

Interview

with

BARBARA P. FOSKEY

February 3, 2005

by Gerrelyn Patterson

Transcribed by Cathy Mann

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

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Interviewee: Barbara P. Foskey
Interviewer: Gerrelyn Patterson
Interview Date: February 3, 2005
Location: Durham, North Carolina

BEGINNING OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

GERRELYN PATTERSON: This is an interview with Barbara Foskey in Durham, North Carolina. It's February 3, 2005 and we're in her office at North Carolina Central University. The interviewer is Gerrelyn Patterson. This is part of the Spencer Grant's Project on school desegregation in the South and will be used as a part of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The tape number is BF2305. Okay, Mrs. Foskey, tell me when you attended Hillside.

BARBARA FOSKEY: I attended Hillside, well, I graduated from Hillside in 1965. So I was there from '62 to '65.

GP: Okay, so it was three grades at that time, ten, eleven, twelve?

BF: At that time, ten, eleven, and twelve were considered high school at that time.

GP: Tell me what you remember most about Hillside.

BF: What I remember most about Hillside is what I considered at the time as having caring instructors and some of my friends, the good times, days that we like to look back on and consider as some of my happier times.

GP: Do you know anybody in this Hillside history book? Two students put it together. It looks like it was in the '70s. Mr. Lucas was still principal then. Is that?

BF: Prof Alston.

GP: Was he still there when you were there?

BF: Un-huh.

GP: Can you tell me a little bit about him?

BF: Well, anybody that went to Hillside during the time that he was there right off remembers him. He was a disciplinarian but at the same time I think he had each student's welfare within his heart. He cared about students but at the same time he tried to make you do the right things. And especially for the boys, most of them remember him if he saw you out of line or walking the halls when you should have been in class he would throw his keys down the hall at you. (Laughter) I've heard that story so many times.

GP: Nobody has told me that. I didn't know that.

BF: Oh, really? I've heard it so many times.

GP: He would throw his keys at you or down the hall?

BF: He would throw his keys at you, you know, roll them down the hall to get your attention. But, yeah, he was something but he was well respected I think.

GP: He must have been to be a disciplinarian and people still liked him.

BF: Right, right, un-huh.

GP: Because that's usually the bad guy.

BF: I know, I know, I know, I know, un-huh.

GP: Were there other people like him?

BF: Well, I'm sure there were others, probably coaches or whatever, and some of the guys could tell you more about that, you know, from that standpoint.

GP: Okay, all right. And who was principal when you were there? Was this Mr. Holmes? Was he principal or was it Mr. Lucas?

BF: Mr. Lucas. I'll have to look again. Mr. Lucas was the principal.

GP: Oh, because it's a young picture of him. It says 1962.

BF: Yeah, okay. But, yeah, Mr. Lucas was there.

GP: Okay, do you have any memories of him at all?

BF: Yes, I thought he was a very good administrator and through the years I've even learned to respect him more. But he was our principal and I thought he did a fairly good job.

GP: Were you in any clubs?

BF: Any clubs?

GP: Activities or did you do anything?

BF: Yes.

GP: Tell me about that.

BF: Oh, Lord. Okay, I was in the Future Teacher of America Club.

GP: I was in that.

BF: Oh, you were in that too?

GP: Un-huh.

BF: I was in the, it's hard to think. I wish I had my yearbook. But I also was in the French Club for a while. I was in a modern dance group for a while. And I think that was it for the most part in terms of an organized group.

GP: Okay. So you took French then when you were there?

BF: French took me. (Laughter) Yes, I did take French.

GP: Okay, so you didn't enjoy French? But you were in the club.

BF: Yeah, I did I think when I started out I thought it was easier but as time went on I more or less stayed in the club because of my friends. It was okay. I made it through.

GP: Who was your teacher?

BF: Say what?

GP: Who was the French teacher?

BF: God, I can see her face but I cannot remember her name. She wasn't from Durham but right this minute I just can't remember her name.

GP: Okay, okay.

BF: How ridiculous, if I had my yearbook a lot of this would have really come together with me.

