

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

NED IRONS  
March 16, 1999

PAMELA GRUNDY: I am speaking with Ned Irons at West Charlotte High School. It is the twenty-sixth of March, 1999. Can you tell me how you came to be at West Charlotte High School?

NED IRONS: Well, my neighborhood is zoned to go to West Charlotte, and my older sister came here, and sort of just the procession of the natural order to come on and move from Eastover Elementary to Alexander Graham Middle, just come on to West Charlotte. It wasn't a ground breaking decision for me to come here.

PG: That was just the way that it was. Had you had contact with West Charlotte then through your sister? How old is she?

NI: Yes. She's four years older than me, so she graduated two years before I came. I came as a sophomore. There's a sort of mystique that goes about West Charlotte where you hear about it, and younger brothers and sisters can't wait to go to football games, and wear maroon and gold, and things like that. So, I've had a lot of contact with it before I came.

PG: When you say the mystique, can you define that a little bit more, or is it something that can't really be defined.

NI: It's kind of undefinable, but I would say that it's based around being able to tell other people that you go to West Charlotte and have them be like, "Oh, you go to West Charlotte. Really?" And wear your West Charlotte sweat shirts and tee shirts, and just have people know that you go to West Charlotte. I think it's sort of a pride thing where the student body is proud of West Charlotte, and they're proud to be here. I

haven't been to another high school in Charlotte that's had as much school spirit per se as we have.

PG: What are students proud about? What are you proud about about going to West Charlotte?

NI: I would say, in terms of just sheer pride with your peers at other schools a lot of it is based around athletics, about, "Our basketball team does this, and our football team does that." But on a deeper level in terms of who you are when you leave West Charlotte, I'd say you gain an understanding of how people other than yourself live. I don't mean to put these schools down, but I'm not sure if I went to a South Meck or a Providence that I would be aware of intelligent minority underprivileged kids who made it, who are the success stories. You see so often, "Oh, this is bad publicity about these minorities, or these underprivileged kids," on the news or in the paper acting in ways which are less than desirable, but at West Charlotte you get more of a view of the whole spectrum. You do see the kids who aren't cutting it, but more than that I see the kids who have really picked themselves up by the boot straps, so to speak, and done it for themselves. And it's more impressive for me because I'm not sure—I mean, my mom has been a huge influence in my education, and she's always pushed me. And education has always been the focal point of my childhood. For some of these kids who are doing as well or better than I am it hasn't been. It's been an independent endeavor to be successful. And I'm shocked by that and just really impressed. It opens you and it makes you aware that simply because someone doesn't have money, or simply because someone's not your same color, or they don't talk like you, or they don't look like you,

they have as much to offer and you shouldn't count them out before you hear what they have to say.

PG: How do you become aware of these things about other students who go here?

NI: I would say mostly through classroom interaction where you'll be in a classroom discussion, and someone that you never really thought about will say something really intuitive or exactly what you wanted to say, but you didn't have the verbal ability to express it. You think, "Wow, I had no idea that this person had the ability for that kind of thought or had the ability to be that responsive." And, more than that I would say just in interacting and getting to know people. I think there are a lot of stereotypes around, "This is how this class of people is supposed to act, and this is how this class of people is supposed to act." And I think West Charlotte really defies that. There are county club kids and kids from project at the same basketball game standing next to each other cheering just the same way, and you see them in the hall. You get to know people here instead of stereotypes I'd say. I think it's a really diverse population, and in order to interact with your peers you have to acknowledge the difference and be aware of them, but also it's sort of like you have to get over them in order to have a very active social life at all.

PG: Are there specific actions that the school takes to try to promote this? Are there things that are done or is it something that happens?

