

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

LINDA ROSS

JUNE 15, 2005

LINDA ROSS: I graduated in 1972, a graduate of Jess Lanier High School which is in Bessemer, Alabama. Both the black high school and the white high schools were closed and a new high school was built for everyone to attend the next fall, it was called Jess Lanier High School. This was in 1971. The last graduating classes for both the black and the white high schools were the class of 1970. So I started at Jess Lanier my junior year and it was not bad, the black to white ratio was fifty-fifty. The instructors were all neutral, they taught us as well as they taught the white students because we were all in there together. We didn't have many race wars at school that year; they did things to try and curb them. They didn't play all black songs or just white songs at the pep rallies; they made it a mixture to keep everybody happy. There were a few break outs of race related fights but not enough to interrupt any classes. We went to school there for two years; by the time I graduated in 1972 the school was about eighty percent black and twenty percent white. I do not know where all the white students went. I found out later; once our graduating class came through, the whites gradually started finding other schools. All white people were not able to afford the private academy, which was Bessemer Academy that had been built at the same time as our high school. This school was built for the whites that knew they were not going to mix with the black students. As the years went on it grew bigger and bigger, so the old students that once couldn't afford it somehow were able to afford it all of a sudden. Probably by 1980 there were about five percent white people at Jess Lanier High School, currently it is probably down to about

two percent, it is predominantly black. The brand new Jess Lanier High School that they built is predominantly black now. All the white students that still live in Bessemer and still live within the school zone of Jess Lanier somehow get to go to Bessemer Academy, which I know was built just for this purpose. At the time I didn't know it, but now I know why it was built.

KIMBERLY HILL: Was it built close to Jess Lanier?

LR: It was built right down the hill from Jess Lanier. It is full and it is growing still, and Jess Lanier is still there and is all black students. I think they may have one player on the football team and two white children in the band. Probably the only reason they are there is because they want to be there. **Anybody that wanted to go, the city or whoever their parents knew they got away from the integration thing.** Now, that's that. At the time it seemed to me -- I am just one person and this is my opinion -- it seemed like a good idea because we were getting a nice building to have classes in, the student to teacher ratio would be good and the environment would be made for learning, but that did not happen. The elementary schools, the middle schools as well as the high schools. When the schools were integrated they took away prayer -- which we prayed every morning, we learned the pledge of allegiance and we sang a gospel hymn when I was in elementary school, these were all black children. We were taught just basic patriotism. Right now if you ask any middle school child in the black schools in Bessemer to recite the pledge of allegiance, they are going to ask you what that is. Not to mention "The Star Spangled Banner" because that's not going to happen either. Prayer was taken away. We said the Lord's Prayer and the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm every morning before we started class. They don't do that anymore, so when [they] take God out of it -- everybody

says that religion is each person's preference, but whatever it is, you do not have a right to just bow your head and pray to just whoever anymore. We prayed all together, but now that's been taken away. They don't say the pledge of allegiance, they don't sing "The Star Spangled Banner" and there is no discipline. If there is no discipline you cannot have order, and if there is no order you cannot teach, so there you go. We get no learning in even elementary schools. I have been there. My grandchildren go there and the only thing they learn outside of the classroom is what I teach them. We don't have that and all children who go to school do not have someone at home that will ask them what they did at school today, if anything was eventful, or if they were going on any field trips. All children don't have that, so there are children that are just being babysat during the day and are not learning, they cut up to get attention and the teachers are unable to discipline them due to the integration. I think the result of which was a lower standard that is expected of black teachers in black schools. I think the idea was that no schools would be predominantly white or predominantly black, but you have plenty of that still here and I'm sure there is plenty of it where you live too. My coworker's daughter hired a lady to come in to help birth her children at home so that no black nurses would handle them. These kids are absolutely taken away from any interaction with any children other than white children, and that may stifle them later when they ask 'who are they and where did those people come from?' They won't even have any knowledge of any other cultures except their own, and I think it's hypocritical what they did. I really hate to feel that way but we as black people and our children are the ones that are suffering as a result of it. It was good for me, when I came out of high school we could go into college. And you can now too, except how are you going to teach without order? How are you going

to teach children who are used to speaking out like they want to at home and then they come to school and you tell them they can't do that, that's not going to happen. I really think it was bad, I don't think it turned out to be what it should have been.

KH: What did you think it was going to be?

LR: I thought it would be all children will go to school and we are going to teach them the same as if they were our own. That's the way I was taught, but I was in an all black environment with all black teachers that told me 'if you don't stop I'm going to tell your mother,' so we stopped. Now, the kids are like "pssss, and?" So I thought integration would mean we are going to have computers just like they have, we are going to have the clean hallways and all the nice stuff, the ceilings not leaking and the walls not cracking. We were going to have a good learning environment, but that didn't happen. We have the same old buildings that they integrated and all the white people fled and left us here.

KH: When you first went over you did have a new building.

LR: Yes and I had aspirations that it was going to be good, but now we are back to the past ways. They sent us the old books that they had three years ago, those are the books we get. They got new textbooks and sent us their old ones; I didn't know how that was. My mindset at that time was that now it is going to be equal; well it has never been equal and it never will be. Working in this job that I do [at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] allows me to look back and reflect and to see it was all just a sham, even the enactment of the Civil Rights Act. Right now it's a joke because they have hired people to incorporate discrimination in the policy and you have to really,

really dig to find it and that should not be. It's just in your face; it's more so in your face than it was in the 1960's.

KH: During your two years when you were in a desegregated school, when you graduated did you feel as pessimistic about desegregation as you do now?

LR: No I didn't because I didn't know as much as I know now. I have learned this because I have seen it over the years. I have worked at jobs that I am overqualified for because I have always known where it is that I am designed to work. Everybody is not designed to work in a restaurant; you might not have the patience or the whatever to work there. You're geared for different things. I was applying for jobs where I would be working in the administrative part of jobs, at hospitals and at clinics. I am going to be the one doing the paperwork, I am going to be the one interviewing and I'm going to be the one meeting the public. ( ) **said, "We can't have her up here, she's too dark. You can tell her she can work in the claims department where all the dust and paper is."** When I recognized it I thought they were looking for a particular kind of person, not just a qualified person. They were looking for a certain image and I was just not fitting it, so at once I knew that I would have to sell myself. I would not just be able to rely on my abilities. So one morning when I left for an interview I told myself I am going to get this job, I am not going to be turned down because I am black anymore. If they want a person that's going to be able to get the job done, I am going to let them know that I am that person. That's what I did, and I was hired that day because I spoke up. I said to them 'if you want someone to do this job then I am the person you need to hire, but if you just want a white person to work because there are other white people around then I understand that', and then she hired me. When I got ready to leave there she couldn't