GP: So you still have your yearbook?

BF: Of course, I have my yearbook, in good condition. I keep my high school yearbooks, yes.

GP: Will you bring it one day so I can stop by and maybe borrow it for twenty-four hours and look at it?

BF: Yes, I will. No problem, sure.

GP: Because I would love to see a yearbook.

BF: Oh, yeah, okay.

GP: This is the only, I have the Hillside history book and then there's one at the library. But I haven't really seen anything else. I would love to look through the books.

BF: Well, I'll be glad to. In fact, I have my sister's yearbooks. She came out in the class a year behind me. So I'll bring both of those in.

GP: Okay, so you bring up your sister and I know that you said that a lot of your family had gone to Hillside. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

BF: Yes, my younger sister and my older sister. My older sister who is four years older than I went there through her junior year and she did not finish. She went to New York and ended up getting married real early. But then it was me and then my younger sister who is a year behind me.

GP: Okay, and she graduated from Hillside too?

BF: Yes, un-huh.

GP: Where is she now?

BF: She's still in Durham.

GP: And did you have other family like did your mom and your parents go to Hillside too?

BF: My mother did. My father was not in Durham but my mother went to Hillside, but she went to the other Hillside. See Whitted Jr. High used to be Hillside before the Hillside I went to.

GP: And the Hillside you went to is the one that was across from Central by the Communications Building?

BF: Right, the one they just tore down.

GP: Where was the Whitted School?

BF: You know where Operation Breakthrough is?

GP: Un-huh.

BF: Un-huh, that at one time was Hillside.

GP: Oh, I didn't know that.

BF: Whitted Jr. High School was where Breakthrough is now. That was our junior high school.

GP: Okay, and so you went from Whitted to Hillside?

BF: To Hillside.

GP: And where'd you go before Whitted? What was the elementary school?

BF: I went to Pearson Elementary School, un-huh. And the first year I went to C. C. Spaulding and then they transferred me to Pearson because of the school district I was living in.

GP: Okay. And so your mom went to Hillside. Your sisters went to Hillside. Do you have kids?

BF: No, I don't.

GP: Okay. If you had kids would you have wanted them to go to Hillside?

BF: It's a new Hillside. It's a different Hillside. I don't think it would have really made a difference. But my nieces are at Hillside right now. One is getting ready to graduate and the other one is in eleventh grade.

GP: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit, because I'm still trying to get my picture of Durham together because everything I read is really about Hayti, and how it was affluent and everybody either worked at Central or the hospital.

BF: Or North Carolina Mutual.

GP: Okay, or at North Carolina Mutual. Can you tell me a little bit more about what it was like for you and your family growing up in Durham? Like where did ya'll live, what did you do on the weekend? What was it like when you were a teenager living in Durham?

BF: Okay, when I was a teenager I had maybe three or four girlfriends in the neighborhood. Basically we did everything together, you know. We'd either hang out [at] each other's house or on the weekend we would go as a group to a sock hop.

GP: A what, a sock hop?

BF: Un-huh, right, or we'd go to the movies together. We just hung out--a group of girls together or either me and my younger sister--because when I was coming up my mother said well, if she can't go, you can't go. We always had to go in twos, you know, and come back in twos.

GP: Together, right, I remember that.

BF: Yes, yes. So it was interesting.

GP: Where did ya'll go to church?

BF: We went to, we grew up in Fisher Memorial Church. It's still right down here on Fayetteville and Enterprise.

GP: Okay. And so in the '60s, how did people, the picture that seems to be out there is that all blacks went to Hillside. All the whites went to Durham High.

BF: That was pretty much the case except for my senior year they had like a pilot group of blacks to go to Durham High. They pulled-- I'm not sure on what basis, academic average or some parents would or would not sign for their kids to go, but they pulled out probably, I don't know, maybe ten to fifteen and sent them to Durham High. That was the first year that they had blacks go to Durham High.

GP: Okay. Did you hear anything about how that went?