NI: If there are, and there might be underhanded teacher methods who say, "Oh, this group of students work together," but as far as I can tell I haven't seen any blatant acts of we'll put kids together in any way. I think it's just the diversity sort of forces it,

that you can't exist in your own little shell of a world. I don't think the school does anything, but I think it's forced when you get here. If you do want to speak to people, and you do want to have friends at this school, you can't stick to your shell, your close knit group of friends. You have to go out beyond that, and in doing that you're going to come across people that aren't like you. I think it's just the normal flow of high school social life that introduces you to that.

PG: Did you have the stereotypes before you came here?

NI: Oh, yeah. And I think it wouldn't be accurate to say that there are people who are completely open minded and come to West Charlotte and don't have any stereotypes. Everybody's, "Oh, I love everybody, and I don't have any preconceived notions of how you're supposed to act." I think everybody, whether consciously or subconsciously, has preconceived notions of people before they meet them. West Charlotte just changed that for me. And, for me, I grew up in sort of a liberal household, so I don't think I had as many stereotypes as some of the people that I associated with when I came here. To see them now from when they were a sophomore, they have changed completely, and not through any intentional actions but just through speaking and communicating and being friends with people who aren't like them. I mean, it's hard to be friends with somebody and then to carry that stereotype onto somebody else, because you say, "It doesn't apply here, so how can I be sure that it applies to everyone I know?"

PG: How do you see that change?

NI: Mostly the way I see it is in the way people speak about each other. In sophomore year there's a lot of "they's" and "we's." Well, that's how they do it, and

that's just how they are, that's how they speak. And now it's individual more, "Oh, well he is a very bright kid," or "She speaks that way because of this." I think there's a lot more understanding of cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic backgrounds where you don't just put a label on it. I think you more grow to understand why something is the way it is, why behavior comes across the way it does.

PG: Can you think of an example of that? Something that you would have perceived differently before having come to West Charlotte?

NI: For the most part I would say that before I came to West Charlotte I didn't have a lot of black kids in my advanced classes. And I would say that there are smart black kids out there, but they just don't have the resources and tools to advance in this world, and I've never seen a smart black kid in any of my classes before I came to West Charlotte. And, first day I got to West Charlotte I walk into my AP English class and it's probably sixty percent black and forty percent white. It was really like, "Wait a second. This is an advanced class." I've been to integrated schools, but I've never been to an integrated class before. And so I thought, "Wow." And I don't know if it was consciously at the time that I thought, "Wow, this is different." But looking back on it now I can say that I don't remember thinking of advanced placement black kids in middle school, and now I think of it as really half and half, because all of my AP classes are half black and half white, about. I don't know the exact numbers, but I would really say that I hadn't observed advanced thinking in minority students until I came to West Charlotte.

PG: So you have been to centrally integrated schools, but you hadn't had a very integrated experience at those schools?

NI: I hadn't, and that's been my general experience with ( ) schools is that after you get off the bus everybody is integrated, but once you go into your separate classes it becomes segregated again. I think that is the thing about West Charlotte, and to be able to be around people who can verbally express what racism is like. Like what being black in America is like, is what really wakes you up to reality, instead of thinking the preconceived notions that we all have. I think it's being around individuals who are intelligent and well spoken of all races is what really changed my perspective on how the world functions, I guess.

PG: Is this something that students at West Charlotte talk about much, racial issues at West Charlotte?

NI: I would say there's a certain comfort level around speaking about racial issues, so it's talked about freely. I don't know if I would say a lot. There's a group of kids who go to diversity training camps and things like that, and come back and talk about it fairly openly. But I would say there's not tension around the subject, but I don't know. I think it's just understood that we try to all get along, and we try to all understand where we're coming from. And we can't all the time. But it's not necessarily like, "You're black and you think this way, and I'm white and I think this way." I think it's more, "Well, I think this. And well, I think this." And that's just understood as being said that way, maybe because of racial reasons or maybe not. But it's not a forced issue. It's more just freely talked about when it comes up.

PG: What about something like when this black fellow got shot by the police officer a couple of years ago. Is that the kind of thing that students would talk about?