offer me enough money to stay. I work to earn a living and they were not paying, but I was exactly what they needed they just didn't know it. Before I left there I made her aware that all black people are not ignorant, all black people are not lazy, all black people do not steal, all black people are not unpatriotic and all those mindsets that were already in a lot of white people's minds. How they got there is because they don't know enough people. Anyway, I have seen this over the years and that's why I am so pessimistic about it. I know it exists and there is just no reason for it. When they integrated the schools I had no idea that we were headed down as far as education was concerned, and it's bad. Nobody will say 'let's all go back,' because you cannot undo that. You cannot undo that unless you start home schooling, which a lot of white people do. A lot of black people have to go to work and you can't go to work and home school; see you can't undo any of that. So, unless black people take a look at what's going on -- we have too many children that are truant and we don't have enough parents that care that their child is truant. Kids are failing, they are not motivated, they are not challenged and if you challenge them they get discouraged because they are not at that level yet. Even though they are in the eleventh grade, they have only learned sixth grade material because they have been absent. In class but absent, as long as you sit and be quiet it's all fine. That was not acceptable when I was in school; you had to participate. You would be called on and you were expected to know the answers. You did your homework and you cared about passing on to the next grade, you cared about not getting pregnant and you cared about things that children now don't see as the same. They look at having a baby as being a part of the upper crowd. They say 'I have me a baby' and they are fifteen. That's the mindset. 'I robbed a man, I pulled a gun on somebody;' it's wrong but it's all stuff that

can't be undone. **Maybe I should have (** ) **[laughs]** That's what has happened, that's how I feel about it. It has deteriorated; the very fiber that's been woven to keep us together is gone because you have some that feel like they have made it. You are educated, I'm educated, most people who came out of school when I did are educated, but we need to worry about the ones who came after us. I have grandchildren, do you know when I try to speak about what they should be doing to their parents, my daughter in law told me that I am always trying to get into the children's business. I don't know any children that have business; I don't know those children that she is talking about! I can't even fathom where she was going with that, telling me to stop getting into their business. It's like she should have been the child and what child raised her? As far as I'm concerned they don't have any business that I can't get in, because I am providing everything they have. What they are wearing, **what they are talking on and I'm getting ready to pull all my stuff.** If they have some business then let me know it and they can get their own stuff. Anytime she talks on the phone at eleven o'clock at night when she's staying at my house I say 'look I don't know what you are talking about but it is not that important, you need to get some rest for school tomorrow' and she says she's not tired. I said, "I don't care, get off the phone." I asked her if her mother knows she's on the phone and she says yes, so I ask if I can talk to her and she says no she's asleep, then I say 'well then how does she know you are on the phone?' It's crazy. [laughs] I don't get this, and it's all gone down hill. Everybody is pleasing somebody and I don't even know who it is.

KH: They are so independent.

LR: I guess so, I mean everybody should be. You should want to do well if you are in school. Why go to school for the entire nine months and then fail? You have to pay two hundred and thirty dollars for one class in summer school that is only going to get you one credit when you need four. You have lost a whole year actually. Save the two hundred and thirty dollars, get some school clothes for the coming year, focus and say you are going to do better. That's the only way to do that. You cannot get into the eleventh grade and cannot be able to read a newspaper article and tell someone what it says. I used to do that when my kids were little, while at the dinner table. It was six o'clock everyday, no changes everybody would be there. I would tell someone to read this article and the kids would say 'you know I know how to read,' and I would tell them I want to make sure you can read and comprehend. That's what we did, just drills. I ask questions of my grandchildren randomly as we are riding down the street, I would say 'what is Independence Day, which one of our holidays do we celebrate Independence Day on?' They know the fourth of July but they don't know Independence Day. So, it's the little things. I learned that in third or fourth grade, but they don't have it anymore.

KH: You are hitting one of the themes that a lot of our interviewees talk about. They say that the black community has lost its strength since desegregation.

LR: It really has. That's what kept our race strong, to get adhesiveness with each other. You could discipline your neighbor's child if you saw him throwing rocks and trying to break somebody's window. Try that now and see what happens. One time there was a little boy who must have been about five and he wouldn't get out of the street. He called me a name so I pulled my car over and got out, he ran and I saw where he went and I went to his house. Do you know, when I told his mother what he had said she said



she was surprised that was all he said! I'm an elder, to me when I was five if I said something like that I was going to get whipped by that person, whipped once she came and told on me and then would have to sit inside the house all day long without playing with my friends. 'That's all he said, that ain't nothing.' That is what has happened, nobody respects anything anymore. They don't respect each other's lives, the boys don't respect their girlfriends and the girls don't even respect themselves. Who is going to get up on the dance floor with 'I'm a bad bitch, I'm a bad bitch', how are you going to dance to that when they are talking about you. I'm in the club asking what is he saying.

KH: You are not so crazy about the new rap music then?

LR: Not those that degrade women. They all get up and the whole dance floor is bouncing, they are having a good time while being degraded. We didn't have that kind of music, but if they play that and I am somewhere I feel that they don't have any respect for women. I would go over and tell them they need to take that off because I didn't come here to listen to that. I'm sure that in his mind he was like 'you can just take your old ass home because we are having a good time off this.' My granddaughter tells me that's what they dance to now and there is nothing wrong with it. I told her they are talking about girls, and you are in that category, so you meet a boy and he calls you a bitch and then you are happy? You should be insulted is what I am saying. It isn't anything but a word, but it's degrading. **That just like all the other words that he can line up behind it to call you and you accept it.** It should be unacceptable at any age, but it isn't.

KH: Do you think that this degradation of women might have something to do with schools too?

LR: All of these people who are in this era we are talking about, the rappers, anyone from age seventeen to age thirty, if they made it popular because if you don't stand for something then you will fall for any and everything. When you stop learning and stop being concerned about you as a person, your black pride or yourself as a woman -- there are certain things [such as] I'm not going to get drunk and fall out in the street because that looks to me like a slut and a tramp, so if you don't want to be labeled then don't conduct yourself in a way to fit that label. If you don't speak out when somebody says something that is degrading or making you feel less than what you believe you are, then you are accepting it. It may have, if you don't know anything then how are you going to protest? You don't even know what you are protesting about; you shouldn't get on a bandwagon unless you know where the wagon is headed. A lot of them have not even taken the time to think about it, 'it's just the way is, that's what we dance to.' Now, if you didn't cater to that then he would make cleaner songs. So there are too many accepting people and not enough people saying it is not acceptable to disrespect women. Don't you have a mother, a sister, a daughter? The same thing is there for them, too, from someone else, but I don't think anybody thinks about it that far [ahead] to say that their daughter has got to grow up in a world where guys are traditionally taught that they don't have to respect her. If she doesn't have the money to give you then you just keep walking, it used to be the opposite. I wouldn't have a boyfriend that told me to pay his way. Now it's like 'let's go Dutch.' My granddaughter has her money and the boy has his own money but yet I have to pick him up and give him a ride. I will go pick him up and I will give him the third degree from the time he gets into the car until the time he gets out. My granddaughter wants me to stop asking so many questions, he isn't saying

anything and I am trying to find out what kind of guy he might be. I just let him know that I am going to be here when you come out, so you better know that I am not going to run late. You are going to be looking right into my face at ten thirty I am standing outside the car, tell me what the movie was about. They said they were going to see one thing, but I know they went over here to see the R rated movie. I ask questions. When I was growing up we were not allowed to go anywhere that a parent was not going to be supervising. Having parties at my house while my parents were out just did not happen. My granddaughter will tell me that it's okay with her mom for her to go to the party, the next thing I know her mom is picking her up and then the next day I hear my granddaughter talking about how good the party was. Anything could happen.

