachers that showed that they cared for the students and worked with us and as I think back at a younger age, as a child, do I go back that far, as a child? I think back growing up as far back as when things was not integrated, and back then, that's the way things was, that's the way we was brought up, and we just figured that's the way its supposed to be. And the way they had the signs at the bus stop -- me and my Mom used to go to the Trailways bus station to catch the bus to Durham -- they had black, well it was "colored" back then, on one side and "white" on the other, and we had our place on the bus, we had our water fountains for coloreds and our bathrooms for coloreds, and we figured that's just the way its supposed to be until later when integration did come about, and we came into the knowledge that it's not supposed to be that way, everybody's supposed to be equal -- but being white, white thought "white meant right" and back then white was superior, and we just assumed that's the way its supposed to be, and we just let things go as it was, and that's just the way it was until Martin Luther King came and then we could see the light and knew that it wasn't supposed to be that way.

BG: So were you taught to just follow the system?

SF: We were taught that's just the way it was, that's the way it's supposed to be, and everybody just automatically knew. You just didn't get out of line, you didn't go to the water fountain, cause you could see the sign, or if you didn't read our parents would show us -- "now, we use this water fountain, or this bathroom, and this is for somebody else, this is for white people," they'd say.

BG: Did you grow up in the same neighborhood right here?

SF: Yes, right down the street, and we all got along and, back then, it's not like today, everybody going this way and that way and nobody has time to visit. Back then, everybody knew each other, and everybody took time with each other, cause everybody was somebody in the black community, back then. We had time to go to visit, and when one child got out of line, then that parent would correct them and call the child's mom and say "Sheila, or Charles, or whoever, was cutting up and I had to correct them." And then when we got home, then we would be corrected again.

BG: Double trouble.

SF: Double trouble [laugh]. But now, nobody, you can't discipline anybody else's child, so a lot of that's changed. So it was nice, had a good life back then.

BG: What were your parents like?

SF: Well, let's see. My mom was active in the community because she was the piano player for the church, and everybody knew, her nickname was "Bodie," everybody around knew Miss Bodie, because she played for five different churches at one time, and she liked to sing, and play, she played piano, and she played organ, and she played guitar. My aunt, [] Cotton, taught my Mom to play guitar, and she learned playing on a freight train. I had a good mom, and my dad, he got killed in a car accident. I was a teenager at the time.

BG: What did you dad do for a living?

SF: He delivered coal, Bennett and Blocks, they delivered coal to heat wood stoves, back then.

BG: Did your mom, did she work also?

SF: Yes, she worked also. She done domestic work, she would go to the home and clean up, we called that, it wasn't housekeeping, but the term nowadays is domestic work, but house cleaning. Yes, she done house cleaning. And washing and tending to, if the person had a child, she would tend the child in the home. She would leave our house and go tend to the white folks' place.

BG: How many days a week did she work?

SF: 5 days a week.

BG: Did she have the weekend off?

SF: Weekends off, and then on weekends she played for choir rehearsals and church services.

BG: Who made the dinner if she was out working?

SF: Well, she's get off at like 2 o'clock, one o'clock. Back then, you only worked from 8 to 12 or from 8 to one or two. Then she'd come home, and then she'd do dinner.

BG: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

SF: One brother and one sister. I had one brother that was two years older than I am and one sister that was three years younger.

BG: Did your parents ever talk about the work that they did?

SF: Sometimes, my Mom did, because she'd go and -- one of the persons she worked for was Anne Queen. Anne Queen was head of the Y down on campus, and she said "I'm going down to Anne Queen's" or "I've been up to Anne Queen's and she had several people up for her party," and she'd help with the dinner and then wash the dishes and then help put everything back away.

BG: How did your parents get along?

SF: They had ups and downs, cause they were divorced. When he got killed, they were divorced already. So I was like, middle-age, when they divorced, cause he liked to drink a lot, spend a lot of money, then come home and all the money'd be gone.

BG: How much alcohol abuse did you see in the community?

SF: Not a lot back then, or they kept it hid. Like my dad, he go out and drink and then come home and sleep.

BG: So he didn't beat up your mother?

SF: No, didn't have anything like that.

BG: Did you see much abuse?

SF: No. Can't think of a lot back then.

BG: Did you see as many single-parent homes back then as you do today?

SF: No, back then, they stayed together, even sometimes if they didn't get along for the children's sake they would stay on and you'd find out later that the Mom slept in one room and the Dad slept in another room. They were in the same house.

BG: But you did see some single parents.

SF: Some. But nowadays they have single parents because the girls get pregnant so young.

Back then, they'd didn't talk about sex, but nice girls just didn't do that. Back then, that's how we

were brought up. Nice girls didn't go out after dark. They'd go to school, come home, do the homework, help around the house. You didn't go off up the street. Or you'd go off with your Mom or dad. You had your friends, and they'd come over to the house, and you'd walk over to community center, or up to the store, but you'd be back before dark. That was the rule.

BG: Was the community center a big gathering place?

SF: Oh yeah, that's where'd we all go, to the community center.

BG: Is that what's now the Hargrave center?

SF: The Hargrave center. But now, like some men, some of the girls, we'd get together and walk over the center. We'd go in and listen to music and we'd try to dance, or meet up with some other friends and talk about what's going on at school.

BG: You said that Northside teachers really cared for you.

SF: Oh yeah, if you weren't doing your schoolwork they'd call up your parents and let them know that, that we're talking too much and not doing our homework, not doing our schoolwork.

BG: And then what would happen?

SF: Then our parents would get on us [laugh].

BG: So the teachers really cared for the students and you saw that in how they would contact the parents and tell them you weren't doing your studies.