NI: I think if they did talk about it, it would be more of a consensus, like everybody would say, "Well, yeah, white cops shouldn't shoot a black guy." It's not like white people standing on one side saying, "Oh, you know, black people are dangerous." And black people standing on the other side and saying, "Well, you know, he had no reason to shoot him. The white cop's a racist." I think it's more things are not looked at through a racial perspective as much. It's more looked at through just a human experience.

PG: But you don't remember a particular discussion of that?

NI: No, I don't.

PG: I was just trying to think of an example. Well, you seem to indicate that everybody would fall on the side of the black guy?

NI: Yeah, I think so. From what I can remember he hadn't done anything wrong. He was going about his business and was shot by a couple of police officers. So, through that perspective it was innocent man shot by cops. It wasn't the black guy shot by the white guys, I think.

PG: Who are your friends at school? Who do you spend time with?

NI: I would say that I'm in SEC, which is right across the hall, and there's three black guys and another white guy, and an Asian guy, and a black girl and two white girls. I would say that I have sort of different circles of friends.

PG: Tell me about those circles.

NI: I would say that I have circles of friends. I have circles of integrated friends where I feel completely free to walk in the cafeteria which, unfortunately is where the black kids sit during lunch, but I walk in there and I see my friends, and I go and I say,

“hi,” and I mess around. But then I walk outside where the white kids sit and I eat my lunch, because that’s where I have a seat, and I think that’s where I have experiences and just more things in common with. I don’t think there’s a forced separation in terms of the different little groups of friends that I have. Like I’m friends with the people in SEC who are all advanced placement, very bright kids. And that’s sort of a different level, actually, of conversation and interaction than with my little group of white friends who aren’t necessarily all advanced placement, and we’re more, “Oh, did you see what happened at the ball game last night? What are we doing this weekend?” But on SEC with a more diverse group of people and, I would say, a more intelligent group of people, I would say discussions are more worldly, and we talk about things that I don’t necessarily talk about with my little selective group of white friends. But then I can go into the cafeteria and see, I don’t want to say less intelligent, but I would say less intellectual black friends and I’ll be like, “Oh, what’s up? What’s going on?” So I think it’s more of a separation of intellectuals that the higher intellectuals sort of mix across races, and the lower intellectuals it seems to be more of a separation of races, I would say.

PG: I was going to ask about the cafeteria which you go into very often, this difference. What is that about? Let me ask you a different way. What does that say about West Charlotte do you think?

NI: I don’t know if it says much about West Charlotte. I would say that it says about human nature in general that you migrate to those with whom you have the most in common. Just if you met somebody on the street, and they were also a student. They also liked English. They also like sports. You have more to talk about with them, and

you have more to base a relationship on. I think that, very obviously, the black kids sit with the black kids and the white kids sit with the white kids, because that's who they're comfortable with, and that's who they share more of a socioeconomic background with. I do think some of it is racial, but I think it's more socioeconomic that you sit with the people who share your interests. I'm on the golf team here, and whenever someone plays golf I'll always have something to talk with them about. And a lot of the black kids that go to school here don't really have an interest in golf, or don't play golf, and I think it's more interest based, or socioeconomic based than necessarily racially based.

PG: Well, you talk about this group of friends that you eat lunch with. Are these people that you've known for a long time? Are these sort of people from your neighborhood, or is it just people that you've come to know here at West Charlotte?

NI: Probably half of them are people that I went to middle school with, and the other half are people that I've known throughout elementary school and middle school, and got to know really well when I got to West Charlotte. I knew of all of them before I came here. So it's more based on pre-West Charlotte experience than experience here at West Charlotte.

PG: On the weekends and stuff, are these the folks you hang out with? Are they the same?

NI: No.

PG: What do you all do? You don't have to tell me everything.

