

Interview

with

CAROLYN THORNTON

August 13, 2004

by Gerrelyn Patterson

Transcribed by Cathy Mann

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

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Transcript – Carolyn Thornton

Interviewee: Carolyn Thornton
Interviewer: Gerrelyn Patterson
Interview Date: August 13, 2004
Location: Durham, North Carolina

BEGINNING OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

GERRELYN PATTERSON: This is an interview with Carolyn Thornton in Durham, North Carolina. It is August 13th and we're in her home. The interviewer is Gerrelyn Patterson and this is part of the Spencer Grants Project on school desegregation in the South and will be used as part of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The tape number is 81304CT. Okay, Mrs. Thornton, can you tell me the dates that you attended Hillside.

CAROLYN THORNTON: Okay, I graduated from Hillside in June of 1953. So I was there from '49 to '53. And we celebrated our fiftieth graduation anniversary last year.

GP: How was that?

CT: Oh, it was dynamically fun. We had a big return of classmates to participate in the graduation exercises. The class of 2003 honored us and the administration of the school honored the class of '53 and we sat as a group on the floor of the stadium at Duke, well, the gym and it was nice. And we had breakfast there afterward. Just had a lot of fun.

GP: It sounds fun.

CT: In fact, our class continues to meet every month.

GP: Every month?

CT: Every month. We meet the second Saturday of the month. In fact, we just had a committee meeting because we're planning a picnic for September. So you can tell from the fact that we stick together, not everybody in Durham who went to Hillside, but a core group of us. I guess there are about fifteen of us who get together on monthly basis for events and activities about Hillside.

GP: Okay. I'd like to talk more about that because that's so different from my experience in high school. I can name five people that I remember probably and stay in touch with from my high school class. But I want to start with hearing some of your fondest memories about Hillside.

CT: Well, our class, class of '53 was considered one of the brightest classes.

GP: Okay.

CT: We were mischievous as we could be but we were all quite bright. National Honors Society members, Alpha Kappa members, went to the National Student Council meeting in Evanston, Illinois. I was Hillside's first girl student council president.

GP: I'm not surprised.

CT: So I was supposed to have been a big shot, okay. [Laughter] But we had fun. Everything we did we did with enthusiasm. Hillside in that era had the reputation of being probably the best high school in North Carolina, certainly the best black high school. Many of the national meetings that I attended representing Hillside at the national level were integrated and it was always interesting and fun. Here in the state of North Carolina, of course, we were "separate but equal" and did not

particularly associate with white schools. But invariably at the national level, I never will forget when we went out to Evanston, Illinois, at Northwestern University to the National Student Council meeting, the black students all over North Carolina got together. We went as a group but we paired up with the white kids when we got to Illinois. I maintained a friendship with a guy from Four Oaks, a white fellow from Four Oaks, North Carolina through much of our college experiences, although back home we didn't dare associate. But Hillside, everything we did we did big time. The band, I was in the band.

GP: Were you?

CT: Oh, yeah.

GP: I've heard a lot about the band.

CT: That Hillside band was world renown. Our bandleader at the time was Shortie Hall. Mr. Fillmore Hall was his name. He was nicknamed Shortie Hall, who had taught Dizzy Gillespie and other famous musicians.

GP: Oh, wow, I didn't know that.

CT: At Laurinburg Institute. He came to Hillside after having served as band director at Laurinburg Institute, which is a private school in Laurinburg, North Carolina. So he brought a level of expectation, if you will, as well as a level of experience and expertise that he basically expected from his students and he got it. There are a number of people who were in the Hillside band with me at that time who have gone on to be pretty famous. Grady Tate who comes every year for the jazz festival is a graduate of Hillside. Billy Eaton who finished Hillside the year ahead of me was the musical director for Harry Belafonte for a number of years. And can't

remember the name of the group that his wife, but she didn't go to Hillside, Billy went to Hillside. They both finished Central. But Hillside just enjoyed a reputation of par excellence. I don't know if you've heard about Swing School.

GP: Mr. G's Swing School. Now tell me about that.

CT: And here's Miss Brown. I was the first Miss Brown from this side of town, okay? To this day, and I've had lots of extraordinary good things happen to me in my life, but nothing was more exciting then or now other than being Miss Brown.

GP: Now tell me about being Miss Brown because I don't know about that.

CT: Oh, she was the main character in Swing School.

GP: Oh, I didn't know that.

CT: She was the teacher. And the whole theme, it was an original script developed by Mr. Gattis. And, in fact, when he retired from Hillside several years ago now, I guess about fifteen or twenty, we put on a tribute to him at White Rock Baptist Church including the primary scenes from Swing School and I got to reenact Miss Brown.