SF: Yeah, because like my brother in school he liked to go and have a good time, to play, in school, do a lot of talking, so he got reported. And the teacher called my Mom up and said "Charles is not doing his schoolwork, you need to get on him." And she'd say, "Okay, I'll get on him, I'll straighten him out," is what she'd say [laugh]. And back then, I don't know about other parents, but she believed in getting the switch. You go out and get your own switch. You wouldn't get a little weak switch, but she'd go behind you and get 2,3 and wrap them together, and that's when you got a whipping.

BG: Where did you get the switch?

SF: Out in the yard, we had hedges [laugh].

BG: Where did you get hit with the switch?

SF: ON your legs [laugh]. She believed in stinging your legs with it.

BG: How many stings would you get?

SF: Several [laugh].

BG: It wasn't like twenty or thirty?

SF: Oh no, not like that many.

BG: Not like child abuse?

SF: Oh no, not like child abuse. Because she was saying "yeah, nowadays, if you used the switch more, you wouldn't have a lot of trouble going on." The children wouldn't get in as much.

BG: Did they use the switch at school?

SF: No, let see. They used the ruler.

BG: The ruler.

SF: ON the hands, cause I remember getting hit on the hands a couple of times. You'd get three or four licks on the hands.

BG: You don't seem to be upset by that, or angry. You had a smile on your face.

SF: Well, that's just the type of person I am. But back then, I was upset about it, cause I didn't think they should discipline that way.

BG: What do you think now? Do you still think that?

SF: I think they should be punished. And I know sometimes, they have us to write on the board, "I will not act up," or "I will not talk in class," or "I will not talk in school."

BG: So you like that kind of discipline better than physical.

SF: Than physical. I think that would work better.

BG: What kinds of games did you play outside?

SF: Outside at recess we'd play, what was that, we'd play baseball, or jack rocks, that's what we liked to play. The girls used to play jack-rocks and the boys would play-

BG: -marbles-

SF: Marbles, that's it. And we would play hopscotch. That's what the girls like to play.

BG: Hopscotch and jack rocks. Are jack rocks those little jacks?

SF: Jacks and a ball. You'd throw it up in the air and pick up a jack. We played that. I can't remember whether they had basketball or not. Maybe at a higher grade the boys would play basketball. And the girls, that's when we would play our hopscotch. But like we were saying, the younger age, we would play jack rocks, color, stuff like that at break.

BG: What kind of house did you live in?

SF: Let's see, I lived in a two bedroom. Two bedrooms, a bathroom, a kitchen, and a living room.

BG: And what kind of heat did you have?

SF: We had a wood stove.

BG: So your bedroom wasn't heated if the stove was in center.

SF: It wasn't in the center, it was back in one of the bedrooms where my Mom slept. And also, we had my grandmother lived with us.

BG: So you had you, your mother and father, your grandmother, your brother, and a sister.

SF: A brother and sister. That's right. It was crowded [laugh]. Everybody didn't have bedrooms like they do today. Let's see, like, my Mama, Dad must have been gone then. Years ago, my Mom and Dad slept in one bedroom and then grandma and the children slept, like me and my brother and my sister, we had a roll-away bed that we put in the middle, in the middle of the floor. So we had four people in one bedroom. And the wood stove. Back in that room you had to keep the door open for the heat to circulate.

BG: No air conditioning?

SF: No air conditioning. The house still don't have, the house we live in now still don't have air condition. My mama was brought up with no air condition, and she didn't ever get used to the air condition. In wintertime, to stay warm, we had the plastic over the window.

BG: Did you have plaster on the wall, or could you see the -

SF: -plaster on the wall. Plaster on the wall.

BG: The cold didn't just come right through.

SF: No, but you had to keep the fire going. Or, I remember, before we got the wood stove, we had a fireplace, and we had to go out and get wood and keep the fireplace going. And if it ever went out, then everybody be cold. And I remember, I was growing up, and my brother went to bed, and he would go up near fireplace and because he was wet, he'd be smoking. He'd come back in and he'd be smoking. [laugh] But that was the best we could do back then.

BG: [laugh] Did you have running water in the house?

SF: Had running water.

BG: Did you have a toilet in the house?

SF: We had a toilet, but it was on the back.

BG: Outside the house?

SF: on the back porch, we would call it. You had to go out in the cold to get to the bathroom.

BG: It wasn't an outhouse?

SF: No, it was just a porch. No sink to wash hands. And you'd come back into the kitchen, and we had a spigot there, when you first come in the door there was a spigot with a bucket and that's where, we had soap beside of it, and that's where you'd wash your hands.

BG: There was no shower or a tub?

SF: No we used "whit tubs" [right word?] we called it. When time to get a bath, and we'd use that. What we do, we'd heat water on the stove and then pour it over into your tub and then we'd add cold water to it. And that's where you'd get your bath. In the kitchen there was a wood stove and I guess you'd put wood in there to get that going. So you'd be in there where it was warm and then that's where you take your wash-up. We call it "wash-up." And back then, we'd wash it, like in the tub, very few days. You didn't wash-up every night. We had a sponge bath the other days, but we had a smaller tub. You put the water in that, you put it on top of the wood stove and you get it warm, and then you take it down and you wash up.

BG: When you were growing up did you have a dictionary in the house?

SF: I don't think so. No.

BG: Did you have an encyclopedia?

SF: Maybe up in years.

BG: Later on.

SF: Later on, we had a dictionary. I don't think we had an encyclopedia until I got maybe to junior high school. We didn't need one back then. Well, we thought we didn't need one. Cause lot of time some of the books had dictionaries in the back and we'd look up our little words and what we needed.

BG: Did you use new books or used books at Northside?

SF: Used books. We always had used books.

BG: Where did they come from?

SF: Came from the white schools.

BG: They were, how they?

SF: When we got our books, the teacher would put "good, bad, or poor condition." A lot of them was like, bare and poor conditions.

BG: So they were in bad condition?

SF: It depends what grade you were in, and how much the other people had used the books. I had forgot about that.

BG: Were there pages missing?