KH: Yes and no accountability.

LR: No accountability. Then it's going to be 'I don't know what his name was but he had the gun.' I said if you would use better judgment in where you let her go you could avoid a lot of things, some things are going to happen. The good Lord gave you five senses to use judgment when you are raising your children. Now my granddaughter says she doesn't want to come over my house because I won't let her do things. No, I'm not going to let you go anywhere unless I feel it is controlled. My daughter in law would send a four year old to an all night skate.

KH: A four year old?

LR: She's four but her big sister is going and she didn't have anyone to keep her. Why didn't she call me? The baby was lying on the floor. **That all comes from ( ) way back from not having the values** when she was raised, the same ones I had and the same ones I raised my son with. Then he goes and has children with a woman who

doesn't know **how to ( ) her way** out of a paper bag if you gave her the instructions with it, and she has children. It could be related, I think it is because if they had never done it and we still had prayer, these children would know how to say a bible verse. **( ) table have about six or seven of the neighbor's children and I ( ) say a bible verse before we eat our ( ) we just got cups ( ) and none of them-they are about six years old and I have a couple three year olds, but I have everybody come on open the box of ( ), just to get in there presence and see what they will say. I say we are going to say our bible verse first and they ( ) he's the only one that knew one. Now my ( ) class starts on Tuesdays of next week and I will have all the ones that come.**

KH: Is that at church?

LR: It's at my house. I went to ( ) at Miss Lois' house when I was eight, and that where I learned my books and Bible and that's where I learned my first ( ) song. Before my mother past I was singing it and she said 'you still know that song?' and I said yes, that was my first ( ) song. We had it at her house and she taught us that and I decided I was going to have a ( ) at my house and try to teach these children the bible and the books of the bible, so that if they go to church they can keep up with where the preacher is. Just that little bit will help.

KH: Who was Miss Lois?

LR: Miss Lois was a lady in my neighborhood that helped raise me; you know a village raised children then. I couldn't go down the street and sass anybody because they know whose child I am and they are going to tell on me. ( ) they don't believe what she said, this is an adult. Any adult anywhere you go could tell you right and wrong

don't do that, stay out of there, blah, blah, blah. Now you can't; villages don't raise children. People don't want you to say things to their children, even when you are telling something right. They don't want you bothering them; they will take that child's side too. Children will pit you against each other, they are that smart and they are manipulative. I have seen them in action. Miss Lois was my neighbor across the street. My sisters and brothers and her children, we were all about the same age and had each other to play with as we grew up. She had ( ) and had to talk me out from behind a tree and I would come out or else she would tell my mom, who would then tell daddy and then I would get a whipping with the longest switch on the tree. I don't know how he always found them. We didn't sass. So I ( ) to see if I could get their attention to know. It got to the point for us that we would look forward to it; we'd be sitting on her step waiting for her to get ready for us. That's how I learned. It's ( ), that's what we taught. They have them at the churches too, but my church has them on Saturday and I don't have any kids here on Saturday. The kids come here all during the week. So on Tuesdays I am going to get them all together and I am going to read to them. There are just too many that do not have anything to do, and the only thing they think about are video games and sitting in front of the television set. I asked them to walk up to the store to get a Sunkist and they were like 'way up there', it's two blocks. [laughs] Then they ask me to drive and tell me they'll run in and get it. Then I offer to walk with them and they are like no, it's too far.

KH: They don't get much exercise.

LR: They don't get any. I tried to get my grandson on the track team. He protested, he frowned and he rebelled. I said just give it a try, you might like it. He runs

like greased lightning. If he could get to liking it, like the coach and wanting to be out there to compete...but I couldn't get him to cooperate. There's no sense in trying to talk to his mother either. The city has a track team and a ball club; he needs to get involved in something. She said he doesn't want to do that when it's really that she doesn't want to take him. She can't drive, and she doesn't want to sacrifice the time to keep the streets from taking her child. He is still young and impressionable-

KH: How old is he?

LR: He's eight. His sister is nine and all of them are lazy. It discourages me because I had such a happy childhood. We made our own toys. If the roller skates got broken we would take the wheels and make a scooter. We played and they don't play anymore. They don't know how to play dodge ball; they just don't do that anymore. I **guess it's ( ) to change, but integration I can't think of anything positive about it** and I'm sorry. I really just can't.

KH: It sounded like you had some positive things to say about when you were-

LR: When I was there it was a good two years, but now when I look at Jess Lanier I say look what they have done. They only did this actually to pacify, that's what the Civil Rights Act was, to pacify because Martin Luther King had been assassinated and then Robert Kennedy had been assassinated, then Johnson was like I have to do something because the black community is in an uproar. The whole United States was in an uproar, that why it was done and now it's across the board. You have blacks, whites, everybody is being affected by some type of discrimination somewhere. It was only done then to pacify black people. That's why it was done, when it was signed; which that was

a good thing I guess. The spirit of the whole thing was not honorable; they had an ulterior motive from the very beginning.

KH: So you would say it had short term benefits but not long term benefits?

LR: It wasn't long term. It should be much better now. The attitude didn't change; the attitudes of white America did not change. The hatred is still there. Little children can only relate that another child is just someone who is the same size, they don't know what color or race is. They gravitate towards each other because they don't have any malice. They do not have any sense of prejudice; we put that in them as they grow. "Don't play with her because she is black or stay away from people with disabilities." They can relate to instructions and scolding if they catch you playing with [someone of a different race]. Even at daycare, [they say] 'I told you not to play with her', I have seen this. The children don't know, they are just the two kids that like to play patty cake, they don't know that she is black and I am white. They don't see that; they see we are different because they can see that, but innocence is innocence. Children do not know; it is taught to them and it's taught at a very young age too. I was at Oak Mountain State Park one day with my boyfriend and he has an antique Z car and it's exquisite, it's beautiful, he restored it. A white man parked beside us and he had a young boy with him. The boy said, "Daddy do we get the [robes] now, do we get the hoods?" Whatever, that man had been teaching that boy to hate black colored skin and that was all that boy could relate to, these are the kind of people he had been talking about-do we get to-

KH: Whoa!