BF: Well, the normal stories, you know, from what I can remember. It's been a long time ago. But, you know, how they felt-- Some of the white kids didn't really want them there but their parents felt like it was something they needed to do.

GP: Did they send, was there another group from Durham High of white students that came to Hillside, was there a contingent or whatever?

BF: No, no, that was not the case.

GP: Were there white kids when you went at all?

BF: Un-uh.

GP: Not one?

BF: Not one.

GP: The whole three years?

BF: The whole three years.

GP: Were there white teachers?

BF: I'm trying to think.

GP: The reason I'm surprised is because school desegregation, Brown vs. Board for integration was 1954. Well, not integration but [to] desegregate the schools.

BF: I understand.

GP: But 1954 so I'm thinking—

BF: That by that time—

GP: [There] would have been some white kids at the school.

BF: But that was not the case. That was not the case, un-uh.

GP: Do you remember them talking at all about white students coming?

BF: No.

GP: Hillside was it's own little world?

BF: Right, own little world. We did our own little thing. We stayed where we were and, you know.

GP: So did school desegregation have any impact on you or your family at all?

BF: Not at that time that I saw.

GP: The picture is that black people in Durham stayed with black folks in Durham and went to Hillside or Central and kind of did their thing and then white people did their thing at Durham High and Duke and all those other schools.

BF: Right.

GP: Did you ever have contact with white people? I mean because what you hear is that it was kind of like your own little world. And I'm thinking in the '60s it wasn't. I know this is before the '70s and, you know, some big things happening but it seems as though--I'm trying to understand that.

BF: Right, I understand what you're asking too. I'm trying to think how did I come in contact with white people. Well, you know, when we would get on the bus.

GP: The city bus?

BF: The city bus when we were downtown and () and things like that but.

GP: At this point everything was desegregated anyway so you could sit in the front?

BF: Right, right, un-huh, right, right, un-huh.

GP: But that was pretty much it?

BF: That was pretty much it.

GP: And where did you, I know the Bottom, I know Walltown, I know Hayti, I know East End.

BF: Where did I live?

GP: Un-huh.

BF: Where I lived was considered Hayti. I lived right off, you know where Mechanics and Farmers Bank is on Fayetteville?

GP: Un-huh.

BF: I lived on the street that comes right up beside the bank.

GP: And so now they say Hayti was happening.

BF: Well, they claim it was happening because right off Fayetteville Street any kind of business pretty much that you needed or wanted was there. So we didn't have to go outside of our little circle to get what we needed from insurance to the grocery store to, you know.

GP: So was everybody doing well and living large?

BF: No, they weren't living large. They were living. They were just living close by. (Laughter)

GP: Living close to large.

BF: Close by to those things, you know.

GP: So I'm trying to find out what was that like because that's the only piece that I can find in the books and everything was about how everybody was living large. So for the people who weren't living large, what was life like?

BF: Well, I think for the most part most people were not, most black people were not living large.

GP: In Durham?

BF: In Durham. There were a few families that you considered having some money. But for the most part everybody was pretty much on the same keel. So what you didn't have you really didn't miss because all of your friends were pretty much in the same boat, you know.

GP: And what kind of work? I know the people that were living large were either teaching at the university or they were with Mechanics and Farmers Bank or North Carolina Mutual. They were making money like that but what were regular folks doing?

BF: Right. Regular folks were—. They had a lot of people that were still doing domestic work or I'll tell you another thing that people forget sometimes is people that were living and working at the factories. They were making decent money, you know.

GP: The tobacco factories in Durham?

BF: Yes, un-huh, yeah.

GP: I'm glad you told me that because they make it seem like—

BF: Right, that it was all about particular this and that. In fact, a lot of people at the factory were making more than teachers.

GP: Really?

BF: Really, un-huh.

GP: And so when if everybody black pretty much went to Hillside and you got some students that are coming from really upper class and money backgrounds, then the rest of us, did that play out at all at the school? Did the same people, same goodie students, always get to do stuff or was everybody treated?

BF: No, I think that played out and, you know, I'm sure that still plays out even till today. There were some kids that because their parents were this and that and the teachers knew their parents then sometimes you felt they got a break, you know.