SF: Sometimes, and then you'd have to try to find another book with all the pages. But thinking back, I had forgot about that we had used used books.

BG: Are there any other things that you remember about Northside?

SF: Um, I do remember we had the heating. Sometimes we'd be sitting in there with our coats on cause we'd be cold and the heat was radiator, radiator heat, I remember that.

BG: Sometimes it wouldn't work?

SF: Sometimes it would break down. Or, when it's cold cold, it didn't get warm enough, you'd have to keep your coat on. Let's see what else. Lunchroom. The food, I thought, was pretty good, cause a lot times I'd carry, we'd have to carry our lunch, I'd carry my lunch cause back then money was scarce. Didn't have a lot of money. And, the way my Mom worked, she didn't get paid a lot for doing housework.

BG: Did she ever tell you how much she made?

SF: You didn't get but ten dollars a week, twenty dollars, if you'd done good. That was a good week. But you had your other bills. And after that, my Dad being gone, wasn't much left over. And my grandmother, she didn't work, she wasn't able. I know when she did work, she done housework. It was like passed down from generation to generation back then. My great-grandmother, she done housework. And then my grandmother, she done housework, plus ironing. She took on ironing to make a little extra money.

BG: Could you make a little more money doing ironing?

SF: A little more money. Cause she'd get paid for housework plus ironing. She'd take in, she'd bring the clothes home and she'd wash them -- back then they had the washboards, that's the way she'd have to wash -- and Octagon soap on the washboard and the washboard and then rinse them and hang them on the line. And then she would iron them, fold them up, and carry them back. And then she'd get paid, and she'd make some money doing that.

BG: Did the children help with that?

SF: No, we didn't help with that because we might burn it, then cut back on the money.

BG: So you were at Northside from 1955 . . . [inaudible]

SF: Oh, first grade, when I was six years old.

BG: What did you remember from then?

SF: That so far back, I don't even remember [laughs]. I'm fifty-three now, I turned fifty-three this past June, cause I was born in 1947.

BG: Were your streets paved here?

SF: No. Didn't start off paved.

BG: Did you have streetlights?

SF: yeah, we had street lights, but streets were not paved till over in the years, then they started over top McDade street all the way down to where I was living, and then the other streets was dirt. It was years and years before they paved the other, went on down because of, they said because of the money.

BG: When did they get paved?

SF: Oh, I was up in age then, I was like maybe about 12, 13, 14 years old then. I remember we used to skate on roller skates and we'd start up top of the hill and then we'd come down and we'd have to stop most of the time at the bottom and go up the hill cause our pavement would run out. So we'd start where it wasn't paved, up the hill.

BG: So you left Northside in 1959, is that right? And you went to Lincoln High School?

SF: Lincoln High School. And I was there maybe two years, let's see, maybe '62.

BG: What do remember about Lincoln High?

SF: Lincoln High! That was a *school* back then. Everybody couldn't wait to get to Lincoln High School, cause it was well known for the band, they had a good band, and because, as we said, they could cut up. The band was good and also, football, they had a good football team. So Lincoln was known for football, basketball, and the band. So we couldn't, couldn't wait to go to Lincoln High School. So, plus, I couldn't wait, cause I lived near Northside -- I could walk to Northside -- and when I went to Lincoln, I could ride the bus. So that was something new, something different. So I'd catch the bus and go to Lincoln High School. We looked forward to going to Lincoln High.

BG: What about the teachers there?

SF: They were still strict, as I can remember. Seventh grade, I remember getting hit by a ruler, seventh grade, so that was still going on, back then. Um, let's see. I think they were good teachers. Can't remember a lot about that, but they were good. I remember the work getting

hard, cause we leave Northside and went to we call it the "high school," and the work, the classes got harder, but I don't remember changing classes. We'd go to one and that's where we'd be all day?

BG: At Northside?

SF: At Lincoln.

BG: So you'd stay in the same classroom all day?

SF: I think so, far as I can remember. I was in the band, 7th and 8th grade. I had a brother he was in the band, he played the drums.

BG: What did you play?

SF: I played French horn. And I remember Mr. Egerton, he was well known for being a good band teacher. He was the best all around, so if you got in the band, you were doing good. So, I liked the band, always like English, liked Social Studies, and I done pretty good, I thought, at school.

BG: Did you feel your teachers went out of their way to see that you learned?

SF: Uh, yes I think so, they did. Back then, they were concerned more about the students?

BG: How did they show that?

SF: They seen that we brought our homework and went over things in school, I think they took up more time with us in school, back then.

BG: More time than now.

SF: More time than now. Now, you go to school and you get your education -- it's alright if you don't, it's alright. But back then they prepared us for our education, and our education, we had this big test once a year and we were supposed to do well on the test so they tried to prepare us so that as black students we wouldn't look bad compared to the whites. So, I think that was the main reason.

BG: Were there other things you remember about your teachers? Did they live in the community?

SF: Yes, they lived in the community. I remember, it's a big house, on McDade Street, teachers lived, they roomed in the house across from where I was living at the time.

BG: A boarding house?

SF: A boarding house, cause I remember two teachers. And I remember being at Northside, two of the teachers roomed at the house, but on the weekends they went home.

BG: So they came from out of the area?

SF: Out of the area. But lived here to teach during the week. So a lot of things you're bringing up I really had forgot [laughs]. But I hadn't thought about for years, I'm trying to remember.

BG: Do you remember if your parents owned their house, or if they rented?

SF: No, there was no renting back then. Everybody tried to own their home, no matter what kind of work that you were doing, most, especially the black people, tried to own their home.

BG: They had a mortgage they had to pay.

SF: Yes, they had to pay mortgage every month. And a lot of the homes were pass-me-down, inherited, like the parents would live in there and then the parents would die and then the children still live there, and then they owned it. That's how it was back then. So they worked on it, it was a big thing to own your own home. And also to own a car, didn't many blacks own their own cars back then. Now, like everybody owns a car, but back then it was privilege to own a car. That mean you were somebody if you had a house and a car. I know my grandmother, they said, owned the first T-model Ford round in the black community.