LR: Yes. I looked at the man and he was so embarrassed he was so red in the face and he said ‘oh not now, not now’, but he was talking to my boyfriend because the car was so pretty. Asking where he got the car and admiring it, but the boy didn’t know when to distinguish. He didn’t know that. We both heard what the boy said, but we never changed our expressions on our faces. He was a racist and he was sending two different signals to the boy, because the boy was talking about how these were the kind of people who we were supposed to go get our masks for. That’s all the boy knew. Out of the mouths of babes comes the truth. He was so red and he kept saying not ‘now son, not now.’ If you are a hypocrite than you are trying to straddle the fence and you are teaching him to hate, and he doesn’t even know why. All he knows is that now it’s time to hate because these people have different skin than us, that’s all he knew. It was funny and it should have taught him a lesson, but I’m sure it didn’t. You can’t switch on and off because they don’t understand that. There was a lady that had a child about the same age as my granddaughter, about age two and the kids were getting closer and closer to one another. So, the next thing you know their fingers were touching and that lady snatched that baby and put her on the other side of her, and I just laughed. My baby is sitting there wondering why she did that and I am not going to try and explain that to her at that age. It’s taught. So, if it had been a genuine effort to right a wrong that has been perpetrated against people for this many years, it would have been better now. We would have better schools and we don’t help ourselves any because of our destructive nature. They ( ). When I went for a conference with my son’s math teacher, Christopher graduated in 1990 or so, I had scheduled an appointment with Jess Lanier prior to his graduation. It was my last time at Jess Lanier, before my granddaughter. The math



teacher apparently forgot about the appointment and when the bell rang I went to go but my son told me not to go out there while classes were changing. I told him I had done it before, but there was no order in the halls. Everybody was just going in different directions; it used to be you went up the right side and come down the left side. ( ), I said **“Lord listen to his language.”** No respect for teachers, for the girls or for anybody. Two people were having a conversation with like fifteen or twenty feet in between them and they were shouting vulgar language and telling ‘your mama’ jokes. I was just so ashamed and so frightened in that hallway that I was going to be trampled. When I saw that I knew then that they were only there to house them from eight o’clock to three o’clock and they were like ‘please y’all go home at three o’clock.’ That’s all the state of Alabama requires, that children between this age and this age have to attend school, but there wasn’t any teaching going on I promise you.

KH: What does the school look like now?

LR: It’s a mess. It’s awful. The bathroom plumbing is ridiculous. They had a news reporter go into the bathroom once. How does a urinal get pulled off a wall unless somebody is standing there kicking it or snatching on it? It does not just drop off the wall. So that’s what I am saying, the destructive nature of the children. They said ‘okay if you want the urinal on the floor than that’s where you can use it;’ it was the attitude of them being tired of trying to fix up stuff just for it to get broken or vandalized again. I can see how they would get tired of spending the money on plumbing because they flushed things that they shouldn’t have -- there aren’t any babies in here! They said in the paper all the things the kids had done to the school and they took the camera in and

showed us. How did someone get up and write on the ceiling? That's intentional, that didn't accidentally happen.

KH: In a classroom?

LR: The hallways. There had been fights between kids who would throw garbage cans or have something to hurt another person, it was bad. It was bad. When I left that school there were no windows, only on the outer classrooms. The center of the school did not have any windows to gaze out all day long, we paid attention. Now when you walk down the hallways there are no doors, no doors. It is raggedy, and when a fight breaks out they lock themselves in the main office and hit the floor. It's like a prison.

KH: Do you mean the administration?

LR: Yes. They do not come out and try and break up anything. No, they call the police department and they go and hide. They try to get out of the way because the kids are throwing whatever they can get their hands on and they are fighting real bad. I have never seen one, but I have seen them at the football games. I am not going to any more football games because it's so bad. There has to be a break down from home, church, school and friends.

KH: What about the riots you mentioned they had when you were there? How did they handle those?

LR: It wasn't that bad. Okay, it would be like one white girl might say 'they are going to play a nigger song in the pep rally today' and a black student that heard them would say 'what do you mean they are going to play a nigger song, if they are going to play a nigger song then let me hear you sing it.' They were just words to get at someone. There would be a group of people, but it would not be so bad that the police would have

to be called. We didn't have any weapons, nobody meant to kill or maim. It was anger about what was said, but now they have stuff that they can bring out of nowhere to hit you with. When a fight breaks out now, they call the Bessemer Police Department. They have policeman that patrol, we did not have that. It has to have gotten worse from home, no more prayer and no more focusing on positive things. **It seems like it's like I had you and you are my child and wherever you go once you start walking is up to you.** It's deteriorated, it may not have been integration that caused it, but I just think that's where it started. That is where the breakdown of the black family started. When they took discipline and prayer out of schools. And they had to take it out because they didn't want a black teacher disciplining a white child or vice versa. 'We don't want you all praying because we don't pray this prayer.' That was not relevant; pray to who you want to pray to just keep the prayer there. They took away all of that.

KH: I've been meaning to ask, why do you think that prayer was taken out?

LR: It didn't start until after integration. This man filed a lawsuit, they were atheist and they didn't want their daughter to pray to a God that they did not believe even existed. He took it all the way to the Supreme Court. That is actually when it became permanent that there was no more praying in school.

KH: That was about ten years -

LR: Before that. They took the prayer out when they integrated the schools. They did not have any more pledge of allegiance either. They took out all the things that helped get you acclimated early in the morning on a positive note. That's what it really did. If you are mad about something from home, say the Lord's Prayer. Everybody recited the prayer in unison, the whole class. I learned my first church hymn at school in

the third grade, in the garden. They stopped that once they integrated all the schools, and it had to be because they didn't want -- You have black Baptist people, white and all kinds of races in the same religion but they are still separate, right now today.

KH: Do you think the Principal made that decision?

LR: No, I don't think so. I don't really know, that's a good question. Nobody spoke about it; they didn't come on and announce that there would no longer be prayer in the classroom. I don't remember that announcement.

KH: It just didn't happen?

LR: It just stopped happening. Of course, I graduated from an integrated school. We didn't have devotion in high school, at Jess Lanier anyway. It was just automatic, you got the roll checked and then you went on. I never really asked. I didn't really miss it because I had already learned it and I was used to praying. I was kind of grounded already, but little children are not already grounded and that is when you groom them and get them interested in knowing what they are about when they come to school, that is what they are not getting. When you don't stop in the morning, if a child is hungry they will feed them if you get them there early enough, but you need to have a spiritual food for little children too. It must be age appropriate so that they can understand and comprehend it. We can all say a Bible verse and I could hear you say one that I like, so I will want to learn that one so that I can say it next time we have Bible verse. Then you learn different verses. That's how they do it; they didn't have anything that they could focus on that is positive in the morning. Whatever your mother made you mad about in the car, you could just say a verse and start off fresh and new almost. I asked my grandson's teacher whether they say the pledge of allegiance and she said no. He's a

third grader, but he is an honor student. On days when he has gotten mad before he got to school, his teacher said he has shown zero cooperation. Now the teachers are supposed to be able to win him over some way but she does not have time to try to win him over. That's his fault; he got zeros for the day all the way across the page because everything she asked him to do he refused. He told her he wasn't going to do it and he said whatever he felt like saying; I have seen him act like that. I think you have to start with them early, to send them off and then they still behave. They need to know that a grown person is in charge, or whoever is older than you is in charge. That's what we did at home, when my parents would leave it was the oldest one there that was in charge, and you follow instructions. They don't do that anymore. I have talked on about a lot of stuff, ask some more questions. [laughs]

KH: Okay. We have talked mostly about the effect on the community and the consequences for kids now. I want to ask you more specific questions now about the other students that were with you at Jess Lanier. I also want to know who your friends were and what kinds of activities you did.