GP: So did the teachers know your parents?

BF: A few and a lot of them knew my aunt. But we weren't the upper middle class.

GP: Okay, so there were certain privileges that came with being?

BF: Well, yeah, you sort of felt it. I mean even if nobody said it. Certain people you felt like were getting a break because, you know, of their zip codes, as we put it today.

GP: Okay.

BF: This is something I think you might find interesting. Whenever you get a chance you can just look at this and I was going to give you some of them to put--. Some of this was before the time period you're interested in but it also—

GP: Thank you. Talks a lot about Durham.

BF: Yeah, some black history questions on Durham and I thought--. But also I have another book at home if I could ever find it that's on Durham.

GP: Is it by Dorothy Phelps Jones, "The End of An Era," paperback, lots of pictures?

BF: Paperback, yeah. That's the one you have?

GP: Un-huh, I have that one and that's the one and that's why I asked because it has lots of pictures and you can see people and I read that one and I saw a video tape and they made it seem like everybody was living the life. And so I wanted to—

BF: No, that wasn't the norm.

GP: That's what I was trying to find out if that—

BF: Oh, no, no.

GP: That seemed hard to believe that everyone that everybody was—

BF: Oh, Lord, no.

GP: Living the life.

BF: No, that was not the case.

GP: And it didn't say a whole lot about Hillside and the school's role in the community. I know Central did a lot of stuff in the community, had programs and that kind of stuff. But I didn't know what kind of stuff Hillside did. Like I heard about Mr. G's swing school. Was that still going on when you were there?

BF: Oh, yeah, everybody knows Mr. Gattis, un-huh, yeah.

GP: Tell me about Mr. Gattis.

BF: Mr. Gattis was a--. I don't know want to say, first of all, he was gay.

GP: Oh, was he?

BF: Oh, yes, very gay. And he was a little flaming sometimes but, you know, and he was funny. But I think he was very talented and he'd have this little talent, you know, swing school to get kids, you know, to showcase their talents and things. I guess I've lost some of those things. I've got a jam here. But he was a plus for the school and he was a plus for the students.

GP: Now could anybody do swing school?

BF: If he felt you could do. He pretty much selected his people.

GP: Oh. Did you do it?

BF: No, I don't sing, I don't.

GP: Did you go to the performance though?

BF: Oh, yeah, yeah, I went to some of them, oh, yeah. They were always very entertaining.

GP: I hadn't heard a whole bunch about him the person. I heard a lot about the school.

BF: Mr. Gattis, in fact, before he died he lived right around the corner from where I lived for twenty-five years.

GP: Really? Was he still teaching at Hillside all that time?

BF: Oh, no, no, he had retired most of that time.

GP: Do you feel that Hillside prepared you? Did it give you a good education?

BF: I really do.

GP: Okay, and why do you say that? What did it do that makes you say that?

BF: Well, for the most part, it helped to escalate your self-esteem. I mean most people that know people that come from the old Hillside, they say that's one thing we're not lacking is self-esteem. We've never looked at other people as--even if they had more money or whatever, we didn't worry about that. We knew we were just as good.

GP: Well, how did they do that though, because a lot of schools are saying, you know, we need to help black kids with their self-esteem and one of the reasons I wanted to look at Hillside is because I kept hearing that. How did they do it?

BF: Right, and maybe I give a lot of credit to Hillside but I guess I need to stop and give a lot of it to even my mother because a lot of it came from her. And she was always saying you are just as good. We may not have anything but, you know, so forth. And I just have nothing but good things to say about Hillside simply because I had good friendships there and I enjoyed going to school.

GP: And so do you think that the teachers and the people at the school kind of helped support your mother's message of you're just as good as.

BF: Right, they did and one experience that I can give back to you and I may have mentioned it before is the fact when my older sister got ready to quit school and to go to New York and get married, we had I know there were at least two or three of her teachers that came out to the house trying to talk my mother into not letting her go. Saying, she shouldn't do it. She's a good student. She needs to stay in school. So they were adamant about that.