BG: Did you feel happy growing up?

SF: I did.

BG: Did you look forward to going to school?

SF: I did. I looked forward to going to school. That was the thing back then, going to school and going to church, those were the 2 things we looked forward to doing.

BG: Did you feel poor?

SF: Sometimes, compared to the other blacks. But we didn't have a whole lot, but some had more than others, depending on what the parents done for the job that the parents done.

BG: Did you feel like had enough to eat?

SF: Well, we always had some food. We never went hungry, but it wasn't the best, like we'd have sometimes buttered biscuits, butter and jelly, breakfast we'd have oatmeal, we didn't have cereal, we had oatmeal. Or sometimes we had fatback meat and eggs and toast, not toast, biscuits was the thing back then. We didn't have a lot of meat, cause meat was expensive back then, but we had enough to get by with. We weren't every hungry. Sometimes we'd have beans and weenies, that was a meal. And sodas, didn't have a lot of sodas, we had a lot of water, sometimes sodas was a luxury. Milk, we'd have milk. My Mom, she'd always see we had something to eat, sometimes parents go without to provide for the children, to give to the children.

BG: Did your families share with neighbors?

SF: I do remember where you'd have a garden and then you'd share with your next door neighbor and then somebody didn't have much, you tell them to come by and pick something out of your garden, or you'd pick something and carry it to them. Back then, people shared. Or, meat, they'd have chickens out in the yard. I do remember my grandmother killing a chicken. WE had chicken on Sunday. Through the week you didn't have meat, but on Sunday you'd have fried chicken.

BG: A big meal after church?

SF: After church? Oh yeah, that was Sunday dinner. We'd look forward to gonna have some friend chicken and green beans and stuff out the garden.

BG: Did you family go to church every Sunday?

SF: Every Sunday. Sometimes twice on Sunday. That was the thing for the black people back then, I call our recreation, things to do. Like nowadays people go out to the movies or go out to eat or something. But we would go to morning service, come back home and eat, and then we'd go for an afternoon service. My Mom playing for church, I stayed at church all the time.

BG: Did your Dad go too?

SF: He didn't attend much church. I don't remember him going a lot. By him drinking, he would stay home, or he would go out with his buddies. They call that "going to the bootlegger joint." They sit around drink, talk.

BG: On Sundays?

SF: On Sundays! Yeah.

BG: Do you remember anything more about Lincoln High School? Did you mother get involved?

SF: PTAs, my Mom, she would always go the PTA meetings. She would keep up with what was going on when I was at Northside and Lincoln High School.

BG: She liked PTA?

SF: Yeah, she liked PTAs. Back then, the parents went to the PTAs so they'd know what, keep up with what's going on in school, how the child is doing. I remember we had open house, where parents would come, and we'd do little projects for open house and parents could come

and meet the teachers and ask how your child is doing. You try your best to do good though, you'd be in trouble. Or, didn't have a project and parents want to know, "well where is your work," cause they'd lay our schoolwork out for the parents to see, and then if we didn't do go, then we'd get disciplined. We'd get the switch.

BG: Did your parents talk to you about school, about doing well in school?

SF: Oh yeah. Have to do well in school, because if you don't do good in school, get a good education, you would have to work, you wouldn't get a good job, is what my Mama would say. "You don't want to do cleaning up, or washing and ironing. Want you do better, do a little better."

BG: What about your grandparents, did they talk to you about school?

SF: No, I can't remember them talking about. They didn't talk much about education back then.

BG: But your parents did?

SF: My Mom did. I don't know about the other, but I think most all the children back then tried to do good, make a good impression for the Moms.

BG: Do you remember the principal Mr. McDougle?

SF: Oh yeah, I do remember him. I remember mostly Mr. Peace, the principal of Northside. Mr. McDougal, he was principal of the High School.

BG: What do you remember about Mr. Peace?

SF: I remember all the students used to get nervous when they see him coming, therefore, remembering that, he must have been a strict man [laugh]. A strict principal. You'd hate to get sent to the office because you'd get put on punishment, and he'd always let, everybody would know each other in the black community, and he would know your parents and so he would let them know, he'd get in touch with the parents, send notes home.

BG: Same day?

SF: Same day. He could call them up. So I can't remember too much about the principals, except he was strict and you wouldn't want to get sent to the office.

BG: Mr. McDougal, was he strict too?

SF: I don't think he was strict, no. Everybody had respect for him. Back then, students had respect for principals and teachers.

BG: What about adults in general, did they have respect for adults in general?

SF: I think so.

BG: More so than today?

SF: More so than today. Yeah.

BG: But especially teachers and principals?

SF: If you were a teacher or a principal, or a higher up, you were somebody. The blacks would look up to them.

BG: Did they have any leadership roles in the church, the teachers?

SF: Two principals belonged to the church that I was brought up in, so they did play an active role and everybody did look up to them, in churches. I'm trying to think, the principals would stress to parents how important it was to come to PTA meetings and when they would have one, announcement time they would get up and say "We having a PTA meeting Tuesday night, be sure to try to come," or "PTA meeting, Open House, come see how your children doing in school." So they played a part like that.

BG: So at the church they talked about the schools?

SF: About the schools. And that's about all I can remember about the principals. I can't remember if they sung in the choir, I can't remember them singing in the choir. I know they would come to services as a family. I do remember that.

BG: So you spent two years at Lincoln High.

SF: Two years.

BG: So that would be 7th and 8th grade.

SF: 7th and 8th grade.

BG: And from there you went to --

SF: --to Chapel Hill High School. Junior High School was on this side of the building, High School was on the other side.

BG: So you went to the junior high for a year?

SF: Let's see, 9th grade, yeah, I think that's how it was.