NI: Basically go out and try to hang out with your friends, and try to find someone's house whose parents are out of town and hang out there. It's not an elevated

intellectual weekend that I have usually. Which, I don't know if it's good or not, but I'm not challenged to think on the weekends usually.

PG: You save that for?

NI: I save that for the week days.

PG: What else? This SEC is student government, is that right?

NI: Right.

PG: Do you have an elective position?

NI: Yeah. Everyone on the council is elected. I'm not elected to a secretary or a treasurer or anything.

PG: But you have to run a campaign.

NI: Oh yeah.

PG: What does it require to get elected to student government at West Charlotte? Who do you have to appeal to and how?

NI: This is going to sound pretty negative, but I would say most generally you have to appeal to the greater black population. In my speech I incorporated rap songs and really tried to appeal to African-American culture. I guess it worked. Although I wouldn't say that that's absolutely necessary. There's another kid on SEC who went out and plainly said, "This is who I am." And got excited, but not in the stereotypical African-American way. It was more just eccentric in his own way. And that was just as well received as my speech was. I would say that you have to appeal to the black community here at West Charlotte, but you don't necessarily have to go about it in a stereotypical black way. West Charlotte is a place that really appreciates people who go out on a limb and do their own thing.

PG: You've talked about sort of in classes intellectual exchanges with your fellow black students and white students, what do you think you've learned about African American culture here at West Charlotte?

NI: I would say the biggest thing I've learned is how hard it is in this country to be black and to be successful. I think that in black culture, especially in children, what is acceptable and what is cool for kids is not studying and reading and doing your homework. Where, in my culture, that is acceptable. It is fine to do your homework and get good grades, but not necessarily in black culture. And I see a real alienation of those who try to be successful and who are successful. I would imagine that that would be the single largest thing that I've learned, is that I can't possibly come to imagine what it is like to be young, black and smart in American society. Because you're alienated by white people who are racist, and you're alienated by your own culture sometimes because of ignorance. And I would say that's the biggest lesson I've learned from black culture here at West Charlotte.

PG: Do you think of West Charlotte as being an African American institution? It's obviously an historically black school.

NI: I do. If you walk around you don't see University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. You see, NCA&T. You don't see Duke, you see Johnson C. Smith. And not that West Charlotte is simply relegated to sending kids to African-American schools, and not that they won't do everything in their power to send you to any school that you want to go to. But in general, in terms of I think administration and, I guess not so much teachers, but administration and student body there seems to be more of an African American overtone to the way the school functions. Which I don't mind a bit and

actually I enjoy because it's not the way that I live my life, and it's opened me up to a different side of our country that is just as vital to the success of our country as mine is, but that doesn't always get the recognition that it should.

PG: Was it surprising at first to see the office or the ( )?

NI: Oh, oh, it was definitely surprising when I came to school, and we had a fried chicken day, and we had rap music playing on the intercom in the morning. But sort of a nice surprise and a nice awakening to what it is that West Charlotte is. Yeah, a lot of schools call us ghetto and things like that, but I'd say it's more than that. It's a appreciation of African American culture almost integrated with a diversity of kids that creates an environment for people to be successful, and where you don't worry about whether you're white or you're black or you're Asian, where you just feel free to be who you are and it's not a big deal if you're white or you're black. I've never ever seen somebody be treated differently by anybody, by any staff here at West Charlotte because they're white or black. And I'm not sure I could say that if I went to a different high school.

PG: Can you think of any particular—I'm interested in sort of stories and incidences. Can you think of any particular story, encounter you had or experience that you've had that might illustrate that?

NI: Well, let me think. I remember when Principal Cline first got here, I saw him. He's a very intimidating man when you first meet him, especially if you're a student of his. And he was laughing and joking around with a few black students, and I sort of felt uncomfortable just sort of getting into the fray because it was, I don't want to say a black thing, but it appeared like a racial understanding between two African

Americans, and I didn't want to feel like I was stepping on anybody's toes. And he looked up at me and he was like, "What are you doing?" I was just like, "Uh, uh, uh." He was like, "Come over here." And he started laughing and joking with me just the same. And it was sort of like an affirmation of what it is to be accepting of everybody, even when you're at your most relaxed, and when you're not worried about the social context of what you're going to say or do, you still like everybody and you still want to help everybody.