GP: But she went anyway?

BF: She went anyway.

GP: That had a big impact on you, didn't it?

BF: I remember it and maybe because now that I'm older and I see where she is now, I know that if she had stayed in school some things would have been different.

GP: So you feel like they really had her best interests at heart?

BF: Yeah, by actually coming out to the house, un-huh.

GP: And so is there anything else that you think makes Hillside so unique because I keep hearing that, you know, so many of you still stay in touch with one another and it helped your self-esteem. Are there other things because I'm trying to tell the story for ya'll based on what ya'll think, because I didn't go there.

BF: Right, I understand.

GP: And so I want to make sure I'm not missing anything about what makes the school so special to this community and to the people that went there, that they still love the school so much that they still get together and do things and have maintained these friendships.

BF: Right. Well, I don't know if it has something to do with the continuing relationships for some because of our class reunions. In fact, a few minutes ago I was working on our program for our class of '65 class reunion. Some of us have never missed a reunion. Never missed one since we've been out of school and this year will be forty years for us.

GP: Wow.

BF: But it's just good relationships that we continue to have and keeping in contact. And I don't know, maybe because for some of us that was the outlet, you know, by going to school and doing school activities and things because for one thing, my mother was very tight with us and she didn't let us go out a lot. So basically if there were good activities being produced or put on by the school then we were able to go. So that was an outlet for me and my sisters.

GP: Because your mom felt good about you going to the school?

BF: Right, un-huh, she felt it was safe. It was a good place to be. So we could get out of the house then. (Laughter)

GP: Okay. Do you think there is anything more about the legacy of the school that people should know? What do you think the lesson is for schools today about Hillside?

BF: Well, I say it and I've heard others say it that I don't think we got as much out of integration as we thought we were going to get, because all of those highlights and success stories also came out of a total black school. So you don't have to be integrated and meshed together, even though, I'm not saying we shouldn't do that. I think really for this world to succeed we've got to get along. But I'm saying we produced good people, successful people, coming all out of black teachers, black students and we were able to do our thing without being integrated.

GP: So do you think we gained anything from school integration?

BF: I'm sure there are some things we gained. What did we gain? Well, I guess we've gotten to know each other and we're trying to understand the different cultures and people. I guess the bad thing about coming out of a total black or total

white situation is, once you get to the working world then all these other kinds of people are there and you have not had any real experience with them. But I think with common sense you work that out but it's not as frightful or a lot of kids may feel better about going to larger, mixed schools, if they've been around mixed schools all the time.

GP: Right. Do you think that there are things that schools, things that Hillside can teach us about how to educate black kids now?

BF: I like to think that most schools have mastered that and I don't have anything to base it on per se. But I'm sure somewhere somebody has appointed to that could be exercised, you know, because it did work.

GP: Yeah, and I'm trying to figure out why.

BF: Why, I understand.

GP: I mean because everybody's so adamant about it did work in Durham and there were so many places where after school desegregation they closed down the black schools completely. And Hillside was one of the few of thirteen that stayed open and stayed black and did well. And so trying to get down to why did it do so well. And I'm hearing you say a lot of things that really--. It was an outlet for you. It helped you build really good relationships with your friends. They helped, they continued to support messages that you got from home, self-esteem and you had really caring and nurturing teachers. Not just about your education but about, I mean, because those teachers that came to your home seemed to really care about your sister as a person.

BF: As a person, right.

GP: As opposed to just this is a student, best wishes, that kind of thing.

And then they had some really good activities. And so I'm trying to make sure I don't miss anything.

BF: I understand.

GP: It seems to also be a common thread between your family--so many of your family members went to Hillside, your mom and your sisters.

BF: Right, well, at the time you knew if you got to high school that's where you were going. (Laughter) So yeah, I guess that was important too, you know, that knowing your mother went there, your aunt went there.

GP: And so how can you explain ya'll still getting in touch with each other after twenty, twenty years you said?