BG: Do you remember the year?

SF: I think it's like 19, 1962, must have been '62, September 62, cause I finished in '65.

BG: Were you the first black student to go to the High School, or had there been other blacks?

SF: No, no blacks. I was among one of the first that went, that integrated the Chapel Hill High School, Chapel Hill Junior High.

BG: Before you went there did you get any orientation during the summer to tell you what it might be like?

SF: No I didn't. We went, as far as I can remember, that was a long time ago, we had orientation just like everybody else. Went to the school, we would, they told all about the school, changing of classes, what we were required of, and that's about it.

BG: Was that during the summer?

SF: Oh no, that was school starting. Yeah they let us know that we were going to be leaving Lincoln High School going to, I just call it, Chapel Hill High School.

BG: Now did you want to do that?

SF: Cause I thought about it, I thought it would be a good thing in one way, in another way, I was scared to death to go. I was very nervous, but different ones, especially my Mama, she was saying "Well, I think you oughta go," because of their education was so much better, that was one thing that was stressed upon. And they were saying that we wouldn't have the same books, they were teaching one thing at Lincoln, another thing at the white schools. And so I said, well, I'll go. I was offered a chance to go, that was the way it was, I was offered a chance. I think so many more, so many other people they had asked, and nobody wanted to go.

BG: They wanted to stay at Lincoln?

SF: They wanted to stay at Lincoln, I guess because Lincoln was an all-black school and the place to be, back then. Lincoln High School. And back then, blacks had their school and whites had their school, and just didn't mix back then. That just wasn't the thing to do, and plus they didn't want to miss out on some of the activities or miss out on being with their friends at Lincoln High School, being with the buddies.

BG: Now you played in the band at Lincoln, weren't you a little young to be playing in the band?

SF: Not back then, seventh grade band started, band started when you were in 7th grade.

BG: Now you were in the big band?

SF: Big band. But I had this big horn and I was a little person, but that was the place to be, you looked forward to being in the band, you get a chance to play at football games, and you look forward to going, and then you look forward to going to the away games. Cause the band would go play at halftime. You'd go to be seen, that was the thing, being seen in the band. Then also

we played for parades and your friends could see you marching down the street in the parade. You felt important, you felt like you were somebody, when you were in the band. So that was one thing to look forward to. Let's see what else. And then you knew other higher up, friends higher up, or people in your community that was in higher up classes. And you looked up to them as your role models.

BG: In school or in general?

SF: In school and in general. You wanted to be like them, cause a lot of them were doing good, making good grades and also some was in the band, some was in other activities at the school and you would say, "when I get up in 9th grade, 10th grade, I'm gonna be like s-and-so." So, use some of the older ones as role models.

BG: How many people were in the band?

SF: Oh, big band. Maybe I'd say at least 50 people.

BG: Did you have special uniforms?

SF: Oh yeah, you had your own uniform.

BG: Who provided the uniforms?

SF: The school did. And we'd raise money and do projects to raise money for your uniform.

BG: Was the PTA involved in that?

SF: Yes. PTA, and also we would sell candy, sell different things to keep the band going, and we'd get them dry-cleaned, I think, as a big group, once or twice a year. So we didn't get them dry-cleaned too often.

BG: so did you play in the band two years?

SF: 7th and 8th grade.

BG: Played French horn both years?

SF: French horn. First year, you learning, you don't do too much and think in 8th grade was when we got involved. Well you had the marching band and then you had the concert band.

BG: Did you play in the concert band?

SF: I played in the concert band.

BG: Was there a chorus?

SF: Chorus, I don't remember seeing any chorus until I got to the High School. They call that glee club back then. And then when I got the high school that was the chorus.

BG: So that was the place to be in the band. Got to travel, got to be seen, got to have fun, have a uniform, and you say you felt like somebody.

SF: Felt like somebody.

BG: Was that important to you.

SF: That was important. Back then, it was important to be a classy type person, it give you something to look forward to cause sometimes, we was talking earlier -- you poor and you didn't have much-- but you do the best you can. Didn't have a lot of clothes to change, but what we had we keep that clean and try to look nice.

BG: Did you play in the band at Chapel Hill High?

SF: No, didn't play in the band. I don't think they even had one, didn't have a band. So I felt sort of bad, cause that had been taken away.

BG: Did your minister get involved with your decision to go to the white school?

SF: Yes he did. My minister, Dr. J.R. Manley, everyone knew Reverend Manley at the time, he's like one of the outstanding people in the community and plus he was on the school board at the time, he was the only black person on the school board, and he was for blacks going to Chapel Hill High, to integrate the schools, so he was for it.

BG: So you were one of the first four students to go to Chapel Hill Junior High School?

SF: Yes, one of the first four.

BG: Do you remember your first day?

SF: Oh yes, that's something you never forget.

BG: Can you share it with me?

SF: Well, I got all dressed up so I would look nice, I was thinking I was going to fit in, so I looked nice, because it was like 2 or 3 blocks from where I lived, I walked to school so therefore I missed riding on the school bus so, uh, I walked, I think I went alone, no I think one, might have been my next door neighbor, no I think was alone, I remember I was scared to death though. So I went and found my homeroom class and everybody was looking at me cause I guess I was different. Let's see, what else was there, I was called names and people would shun me, first day, and what else, I felt out of place. But, I just told myself it was gonna get better, and what else was it, that was about it the first day.

BG: Did it get better?

SF: Not much better, cause I was called names, people would see me coming and they would say to their friends "move out the way, move out the way, there come a nigger, nigger's coming." So, could we stop a minute? Well, didn't have any friends, and I was sort of alone, everybody shunned me and I felt lost, didn't know where I was going. And by being in a new school, I didn't have somebody to take me under their wing and say "we supposed to go to this place," or "I help you find where we need to go."

BG: Nobody was helping you?

SF: No.

BG: So there were no role models, like at Lincoln High school, did you have anybody to look up to like that?