LR: Okay. I guess I was an exception to most rules; I participated in just about everything that I could. I was in the modern dance club, I was a cheerleader, I participated on the debate team, and we were on what we called the yearbook committee and [END OF SIDE A]

LR: Okay to answer your question, we had participation from both sides. I think there were attitudes. We were prepared for this, we knew our school was closing and there was nothing we could do about it. We were all going to be here together so it was accepted. We more often than not got along, everybody worked on the yearbook. We did not have any white students in the modern dance club because it was creative dance and they were just not interested, at least they didn't appear to be because nobody came to sign up for it. The cheering squad was predominantly white because that was something that they did. There were three black cheerleaders. There was me, Sheila Armsted and April Thomas, I won't forget that. [laughs] We got along, we really did. There wasn't a whole lot of resentment. I didn't resent it because at that time I was open minded, very young and happy. I had a good life and family, I was a happy child. So, I don't see the effects of it until way later. This was just a scam; this was not intended to be good for us because they never lost their support from home. White people have always been supportive, they put money into their schools, they put money into their child's activities and they have little children in different activities. That is all good, but we didn't have that and we needed that from our community. It seemed like it was automatic in their families, but in ours we needed other people to help boost you along and to help pull you up. If you are lacking I will help pull you up with my child. We needed that and we lost all of that. I don't know why.

KH: It seems like you are saying that for the white families, their way of pulling [children] along was to send them to the academies?

LR: They looked at being integrated as-see what you may not see, and I don't know why you haven't as a grad student, black children and white children are as

different as their skin color. Their heritage, their background and what they do at home. It's different, it's very different. It's always been different. That's why you had other people outside your home to discipline you, because your mother was drunk or wasn't there. That's why you had other people that would feed you at their table, that's why we needed that. We helped each other when somebody's family lacked. I was over at your house all the time because your mother paid attention to me. That kind of thing is what I am talking about. We raised each other's children, we kept a houseful of other people's children because they didn't have sisters and brothers or they didn't have anybody to cook dinner. There were no questions asked. We needed that but now we don't have that, and I don't think we have it because as time went on you were supposed to become more efficient and more self sufficient. If you don't then you get left behind or you don't get anything. Whereas with white families, they take their children on vacation and we are just looking at the commercials. What we do is get our Auntie to keep our kids while we go to Disneyland. That's where you take kids! My daughter in law will ask me to keep Kris and Christian while she goes to dinner at Bryant's with the buffet. That buffet has everything a child could want. Why would you want me to keep them to eat here and you go out? How do you think they are going to learn how to act if you don't take them out into the public? I don't get it! I guess I'm blaming too much on integration. [laughs] The stuff I see, if you don't ever take them in public they will never learn how to act in public. When he throws food you are supposed to let him know that in no uncertain terms that you do not throw food in a restaurant. You shouldn't leave him with me because you don't want to take him, I don't get it. She wants me to keep them while she goes to church, oh please! Take them to church! Then she finally started taking them to

church, now they either fall asleep or sit and stay quiet. You have to do these things because you are a parent. You cannot expect somebody else to do it. It's just not the way it should be to me. I guess I wish everybody thought the same way. Don't send your daughter out half clothed, she doesn't need to get attention that way. Let her get attention when she opens her mouth and speaks, when she excels in her studies or when she shows you an invention she just made. To let her be half naked and leave home is your fault. Ask me another question and I'll try to behave. [laughs]

KH: That's alright. I'm just moving the microphone a little bit. I didn't ask you about the teachers at Jess Lanier.

LR: Oh, we had ( ) instructors. We got some from Carver, some came to the high school and some came to the middle school and some to the elementary school. I had an English Literature teacher that I remember ( ) she didn't know it. She was a white lady. She was very, very strict and she was no nonsense. I liked the way she taught and lectured. You just sat there and took good notes, but she was very good and she was very professional. I could not detect that she didn't like me, I couldn't detect it. That's why I liked her I think. I liked the way she taught everybody, she didn't make it appear that she only wanted the white students to learn. I didn't get that from her. Others, like my typing instructor were like that. If I hadn't already had typing in the tenth grade; but she did not know who she was dealing with, I was good at typing and she was like almost wanted to knock me. I finished, I had already done this-

KH: She didn't want you to learn anything?

LR: ( ) she was Dr. Lee. She was so good and so good at what she did and I admired her because she was good. She had no qualms about



letting you know that she favored the white students. She resented me because I read the editorials. She thought as a black student that I didn't know what an editorial page was. I read her, I could read her expressions. She thought I didn't know what I was talking about. I read Dear Abby, I read the ( ) and I read the editorials. I could see her disappointment that I said the editorials and one of them didn't. She was that way, and that wasn't right. I would always get angry. It didn't affect her but it affected me. I dropped the class because her prejudice was just too open and I should have gone on and taken advantage of her knowledge, whether she wanted me to get it or not. I didn't know that at the time. I had good instructors both black and white. That one stands out because I have always liked literature and she was the only one teaching it. If I have to go I have to go to her. She looked mean and hateful, but she wasn't. Her persona was very low key and mild and she was like "if you don't know The Raven by this date" ...and she meant it. I liked that about her. I had a white teacher named Miss Smith; she was an English teacher who taught grammar and composition. She was hard but I wasn't afraid or intimidated by the lessons because I was a student. There was prejudice but among the teachers, it was new to them too, so some of them were apprehensive to find out which of us were smarter than they perceived us to be. I am sure we surprised a lot of them because we got our lesson, unlike students today. They don't care if they get an F, but we were not going to get an F. If I'm here I am going to get a passing grade because I have to graduate and that was our mindset, that's what we were about. The teachers were good. We had a white principal, a white assistant principal, and we had a black counselor. One black counselor lady, Miss Johnson, helped us find out if we need to stay straight academic or take a trade. You know, we had one black counselor.

KH: Do you think most of the teachers were strict like your English Literature teacher?

LR: No, it was like that was just her own message. That cut down on a lot of whispering and snickering in the class. She was not a ( ), she didn't smile. When you went in the door you knew it was business. The other teachers were more relaxed. They weren't so much strict, they were relaxed. When you went in there and she would cut the lights off sometimes. When she was lecturing and you had to listen, you can't go to sleep because she would know. If you go to sleep she would give you a pop quiz the next day on what was talked about the day before. She was good, I like her. It was all new to all the teachers, it was our first year there and it was a learning process. It was good; I wished it had stayed that way. That way if you want to learn you can go in a classroom and expect to learn, but now when you go in a classroom there is just so much foul language that the teacher just sits-

KH: Looking at their watch.