BF: No, this year is forty years since out of school. Well, we're still friends, especially the ones right here in Durham. And my class we meet probably about every other month and we just every five years, after the first one it's ten years and after that it's every five years. We look forward to having our reunion.

GP: And so the reunion is coming up?

BF: It's coming up as of the end of June.

GP: And what's being planned?

BF: Well, we have a night with just members of the class. And then we have--my mind is gone--a night where we usually honor some teacher that was there with us and is still involved in the community. We do that. We have a dinner dance on that Saturday night. On Sunday we go to church as a group, as a class, and we give a donation to that church. Earlier years we used to have a lot of picnics but, you

know, at my age, the kids are grown and don't want to come, so we just cut that fun out, playing basketball and all of that. And then through the years we've gone on cruises.

GP: Oh, really?

BF: Oh, yes. We went to New Orleans for a week one time. We do things. In fact, when we went to New Orleans it wasn't our class reunion. We just wanted to get together as a group and go somewhere and we went to New Orleans for five days.

GP: That's nice.

BF: Oh, yeah, it was nice.

GP: That's very nice. And so who organizes all this stuff?

BF: Our president is Jackie Williams and I think he eats and sleeps our class. Now you talking about somebody that loves his class, it's him.

GP: Okay. And he's in Durham?

BF: He is in Durham and I really wish you would talk to him if you had a chance.

GP: Okay. I would love to talk to him.

BF: Un-huh, because yeah, he's good with stats and I'm sure he would know many more people and perhaps things. Because like I say, he is really a die hard '65 class member and he has led our class from day one in terms of our reunions and I think he thinks he's going to die in that position. (Laughter) He never says anything about an election. I really think he thinks he's supposed to die there. But you know he works hard so he can have it as far as I'm concerned. He can have it.

GP: Okay, well, is there anything else you think I should know? I know we've talked a couple of times about this. And if you, of course, remember anything you know you can always reach me. But is there anything else I should know? If some said, Gerrelyn, I know you are working on—

BF: And another thing we had good ball players. We had a super basketball team. We had good teams. And I don't mean to be rude but I need this thing to be--. Okay, I got it out of there. But yeah, we had good athletes. We had people that played tennis when that wasn't necessarily a black thing. In fact, on one of those questions it has something about who was the person that played with Arthur Ashe during his tennis years. He came out of Hillside. John Lucas, his son, he's the coach of—

GP: Big time basketball team.

BF: Yeah, un-huh, NBA, un-huh.

GP: And so what did people, regular folks that left Hillside, did everybody graduate?

BF: Of course not because we had a class of seemed like it was close to four hundred in my class. We had a large class. And we had some that didn't graduate but we when we have our class reunions we still include them. If you started with us we consider you as being in our class. But, you know, lot of people stayed around and, like I say, the factories were thriving. Just like every other people, you know, doing all kinds of jobs. Some people, a lot of people I know did go to college all over and there were some that didn't.

GP: So if somebody were going to say something bad about Hillside,
because I have heard it—

BF: Right, un-huh, what would it be?

GP: Un-huh. And I'm not looking for the bad. I'm just interested.

BF: What would the bad be? Some people felt that, how should I say this, some teachers, like I stated earlier, showed favoritism based on some students. And maybe, I guess now that I'm older I can see if you know a child's mother, even though you shouldn't do it, but that's only human, that kind of stuff did happen. And I'm sure in some cases it was a class thing but I can't think of a lot of situations like that because I think I was just in the average. I had friends on this side of the track and that side of the track. So I don't remember getting caught up in those things, more or less, but I'm sure it happened.

GP: Well, if that's the worst that can be said.

BF: Oh, yeah, un-huh. And I'm sure somebody could come up with some but I cannot per se. My high school days were good days.

GP: Good for you. I'm going to stop it there unless there's more you want to tell me.

BF: I can't think of anything else right this minute. But, if you get a chance I really would like for you to talk to Jackie because he knows his stuff and I'm sure he could tell you some things. Like I said, I was trying to get this list off somebody had sent me—

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

BARBARA P. FOSKEY
FEBRUARY 5, 2005

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