SF: No, didn't have any of those and then at lunchtime I sit at the table, nobody wanted to sit over there with me. I had to eat alone, whereas Lincoln you had your little buddies whereas up there I didn't know anybody, I eat by myself. I'd just feel alone, people be looking, whispering, talking, calling me names, and throwing things. It was just a bad experience.

BG: How long did it stay bad like that?

SF: For a while. Until my Mom called some of the white people she knew that was worked with integrating the schools. She called one or two of them and told them how it was and she said, "well, they told me 'I told my daughter . . .'" to eat lunch with me or to take up time with me. And after a few days that's what they had started to do. I had one girl, she'd come and eat with me, or sorta spend a little time with me, talk to me.

BG: A white girl?

SF: White girl.

BG: Just one?

SF: Just one. And then maybe later, I don't think the first year wasn't too good

BG: The whole year?

SF: The whole year. They called me names and then shun me in the hallway and then in my classroom I'd be sitting there, we had tables where we had to sit where we had our seats that we would sit in and some of the older ones, maybe some of the boys, I remember the girls didn't do it, they would have spit balls. They would get some paper and roll up, you know how to do spit balls, they'd put it in a rubber band and they'd shoot and they'd hit me with it. Didn't nobody, I'd try to ignore it, then you could see them coming on the floor, or I'd be hit and tell the teacher and lot of times teacher be at the board writing with the back turned and they didn't see. Then after it

happened several times I'd go up and tell the teacher and then nobody knew anything about it. So they didn't tell. They didn't tell on each other.

BG: Would you sit by yourself or would you sit with the white students?

SF: No, we had seats, they were lined up, rows, so I didn't sit by myself. AS I got up in higher grades we had biology class, I think back on biology class where, like ninth grade you had PE and you choose partners, play ball with and you be on they team, nobody wanted to be on my, they didn't want me on they team, so I felt left out and alone. And, then the teacher would just put me on somebody's team, and then as time went by and I'd be in biology class, you know you'd get partners to dissect animals and then nobody wanted to be my partner and then finally one girl, Mary Huff, that was her name, she came and said she'd be my partner.

BG: how did you get the strength to handle it, all these things? It sounds like you're pretty much alone, you're hearing all these bad things, nobody wants to be with you except this one girl?

SF: Well, that's just something I had to do, just had to go through it. I don't know, just the help of the Lord, help me get through.

BG: Were you able to talk to your mother or father?

SF: Oh yeah, my mother, my mother was there with me, she helped me through a lot and --

BG: You must have been angry inside

SF: I was

BG: How did you handle that anger?

SF: I'm a person that just keeps things held in, just kept it to myself.

BG: Did you ever feel like taking a swing at someone or calling names back?

SF: Yeah, I was gonna say I did, I tried to defend myself.

BG: How did that work out?

SF: Well, there's only one of me and a whole lot of them [laugh], so you can figure I couldn't get very far, I just ignored them unless it got so bad that I'd go to the principal, miss Marshbanks, that was her name, and she helped. She kept me encouraged and told me, try not to let it bother me and just if I had any problems to come back, to bring names to her, that she'd try to talk to them, and she would be there for me if I needed somebody to talk to.

BG: So she was a friend to you?

SF: Yeah, that's what you call it.

BG: Were there particular classes of students who bothered you and others who left you alone

SF: I think so, some of the white lower class was brought up to not like black people, or Negroes back then they called them, but the ones like upper class, they might laugh or not say anything, not let it bother them, they wouldn't participate.

BG: But none of them stood up for you?

SF: Not at first, but maybe as time went by, they got used to me being there and seeing me and some of the other girls had started taking up time with me, then they changed. It took a while. But it was a long time before things got good.

BG: When did it get good?

SF: The next year.

BG: When more blacks went to the school?

SF: More blacks.

BG: And you were in 10th grade, at the high school?

SF: At the high school. So by being more blacks I think it got better but we were still called names.

BG: Were there any teachers who went out of their way to help you, or who encouraged you, or saw some of the abuse that you were taking and tried to help you with it?

SF: One man stands out, I was in 11th grade, he encouraged me, helped me along, I guess all the teachers would good, they treated me fairly.

BG: You felt as though they treated you fairly, they would look at you, or call on you if you raised your hand?

SF: No, I was treated fair, but I always felt a little inferior because their teaching, I didn't feel as much as they did, as the white students. So that made me feel bad, and a little inferior to them.

BG: What were your grades like?

SF: Um, not too good to start with, I had some Bs and Cs, not too many A's to start with

BG: But you got some later?

SF: At the high school, I was more like a B-C student

BG: Did you have new books there?

SF: Yeah, I think we did. We had new books, that was the first time I had new books. Even smelled new [laughs], that new smell to it. You'd open the book and the pages didn't fall out, or it hadn't been written in, or it was new, when you opened the book you could hear it crack, it being new.

BG: Are there other things you want to share about your experience there?

SF: Uh, let's see what else. I do remember going to the prom one year.

BG: Was that at the Chapel Hill High School at Franklin street?

SF: Franklin street. I do remember going, and I carried somebody else along, another black person and I got in big trouble then, couldn't bring in somebody else. That was a no-no.

BG: So what happened then?

SF: Principal was real nice. I got called into the office and put on, forgot the words she used, probation, so I couldn't attend some of the other activities that I wasn't going to attend anyway, like football game or basketball game and that didn't bother me though, but it bothered me because I got called to the office and then I got picked on and made fun of, and I felt bad was teary eyed about that.

BG: Were there black men there at the high school that you could have gone to the prom with?

SF: Nobody else went, that was like 11th grade, nobody cared to go, they had one other black, there was four blacks, me and one other girl, and I had asked somebody cause I couldn't find anybody black at the school that wanted to go and one other black fellow that attended, Eugene Hines --

BG: -- did you know Stanley Vickers?