PG: Are there any particular classes that have been memorable for you here, just in general, that's what I'm moving toward.

NI: I would say that my US history AP class last year was pretty memorable because it was led by this old white teacher who's color blind. And he started out the year by saying, "I'm color blind so you can be black or white. I don't care. It doesn't matter to me." And that was probably the first time where I really got into intellectual debates with African Americans who were smarter than I was and could illustrate their point better than I could, and so I found myself at a loss for words and sort of taken aback by how well spoken and how generally intelligent some of these kids were, and I thought I'd never really experienced this before. As soon as I realized that, "Wow, these kids really have something to offer," it was such a learning experience to find out what they thought about American history and find out a black perspective on the founding of our nation. It was really surprising to see the way they reacted to some things, and informative, and just helped me, I think, to become more understanding of what it is to be black and in America.

PG: Were there ever points in that course that were difficult for you to hear some of the things that they said?

NI: Oh, yeah. There's always times I think when you don't want to hear that you're racist, or you don't want to hear what your forefathers have done, like the horrible inequities that have been forced upon black people simply because they were black and that you feel bad about simply because you're white. You don't want to feel like it's your fault, but in some way you sort of do. And you don't want black kids to have aggression or feel oppressed by you, but you know in some way they have to simply because of history. That's hard to deal with. It's hard to come to terms with the fact that, "Yes, my group of people oppressed your group of people, and to this day is oppressing your group of people. But in terms of this classroom, let's move beyond that and discuss the ramifications of it and make it an academic subject." In terms of just fessing up to that, it was difficult.

PG: Was there any particular historical moment?

NI: I was trying to think of that. When we talked about the civil rights era we watched a movie called—I can't remember the title of the movie. It's about a black settlement shortly after the Civil War.

PG: Was it like *Rose*—

NI: *Rosewood. Rosewood.* I'd never seen it before, and we watched it. I don't know if I need to give a plot line for the movie, but it's about a black settlement rising up and being successful, and a white settlement sort of moving in and antagonizing the black settlement. There's a show down, and a lot of white people are killed. To see, I don't want to say joy, but to see the satisfaction that was gotten by watching that movie by the

black kids where it was almost like that was the right thing to do, to have a massacre of white people. I got mad. I said, "How is that possible? That's not right." And I talked with Jeff Black who's a black kid on SEC and just won the Morehead scholarship. I was talking with him about it, and I said, "How can that be okay? How can it be all right for anyone to kill anybody?" And he said, "Well, Ned, you know black people were in slavery for about three hundred years before that. Three hundred years of aggression building up to twenty white people dying. For us that's a," he said, "small victory," but I don't think he meant killing white people was a victory, but that fighting back, having a voice and standing up was a small victory. For me, I sort of thought, "Well, okay. I guess you're right." And after that I reflected on it, and thought, "I guess I don't want to think that black people have a right to have a distaste for me because I'm white, but they sort of do because of the history of this country." I don't want that to be that way, but that's how it is, and I have a greater understanding of that now.

PG: Well, tell me about your senior project.