LR: Just waiting on time to pass. She can't teach because she can't make certain people who are empty wagons anyway, be quiet. They want the audience because they don't have anything better to do.

KH: So the mode of discipline now is to basically just ignore you?

LR: Yes. How can I learn if somebody is back here talking so loud and the teacher is not saying anything. They are afraid I think. You can send them to the office, there is in-house suspension -- this is what I think and I know this is not going to happen because people don't want their children labeled or tagged. If you can't come into class and want to learn then there ought to be a place for you to go sit and you can let the

people that want to learn graduate. You can still go to Jess Lanier and come out and be a sophomore in college, but you have to be able to get the knowledge. They are tired and no one wants to do the right thing. They say these kids are just so disruptive. I have a girlfriend who is in the middle school and she is a ( ), you would be surprised what some of those kids tell her. Things that they should not even be exposed to yet; we are talking about eight, nine, and ten year olds who have a brother who's having sex in the bed across from them. The house isn't big enough and "they were keeping me awake; I couldn't get my homework done because he told me to cut the lights off." She hears this. How do you do this work everyday with these kids? I am sitting here and I hear people talking about things that I know happened back in the 1950's, and it's still happening now. A guy told me they were doing a roofing job -- he's the only black guy in the crew -- and a woman pulled in front of the bank ( ) so they are up there yelling and hooting, and he looked too. The man told him, "Nigger you don't have no business looking at this white woman, if you look you are going to lose your job." He said you are looking. That's a white woman down there, ( ) any day. She just doesn't want you to know it. He got fired.

KH: Wow, he got fired?

LR: He got fired because he stopped and looked. He said he called me a nigger to my face and told me ( ) sounded like that guy [Emmett Till] back in 1952 when the man accused him of--

KH: Accused him of whistling at a white woman.

LR: Okay. What they did to him, I mean! Okay, ask your next question. I am venting like crazy. [laughs]

KH: That's good, that's what this is for. You are talking about the same things that everyone else is bringing up.

LR: I know it and it's got to be something that bothers us because everybody is talking about the same things. It really does. I look at even the justice system, you are supposed to be innocent in the eyes of the law, justice is supposed to be blind. ( ) But the color of your skin I declare, it makes a difference on the attitude of the people that you are around. Like that black guy that killed the three police officers, the jury selection has just begun. Now, black people by nature are not going to just kill police officers because they know this is war on you, for real. They had to have been doing something and it's going to come out, it's just going to depend on who is listening. That's what it will depend on who's listening, because he didn't just pull out a gun to shoot those police officers down. They had been there and returned. There was something going on that we don't know about, that led up to this and the guy said he was threatened. It had to be a pretty big threat because more than likely most black people would have went on to somewhere else, not wanting to be there when they came back. It was something else and I can't wait. He is in a whole lot of trouble and it's going to depend on how well his mouthpiece is that he has hired. I wonder how he will afford it.

KH: I hope he's good.

LR: He's got to be, he took the case and he is not a court appointed attorney. He is an attorney that is practicing and he spoke like there was going to be a lot of stuff to come out that people wouldn't like. When he said that he might get his house bombed, now ( ) it is not unheard of. You might have some diehard racist people who still hate that deeply that if you help this nigger we are going to kill you, because you

aren't any better than him. That's the mindset in Birmingham. That man got blown up in Jasper. He had done something and as it turned out he was dating a white woman, I mean so what? It ought to be accepted now. In the wrong place, it's not. It should be nobody's business who you find happiness with. You'd be surprised; okay what's the next question?

KH: Tell me about the white students at Jess Lanier. Before I started the tape you talked a bit about how few white students are left there now and some of the reasons they are there.

LR: There were three that really liked to be around our group. We were not the smartest, but we were always planning to do stuff. We had to have our own [parade] float...whatever. There were three, a set of twins and their brother. Their last names were Phillips -- Lisa and Thalia Phillips and their brother. The three of them were like associated with us openly, they didn't care and they didn't see anything wrong with it. They were like "why is it a big deal?" There were some in different groups who were like "Wow, I'm smart and you're smart; I thought you all were dumb." Here's some stuff that -- well why did you think that? "Well, my dad said that black people are dumb and they can't read." Yes we can read. That was just some ( ) to deter them from being around us ( ) and there were others and they were friendly for the most part. We had the first class reunion. The President and the officers of our senior class, who were both black, got together to plan it. My problem was that every activity was over in Vestavia area and I'm not going to drive way over there. We have hotels that are mid way. We have convention halls that are mid way; come to downtown Birmingham. Everything was over on Highway 280.

KH: Is that the white area?

LR: Yes. That's where they live now. I said I'm not going and I didn't. I wasn't going to pay one hundred and fifty dollars to drive way over there where if I get a hotel it was going to be inflated, unlike if you go downtown and everyone booked at the Sheraton and the all occasion hall. It could have been worked out but it wasn't. They wanted it over there and that's what our class President and Vice President decided. They had good participation I heard, but I didn't go.

KH: Did some of the other black students go even though it was really far away?

LR: Yes. It was far away and my mindset was that if I drive over there the police in that area have got to know that the class of Jess Lanier is having their reunion this weekend and they are going to be around the country club. I felt like they were going to be harassing every black car that's driving out of there. Now, it could have just been me but I know they know we are over here and they are going to see how much we have drank, they are going to stop our cars and search everyone. That was back in the day, too, so I said no; I didn't go. I may have just had it in my own mind that that's what was going to happen. They probably were like "you drive safely now and don't you worry about it we are going to escort you to the city limits;" I didn't think I was going to get any of that. [laughs]

KH: I guess the class Presidents didn't think about any of that.

LR: We suggested it when we first got the letters. I went to the first three meetings, and they were not bending. They were not giving an inch. For the banquet we had to go over to the Country Club, it's lily white over there. They don't even have black neighbors. I would like to be somewhere were I might be welcomed a little bit. Why

can't we have it downtown? We could even go to Homewood that's kind of close. They were over on 280, Shelby County area. I said I'm not going over there. I hear it was a good reunion and they had good participation. Of course there were more whites than blacks but what would you expect? We graduated with company owners, like ( ) daughter. ( ) Jess Lanier because they live, you know it was the only white high school. They came a long way to go to Bessemer High School, so we were in school with some prominent families, furniture store families, I mean-

KH: Did these kids stay at Bessemer?

LR: I don't know because I didn't go to the reunion. If I had gone to the reunion I would know all that.

KH: I was wondering if those prominent families sent their kids to the academy?

LR: No, this was their last years also so they were in eleventh and twelfth grades too. The twelfth graders were mad because they had gone to this school all the way up until this year and now they have to graduate from Jess Lanier. I wanted to graduate from Carver, but we couldn't. So eleventh and twelfth graders were like this is what happened and we were alright with it. None of them went to Bessemer Academy; the school was fine those two years that I went there. It was just within the next five or ten years that they gradually migrated away. I think what happened was that they recognized the atmosphere wasn't conducive to what it should be for learning, and white people wanted their kids to learn. So they took them [away]; those black kids were scaring them. No telling what stories they were telling when they went home, you know "this black guy got me in the bathroom today and they told me they were going to pull my

pants down and make me walk naked.” There is no telling, it could have been a number of things. They gradually migrated and Bessemer Academy grew to accommodate them.