SF: Yeah, I knew Stanley Vickers.

BG: Was he in your class?

SF: No, he was younger.

BG: You say that the first day you went to the junior high school that you were scared.

SF: Oh yeah, I was scared to death. I didn't know what to expect.

BG: Had anyone talked to you of helped you to understand what things would be like and how to handle them?

SF: My Mama did, I'm trying to think, did anybody else, that was with the integration group, they might have talked about how it was gonna be, but I don't really think so.

BG: Were you afraid that you would be beat up or spit on?

SF: Oh yeah, I don't think I ever got spit on, but spit at, but not spit on I don't remember. But it was pretty bad. But it got better when other black people came

BG: Strength in numbers?

SF: Oh yeah, that must be what it was.

BG: Do you think the white students were afraid after you add a certain number of blacks there that there would be fight?

SF: I think that's what it was. They could pick on us few, give us a hard time, but after the next year, everybody else came and I think a lot of the students didn't, I think they still had Lincoln High School if I'm not mistaken, I don't know when they closed Lincoln, but I think that's when a lot of the blacks stopped going to school cause they didn't want to go to school with white people. That was the way I looked at it. Could be so, couldn't be so.

BG: So did you graduate from Chapel Hill High on Franklin school?

SF: I didn't go to the new high school. I finished in '65.

BG: Did your mother take part in the PTA at the new school?

SF: Uh, I don't think so. She might have attended a couple of meetings.

BG: But she didn't keep going? Did she ever share that with you?

SF: I can't remember, but My Mama she was very active when they had integration, you know like walking the picket lines, so me and her was very active, like we would walk the picket lines and go and sit in, but we never got arrested. We were the ones that backed the other protestors?

BG: so that was in 64, 65?

SF: Before then.

BG: Before then?

SF: Oh yeah, back before then.

BG: The movie theater, did you picket the movie theater?

SF: Oh yeah, when integration first started, we were involved.

BG: Were you involved in 1960 when the first sit-ins occurred at the Colonial Drug Store, Big Johns?

SF: Sure was, I was out there watching on the picket line I was walking and they would sit in, well they would sit down in front and make a little circle, they would lock arms and Big John, he had two sons, and they would come to the door and the two sons, they would have baseball bats and they would stand there, they would lock the door. They would see us coming and they would run, lock the door, stand there with baseball bats till the policeman came and they carry the picketers, not the picketers the ones that was sitting in, they would carry them off, put them in the police car and carry them downtown.

BG: Did you ever get taken in a police car?

SF: No.

BG: Did they lift them or drag them?

SF: No, they didn't lift them. By them locking arms they'd have to drag them to get them loose and then put them in the police car.

BG: Did some of your friends get arrested?

SF: Oh yeah. They did, so some of them got arrested and I remember one night we went all the way down to the Town Hall to protest and I remember Me and My Mom we were one of the ones who spend the night up there in the Town Hall, upstairs.

BG: So your Mom was out there with you even though it could of cost her her job? Did her boss ever say anything to her?

SF: No. Never did.

BG: Did the other students ever say anything to you at the white schools, that you were out there picketing? The teachers?

SF: I don't think so. I remember one of the black girls that sit in my class, that was in my class, she got arrested and they sort of made fun of her being arrested, picketing and sitting-in, they make bad comments about it. About her being arrested.

BG: How did you feel about her being arrested?

SF: I felt bad for her cause I was too scared to do it, so I looked up to her cause she had nerve to do it.

BG: So you took pride in her while the other students were teasing her?

SF: That's right. Yeah I told her it was a good thing that she was able to do it, glad that she was one of the ones that had nerve to do it, cause I was little scared, but I would always be there every time they were like "okay we gonna picket, we gonna have a meeting," I was always at the meetings. I would give them support, but I was always too scared.

BG: Where were the meetings?

SF: At some of the churches, like up at First Baptist.

BG: Was that in '63 or back in '60?

SF: Back in '60. Lot of times we would meet and we would have our signs and we would say where we were going to picket. That was something a lot of nights me feet were so cold I didn't know I had feet, couldn't hardly walk, and hands also, hands would be cold, you'd have gloves on and your hands would still get cold cause we'd be out there a long time.

BG: how did it feel when you were picketing?

SF: Felt like I was doing something to help integration and we'd hear what Martin Luther King was doing and so that gave us the courage, we would sing "we shall overcome."

BG: Did you have the same feeling about the school, that you were one of the first blacks at the school, that you were doing something for integration?

SF: I did.

BG: Did that help you get through it all?

SF: Maybe that's what it was, I was doing something so that it wouldn't be bad for others that was gonna come after me, maybe that was what helped me get through it. You was asking a little while ago what helped me get through it, maybe that was something that helped me to get through it. That I was paving the way for other blacks that was gonna be coming, then it wouldn't be as bad for them. They wouldn't get the names and the bad treatment and what not, they were doing.

BG: When you were at the high school, did you do anything else extracurricular like you had done at Lincoln, did you play in band?

SF: Yeah I did, I was in the chorus, they call it, I call it choir, but they call it chorus, and I joined because they had a black teacher. I was surprised they had this black teacher. I think she might have been the only one, I think they might have had one more, I can't remember, but I remember her, she stands out. One of the black teachers, and I joined the choir, I call it choir, cause she was teaching. I was in it two years, 10 and 11th grade.

BG: Did they have white and black student in the chorus?

SF: Oh yeah, wasn't many blacks.

BG: So the whites accepted the black teacher?

SF: They did. I think that was 11 and 12th grade, cause I remember when graduation, the choir had to sing at graduation and I left where I was sitting to go up and sing.

BG: Are there other things that you remember that you want to share regarding your experience anywhere along the line?

SF: Uh, I can't think of anything else that would be important.

BG: Anything else you want say?