NI: My senior exit essay is about the resegregation of public schools and neighborhood schools. There's been a ( ) in Charlotte, not necessarily in neighborhood schools, but for Charlotte to be divided up into a certain number of quadrants, and within your quadrant being able to select the school that you go to. My paper isn't directly towards that, but it's more of an issue of there's a big outcry for neighborhood schools in Charlotte. It kind of worried me because I thought I've been to predominantly white schools in Charlotte, and I've been to predominantly black schools in Charlotte, and predominantly white schools generally have more of an advantage in educational resources. So I looked into it. I found that if Charlotte was to go directly to

neighborhood schools that nine schools would be out of racial balance which is between twenty-five and fifty percent black population. Seven of those schools would have over, I think, sixty percent white population, three of those having over eighty or something. And then two schools would have over eighty percent black population. What I really found was that in terms of economic backing to have neighborhood schools provides an inequitable situation for kids that would go to predominantly black neighborhood schools and kids that would go to predominantly white neighborhood schools, in terms of their opportunity to receive an education. Of course, that all goes back to *Brown v Board of Education* where basically it was found that separated schools don't work. You can't have white schools and black schools because of equity of opportunity for education. Basically my thesis is that neighborhood schools are unconstitutional.

PG: What do you think about this whole debate that's going on?

NI: I think the best way to deal with desegregation of schools is a tough question, because I can't see a way that it has worked without flaw yet. But I'm worried that if Charlotte is divided up into precincts or sections and people choose the schools they want to go to that Charlotte is going to get resegregated. Basically kids that go to predominantly black or predominantly minority schools are not going to have the education, or the ability to get the education, that children are receiving a predominantly white schools. But I think in terms of Dr. Smith's plans there are ways to get around that and to try to maintain racial harmony as it's called.

PG: Do you think that's the major issue in school, desegregation/quality of education?

NI: I don't think it is, and I think that's the problem. I think people are more concerned about just getting their kid to the best school possible and not worrying about the rest of it. And I think a lot of educators on the higher level are too much politicians instead of true educators. They want to please the majority instead of really looking at education as the primary goal of the educational system. I don't see anybody saying, "Well, how is my child's education going to be affected by this?" It's, "Who is my child going to go to school with, and where are they going to go to school? And I don't think that's the right question to ask.

PG: What do you think is the right question to ask?

NI: I would say universally the right question to ask is, "How good of an education is my child going to receive?" However, I think that can be voiced more loudly by white parents with lots of money and lots of political power in terms of their job or their friends. And I don't think it's as easily voiced by African-American parents who work two jobs and live in the inner city. I think in that case it's the responsibility of everybody involved in education to stick up for the rights of those who don't have parents to do it for them, because, obviously, the parent is a large, large part. I haven't seen an editorial written by a child yet in the *Observer*. So I think it's a lot of parent influence. So I would say that the main question to ask is, "What is the quality of education going to be?" firstly. And second of all, "Is that going to be for everybody, or is it going to be for a select group of people." Yeah, it's great if you can educate a few people, but it's even better if you can educate everybody.

PG: Well I think when people first were talking about integration and desegregation in Charlotte schools there was the idea that the legal basis was inequity,

that the schools weren't equal. I think that at least among some people there was also a kind of wish that desegregation would go some ways toward uniting Charlotte as a community, that it would reach beyond the schools.

NI: Right.

PG: Do you think that that has happened from your experience?

NI: To some extent I would say yes in terms of PTA conferences and, obviously, there's more interaction between black and white parents. But in terms of more social circles, I think the way that Charlotte as a whole looks at race, obviously, has changed from the 1970s, but I don't think it's done a lot to unite Charlotte racially. I don't see black and white parents going to dinner parties together or having Christmas dinner. In terms of a social circle I think it's still mainly you stick with your race. I think that's unfortunate but, again, I don't think it's based on, "I don't like black people, therefore I'm not going to socialize with them." I think it's socioeconomic background. If they have the money to join my country club, I'd love to have dinner with them. But if they don't, then I don't want to eat with them, and visa versa. Who's this posh guy in this Mercedes coming down here trying to eat dinner with me? He needs to just go on like he doesn't know what it is down here. So I think it's more of a socioeconomic problem than a racial problem.

PG: So what has it done? You were going to say, again, you've talked to some extent but you wanted to sum up in some way.