KH: What came first, the threats of being harassed or was it the-

LR: I don’t know if there were threats or harassment, but for some reason they were leaving this school. It had to be something, that was hypothetical, but it could have been other things. They said all white boys are...it could have been anything, I don’t know. It didn’t happen while I was there, but for all of a sudden everybody to be gone from a school that was built to accommodate all white high school students. Everybody is gone? Everybody doesn’t have the money to pay for a private school, I don’t care what color you are. You can’t afford it, but gradually they brought in more portable buildings, they expanded on the main building and you could see the city trucks working even though you are not supposed to have the city utilities working on private property. The kids were going to that school. This was after I graduated and I was like there ‘aren’t any white kids at Jess Lanier anymore?’ Then Bessemer Academy had a new building coming up and the parking lot was being paved by the city trucks and I thought it just wasn’t right. It happened.

KH: So between the time that you graduated and when your kids started there it had become mostly black?

LR: It was mostly black, and it was awful. I would have left too. They scared me. It was like a herd of cattle in the hallway with no order, pushing, shoving and playing. I was frightened and I was so glad when my kids got out of that school.



KH: I'm just guessing, but it sounds like most of the white kids left not because there was a higher black population there but because they were getting more worried about being with black students?

LR: Their safety, I think you're right. I think so. It was very rowdy and very violent. They had violent fights there. People got hurt badly there, shoved through windows and glass doors. I would hate to think if I'm a ( ) and they ( ) go to this school and somebody picks a fight with her because she was white and they wanted to teach her a lesson, I would be in horror everyday. I really don't blame them for that, it was scary. I was an adult that had graduated from that school, who came back and looked at the state [of it] and was very, very disappointed. I was saddened by it, I said no wonder there is no learning in here, no wonder these things are happening. The school has gone to this degree, I was disappointed. I was very sad for them. How could they let a brand new school [deteriorate]? It takes a long time to tear up a building. I didn't go in the bathroom [to see the broken toilets] but shortly after that about a year or two later is when the news aired. Some parent had raised a fuss saying how are they going to learn under these conditions. Well, they were the ones who destroyed it. We had a [housing] project in Bessemer that had steps that were brick, concrete, and steel. Do you know they tore it down with their bare hands! I mean what kind of -- I'm mad myself but I am not violent and I'm not destructive. If I have something raggedy I am going to try and patch it up so it will last longer, but they pick at the loose part and pull the pins out to make sure it falls down. It's the exact opposite.

KH: So what's the difference, is this a different social class of kids?

LR: It's got a whole different social class and it has deteriorated because when they integrated schools they took away the discipline kids used to get from school, it's not there anymore. "Hey, let's get it on! You can't say anything to me or I'll call 911 and have my momma put in jail now." That makes a difference. I've heard ( ) say it, I'll call 911 ( ). They put that in their minds and then they use it against the people that love them. ( ) they have rights, I can't call the school and ask what is on ( ) attendance report because I have to get permission from the student. What do you mean?! That's what they tell me. I was in family court not too long ago and I was like 'you mean to tell me that you are going to call me if you have problems with him but that you cannot answer any of my questions unless you ask him if you can answer?' Don't call me again, because I'm am going to have a solution to this problem and I don't need you telling me what I can't do because apparently you can't handle it. That's why you call me. Then when I come you tell me I can't do this, well don't call me again. I am going to deal with the problem and the problem is him and you are going to tie my hands. I don't think so. I told my grandson that I have a job and you have a job, your job is to go to school everyday and get your lesson. You are going to ask me to pay for a summer school class well I'm not going to do it because I work too hard for my money. I'll tell you what; you can earn whatever I give you for next school year. Do your job and you get everything you need; otherwise you get nothing from me. I am doing my job, I come to the EEOC and I give one hundred and ten percent everyday and you can't go to school and it doesn't cost you anything? I buy your school, your clothes, I feed you, you have a television, a walkman and a VCR and all the little gadgets that kids like to have, and it all really belongs to me and I want all of my shit. He said 'grandmamma

please don't take anything, I know I messed up this year but next year I will show you.' That's what I wanted to hear, that's the only thing I wanted to hear. Anything else is unacceptable and you might as well not say it because it's going to be real bad when you go to sleep and wake up in the morning and can't get out of bed because I tied you up so tight. [laughs] I mean the stuff people put up with; you have got to make sure these kids can be self supportive later, like you are. You're not trifling; I can tell you're not because you wouldn't be sitting all this time with me. I'm saying that you have to be taught to want a good life; you have to do what it takes to have a good life. You have to pay some dues. You have to do some things that you don't want to do, you have to be inconvenienced. I need to be here at seven o'clock in the morning because I want to be the first one in line to get what I need for myself, that's what you need. You can't get anything lying in the bed all day. My son says he can't find a job, I guess not since he doesn't get up until ten o'clock! ( ) at eleven o'clock in the morning and you are just getting up and still yawning. No, nobody is going to hire you I can tell you that right now. You need to get up early and beat them there, then let them know you really want that job. You can't be showing up at nine thirty when they thought you were going to be there at eight, no we don't need you. Okay, what's the next question?

KH: I'm still thinking about the impact of class on the school because all of the children in the area have to go to this one school so, not just from when you were there but also from what you observed with your children and your grandchildren; do you think there are more poor children at the school now than when you were there?

LR: Yes, I really do.

KH: Why would that be if everyone is going there?

LR: Because the mindset from home is-what makes you poor is what you do and how you conduct yourself. I am talking about poverty, I'm talking about everybody who lives on the north side has the same mindset maybe. You are outnumbered. So, when your kids go there even though they want to do right, in order to be accepted, not teased and not be made the example of-you know you have kids that pick the weakest link to make fun of. My granddaughter would say nobody is getting a lesson any more because nobody wants to be talked about. The kids are the ones that they want to impress now. She has said that, out of her mouth. So, the peer pressure is there. I didn't have that; I don't know where that came from. I have never known peer pressure. I have heard about it, but I always said why are you giving in to this? It's a state of mind. That's all it is, is a state of mind. If you are doing something and it makes you feel good to be smart and to have your teachers praise you then you should have enough inside you to say I don't see anything wrong with it when people try to say stuff to you. Take up for yourself, but they don't. They give in to it. I have heard of this thing called "playing the dozens;" it's brutal on a child and the one that's targeted...I have had to just come out and say you all need to stop this, it's not nice because the child and the violence is at a point where they are just going to fight because I can't --

KH: Out talk them.