SF: Uh, overall, let's see, I remember in 12th grade I got behind in one of my classes and I had one of the teachers to help and I had a correspondence class, cause I didn't have enough credits to graduate, I had, I needed I think it was a half of one credit and the teacher helped me to enroll in the correspondence and if I had questions he would help me with some of the work that I had to turn in and he'd help me if I had questions and he mailed in a few of them and I would pay to mail in the rest of them the rest of the school year. So I did pass with a C.

BG: Is that the teacher you were talking about before that went out of his way to help you?

SF: Went out of his way, cause anybody else would have said "oh well," you just have to come back next year or do summer school or not graduate with my regular class. So that stands out.

BG: What did you after you graduated?

SF: Let's see, they had a new cafeteria that opened down at UNC, that's where I want to work right after high school. I knew I didn't have money for college and said, well I made it through high school, and back then they didn't push blacks going to college like they do now, and there wasn't a lot of opportunity, and grants and scholarships, so if you finish high school, you doing good. So, Chase cafeterias, that's the name of it, it's still open for students, down at UNC, so I went there to work for a while and then after that, oh I know what else, something else when I was in High School, one of teachers, I forgot what it was called, I think Business, we could take different classes pertaining to something that we wanted to do when we got out of high school, like some took, they went to work at different places, so I chose working at the hospital as a nursing assistant, and I done some hours there to go along with my schoolwork, and then when I left there, finished there, went to Chase, worked there 6 months or more and then I put my application in there over at , what, Gravley, Gravley Sanatorium, and they hired me over there as nursing assistant, and that's where I got my start from, working at UNC. So I worked there when it was Gravley, and then after that, UNC took over, well Memorial Hospital cause they were two separate, two separate facilities, but they were both state, run by the state. So I worked there, enjoyed it, and then I went over to, when UNC took it over I still worked as nursing assistant and then, as we say, I got my big break came along.

BG: What was that?

SF: Working in the lab, as a lab assistant and I worked there being a lab assistant and then they upgraded to a lab technician and I had on the job training and I just moved up from there and then have to go to night classes or go to Durham Tech or somewhere else to take classes.

BG: So you had it right there?

SF: Had it right there. And as time went by I moved up and now, well I said it was my big break, cause I started working a lab assistant, and then lab technology, lab technician, and I been now 27 years on the same job [laughs]. And so that's why I said it was my big break, and I've done well. And now on my job, well I've been doing it several years, now I'm teaching lab, lab technologies, I'm teaching students that's coming through to be a lab technologist, so that's why I call that was my big break. So I've done well.

BG: It sounds like you've done very well. Are you married?

SF: I'm married and have two children and my oldest, he turned 24 January the 8th and he's 18-wheeler truck driver. He went to school in Charlotte, truck driver school. That's what he wanted to be, wanted to drive a truck. I couldn't change his mind cause he's real smart and he's college material, as I would say, but he didn't want to go to college, so he went to Alamance Community College for 2 years and then when he turned 21 and went to truck-driver school. So he drive an 18-wheeler truck, and my daughter she's 14.

BG: So you still have a young one at home?

SF: Still have a young one. She goes to CW Stanford, Hillsborough. Some of the things she goes through, comparing school now to then, it's a big difference.

BG: How do you see the difference?

SF: I don't think the teachers are concerned about the students like they were back when I was in school, um, there's a lot going on in school that we didn't have, like now they have drugs in school, all kind of other things that we didn't have, and a lot of them playing hooky, a lot of them don't think school and education is important like we did. WE know how important it is, like I tell my daughter, "get a good education because when you finish up, you want to be able to get a good job, go on to college, get a good job cause education is important," but teenagers nowadays they don't see it that way, so they don't stay behind them about the homework. If they do it, it's all right, if they don't, they just get a zero.

BG: Not like when you were going to school and the teacher called your parents if you weren't doing your homework?

SF: No, none of that. They send a, they will send a slip home now, a progress report to let us know that they not doing good.

BG: Is that right away?

SF: Towards the end of the nine weeks, toward report card time.

BG: So it may have been three or four weeks since the bad work started before you find out about it?

SF: That's right, cause if they let us know in time, we could do something about it, like my daughter she wasn't doing her homework, she loves talking on the phone, she puts talking on the phone before schoolwork so we took the telephone away from her and don't let her talk at all through the week, just on the weekend. That seemed to help, cause she come in and do the homework and she see that homework is important, more important than talking on the telephone.

BG: So she's learning?

SF: She's learning, but I don't think like she should, cause she says "teachers are not teaching what they're supposed to be teaching," that's her words. So therefore they don't, things in the book, they go through it so fast, they don't answer questions like they should, or they'll run through it too fast, if you don't get it, you just be left out. I couldn't believe that. I've talked to other parents and she said that's the way it is.

BG: Did you feel when you went to the junior high and high school that those teachers cared as much as the ones at Lincoln?

SF: I don't think so because in my opinion the blacks knew how important it was to be educated when you step out into this world it's going to be hard for blacks to start with and without education you gonna be lost.

BG: So you felt that the black teachers at Lincoln cared more to see that you were well prepared for sort of a hostile world out there.

SF: That's it, that's a good word for it -- prepared -- I think so. Whereas when you in the high school you supposed to be already prepared, to have that foundation.

BG: At least you had one teacher who cared.

SF: Oh yeah, him and the principal, Miss Marshbanks.

BG: Am I hearing you say you didn't have that same feeling from the other teachers?

SF: I don't think so. They cared, but they didn't really show it, they were nice.

BG: Did you think it was you, being black, or did you think it was just that way for everyone?

SF: Maybe, I don't know, maybe by the time you get that age you supposed to be mature enough to stand on your own two feet and prepare your own self, you know, when you go out in to the world. Mature, that's the word, that's what I'm thinking. But teachers were nice, they treated us nice.

BG: I really appreciate your spending so much time talking and sharing so many things that were obviously very emotional for you. Thank you very much.