NI: I would say that it's provided a much better opportunity for education for black children, and it's opened the eyes of many, many white kids. For, I guess, twenty-six years now, about, so for twenty-six years it's been making kids who might not have

been aware earlier of how it is to live in this country and be a minority, or to at least help in the process of letting kids be aware of their surroundings, and be aware that the world is not seen through just their eyes. There's a whole lot of perspectives out there, and you're never going to know them all, but it helps to try to understand a few of them.

PG: Well this has been really great. Is there anything else that I haven't asked about what is important about West Charlotte that you would like to talk about?

NI: On a small note is that West Charlotte is predominantly black. I think it's seventy/thirty about black to white, and you can tell that when you walk down the halls and you see mostly black kids and not mostly white kids. That experience to some extent has led me to feel what it's like to be a minority in the greater community. There have been times when kids have had racial slurs to say to me, and laughed at me, and pointed at me simply because I was white, and I'm alone in a hallway with twenty-five black kids and I'm the only white kid. And you get mad about it, and you think, "God, that really makes you mad." But then when you step back from it and really look at it you realize that that must happen fifty more times to black kids than it does to white kids per day, or per hour, or per minute. So it makes you a lot more sensitive to how it is that you view other races, I think.

PG: You've obviously thought about all these issues a lot. Why have you thought about them so much?

NI: I think for my own sake I sort of had to think about them. I sort of reasoned out to myself why do I get mad when black kids say derogatory things about white people, and why do black kids say derogatory things about white people? Why do white people say derogatory things about black people? Why do I feel uncomfortable walking

down the hallway by myself with twenty-five black kids, knowing that nothing bad is going to happen to me. It's just a feeling of uneasiness. I think I just for myself had to reason them out. And my mom is a very large integrated schools activist, and my dad was an assistant superintendent in the schools. So it's sort of the dinner time conversation as well as what I really think about in terms of education in general. Also, for my paper I had to really reason out what my argument was going to be and what the advantages and disadvantages of integrated schools are.

PG: What influence do you think your parents have had on all of this?

NI: I would say the largest influence, because I remember I came home sophomore year one time and was angry about a black kid saying to me, or something like that. My mom said, "Ned, I know you're angry, and, Ned, I know that he shouldn't have said that. But just imagine if you went to school every day, you saw white kids driving nicer cars. You looked in the news and on TV and you saw white people having nicer things than you. Your parents were uneducated. They didn't have a car. You had all these pressures of the world pushing down on you, and you're only ability to lash out was to say something derogatory. Isn't that a small price to pay to suffer that?" And I guess that really made me think that I guess it is. With all that I'm blessed with simply because who I was born, by no fault of my own, and by no fault of other's own that they're not blessed with some of the same things, it really makes you not take for granted what it is you're given. It makes you understand that if you weren't given such things how it is you could feel anger or feel resentment toward somebody.

PG: Have you ever discussed these issues with your black friends. Do they ever specifically talk to you about the difficulties that they felt?

NI: Actually no. I've never had someone say, "It's hard to be black in America because of." It's more I infer through stories that have been told. I remember when my mom first moved down here she walked into a store with one of her black friends, and I think it was a PTA member. They were just at a PTA lunch and then were walking into a convenience store. My mom went first and her friend went second, and the guy behind the counter said, "I'm sorry. I can't serve you." My mom was like, "Well, why not? I have money." And I think my mom thought that the lady didn't have money. And she was like, "No, I have money Edie." And my mom said, "Well, why can't you serve her." And he bluntly said, "We don't serve niggers here." I think stories like that, not to that extent, but stories like that have really opened my eyes to what it is that goes on and the racism and prejudice that exist in our country. But I've never actually had someone say, "This is how hard it is to be black in America." It's more what it is and what I observe people going through, whether it be college information or SAT registration.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE A

TAPE ONE, SIDE B IS BLANK

END OF INTERVIEW

TRANSCRIBED BY SHARON CAUGHILL