LR: Exactly, and then it leads to violence. So sometimes now before it even starts it goes to a fight. I don't know why everybody is poor at the school. They may not even be poor [knock on door interruption]

LR: What time is it, ooh it's four o'clock. It has got to be the peer pressure and everything around them is just slowly, slowly, slowly deteriorating. The teachers stop

trying to teach, they just show up because they need a paycheck. Everybody that has a problem, that's just your problem. We had counselors if something was going on at home. Now, everybody has something going on at home and the counselors are overwhelmed. They just stop trying to help because it's just too much. You never can tell what it is; it just seems that everybody has the same mindset about coming to get a paycheck. All the teachers are just looking forward to the time when school is out so the kids can go on home, but a lot of them don't go home because they don't have anyone at home expecting them or even wanting them to come home. I have a girl who is with my granddaughter all the time and I ask her whether she needs to tell her mom that she's out of school or check in with her at all, and she says no.

KH: Because nobody expects her to come home?

LR: Nobody even cares where she is. It's one o'clock in the morning and I am still waiting for her mother to come and pick her up, I'm falling asleep. I ask is she coming. She told me she was going to ( ) I'll tell you what, get in the car. I have to go to work tomorrow and we go to her house and she is asleep in the bed. We woke her up and I asked her didn't you notice that she wasn't here? She didn't want to say but it was all over her face that she didn't know where her kid was. There is no way that I could go to sleep if I had a fourteen year old that was not accounted for. That's why she acts the way she does, because she doesn't have anyone who she feels like cares about her. Now I have two teenagers, my granddaughter and her. I can't tell her to go away, where will she go? If something happened to her then I would be feeling like I should have let her stay, but you can't take everybody's child in. That's an example, so she stayed up half the night and she had school the next day. ( ) had been asleep. She

can't stay awake all night and all day too, so she is not going to be alert in class and she is not going to participate so she is flunking. That happened after all of these laws were made so you cannot discipline your child. You can't ask him what his grades are; he has to tell you-it's all backwards! ( ) two thousand or three thousand dollars a quarter or something for this child to be in school and I haven't seen a grade yet. I said why don't you write to the school or email somebody asking for a copy of his grades, he was in college ( ) up in South Carolina. That lady told him that under the Freedom of Information Act I can't give you any of that information. He said well who's paying you, who is sending you the check and ( ). This is his sixth year trying to get a degree and you know his dad wants him to have it bad because he keeps paying. I wouldn't keep paying, he's twenty two years old and he still doesn't have his degree? I don't think he wants it; you are just throwing money out for a lost cause. But these kids, I don't know. Integration should have been a good thing to put everyone on a level playing field, and it didn't happen. Like right now with computers, everything is going to be electronic after a while. All black families aren't even-

KH: On the internet.

LR: And they are not equipped to buy a computer not unless ( ) electronic and you can't pour water in it and they expect it to work. I am serious. My granddaughter put pennies in the VCR in the little opening. She had filled it up with pennies, you can't do that! I knew she was doing something, she filled up the back with pennies and it shorted out. So then it doesn't work anymore. What I'm saying is look how far behind they will be then. You have somebody that has to go to the library to do a book report and what do you have maybe fifteen minutes to use the computer?

KH: Fifteen to thirty.

LR: Then if you don't finish you have to wait again, then the library is closing; you have to go to class, I mean it's going to be hard for them. That's what, within the next five or ten years, maybe less.

KH: Well, they pretty much expect everybody to know how to use the internet now.

LR: Okay, so look at that.

KH: And to have it at home.

LR: And to have it at home? So see that's the same thing they did- you just have to be ready. The only way you can get ready is to think ahead and take advantage. ( ) it's time to be doing this, in school it's time to learn. All you have to do is prepare yourself for what's coming, that's not a whole lot to do especially when you don't have to go to a nine to five job. You go to school; you are supposed to be there to learn. It hasn't hit most of the black students yet. I have some of them, when I went to the graduation for Alabama State, my niece was graduating. My sister died when she was about nine years old, little girls need their mother then. She was the type of child that was always very quiet and she read books from the time she was little. She could read. My sister was sick so she would read to her and she had a lot of time to spend with her. When she died, it doesn't seem like she missed a beat because my brother and sister in law took the kids and raised them on up. They all just excelled. All three of them graduated college and all three of them are career women now. All three of them are in Early Childhood Education, they teach little ones, and I am glad. That's what you need is a good foundation, but why is it the ones who are given everything are the ones-that's so

hard to understand, you are privileged to be able to have this, you should treat it for what it is worth. You don't have to worry about anything except going to school and they are the very ones that cut up, jump on the teacher and get kicked out. I don't understand it. What else you got, I have to get to my office.

KH: I don't have anymore questions.

LR: ( ) I talked a long time. [laughs]

KH: You addressed everything.

LR: I just hate so bad that it didn't do what I envisioned it would be doing and that I had to learn later that it would seem like it was all a trick. That it was all done to hush you up, we don't really mean you any good in this society and you will have to work extra hard to get the same thing that a person who is just white can get just because they are white, that's not right. I had a job once, let me tell you this. I worked for First Alabama Bank; I worked the night shift because I wanted a job just that badly. Nobody wanted it, but I took it. I worked in the data processing room; they had only heard my voice because I left voice messages for all the department heads when there were errors in the processing in the night shift. So when they got ready to close down I was requested by the trust department and the credit department, they hadn't seen me [whispering] but I wasn't, so I went to the credit department. I showed up, sugar shop, held my head high with a smile on my face. You could have sold every last one of them for a nickel, they were just that shocked. I could just see it on their faces and I was just smiling and thinking that they are hating this, they thought I was white. I knew it, they thought I was white. I never showed any signs. They showed me my desk and I had a secretary, that really-that job called for a secretary because I did all of the credit



approvals. I ( ) report everyday. I read divorce records and bankruptcy to see if any of our customers were involved, that was my job. They hated it. I had a white secretary that was really dumb, but I couldn't put her on the spot because they would always take her side. Whatever I drafted she would type and give back to me for proofing. A lot of times I would give her back stuff twice and then I would say this is fine and then I would do it after hours once she was gone, so it would be correct. We couldn't bounce any checks and she had bounced two, she was about to be fired. I was the only one she could trust. I had nothing to gain by her being exposed so she asked me if I would show her how to balance her checkbook so she wouldn't get fired. So after everybody left the office we got on the computer and I noticed that she was making more than I was! I never said a word because I knew she wasn't aware of it. When I took it to the department head and her boss the first thing out of their mouths was how did I find out? I told them it came to me because it was meant for me to know, she needed help balancing her checkbook. Well, the next thing you know a memo comes out telling people if they need help balancing their checkbooks or accounts they should take it up with their supervisor. They gave me a raise and I'm sure they gave her ( ) they weren't going to have her making less than me. That was the mindset, it was obvious. They gave me the biggest baby shower, they were hypocrites too. I got pregnant and I knew that I wasn't going to come back to that job. When I had Christopher, well I didn't know he was Christopher at the time [END OF TAPE]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed August 2005 by Chris O'Sullivan