GP: Oh, how exciting. I know you had a good time.

CT: It really was. But the story of that, the theme, was Miss Brown was a young attractive teacher with a classroom of incorrigibles for the most part. Mischievous kids pretty much like we were at Hillside, and she knew her supervisor was going to be coming to visit the class and what she was trying to do was make sure the children were absolutely cooperative.

GP: Un-huh, been there.

CT: Yes. Everything she asked of them they sort of paired it in rhythm and in swing, okay, absolutely delightful. And, of course, the supervisor comes in and the kids go all crazy with song. But that was the main scene of Swing School and then there were other scenes as well like the waltz and whatever the current operetta might have been and those kinds of things. But it was a coveted kind of experience, okay, because Mr. G lives and worked in North Durham and he taught music to many of the kids who grew up in North Durham. And you had to audition for the lead parts.

GP: I heard about that.

CT: And the auditions were quite competitive. And I don't know why I got the nerve to audition for Miss Brown but I did.

GP: What did you do?

CT: I don't even remember now what I did, Gerrelyn. I just know I had to audition and I got the part and I was excited about it. And it was so funny. We used to walk home from where Hillside is located and where it used to be, of course, the place that was torn down and then made way for Central. We'd walk up Fayetteville Street, the courters, not really courting because we were really very young, but I can remember a couple of the teachers who taught at other schools who were family friends saying to us I had no idea you could move that fast until I saw you in Swing School. Because the idea was to take as long as you could to walk home from school so we really moved slowly. But with School Swing everything was in rhyme okay, and finger popping and that kind of thing. And people came. I think we did the performance two or three nights, long before Central started doing their plays for more than one night. And people were excited about it. And as youngsters elementary and

junior high school kids looked forward to coming to Hillside to be in Swing School, to be in the band. I think the choirs were good but they didn't quite get the notoriety and the emphasis that the band did. Also, we had lots of young people going to--. As I said I went to the Columbia Scholastic Press Association in New York. We did not stay at the Waldorf Astoria but the grand banquet was at the Waldorf Astoria.

President Truman spoke to us. So, you know, we had exposure to everything that anybody else had--private students, white schools, whatever. The teachers at Hillside were absolutely committed to exposing us to whatever there was out there. I can't remember other kids from a lot, I know Second Ward from Charlotte there were kids there. They went with us lots of times and West Charlotte. The two black high schools in Charlotte, West Charlotte and Second Ward often times had representatives. I had cousins who grew up in Raleigh at the time and went to—.

GP: To Ligon?

CT: What was the school?

GP: Ligon.

CT: Ligon, and we called them our country cousins because they just didn't keep up with the same kinds of things that Hillside was going on. And I guess it was because, well, the whole atmosphere at Durham was so progressive. This was an era when indeed Durham still enjoyed its black Wall Street reputation. And also, I was about to say that I know my family knew all of my teachers, but I think whether parents and teachers were friends or not teachers made the same level of commitment to children being exposed to great opportunities regardless of the backgrounds and neighborhoods from which they came. There was I think sometimes amongst the kids

some sense of classism in terms of what side of town you lived on or where you lived or what your parents did. But the teachers did not reinforce that. The message that they reinforced is I expect you to do well.

GP: That was the message?

CT: That was clearly the message and it didn't matter whether you lived on an unpaved street in an alleyway or whether your parents taught at Central.

GP: Everyone received the same message?

CT: Everybody, yes.

GP: Were there other messages that they sent you?

CT: Certainly I think the reinforcing of a positive self-esteem was, without question, always there. When somebody expects good things of you they're saying to you, you are somebody, I mean long before Jesse Jackson coined it. And we had fun. I think one of the disadvantages, if you will, of urban growth, urban sprawl, and desegregation is that the neighborhoods that were identifiably our neighborhoods, were diffused so that then people started going to other schools like Durham High or whatever or moving into other neighborhoods. So it was not as much as of a cohesiveness as there was when I was at Hillside.

GP: Will you tell me a little bit more about what it was like living in Durham because you mentioned the class issues and I don't know a lot about that at all. Because what I read is, kind of like when I read they make it sound like Durham was a black Wall Street and there were black businesses and it was a black mecca and I haven't heard.

CT: Oh yes, oh yes. Well, everything on Fayetteville Street and Pettigrew Street was black owned. And, in fact, some kids I guess, if you lived in Hayti, you grew up in Hayti where I did, you were supposed to be somebody special. It's as simple as that. We had our own clubhouse. Where W. D. Hill Recreation Center now is there was the Algonquin Clubhouse, which was a private country club.

GP: Oh, I've seen that. Okay, and there was a tennis club too?

CT: Yes, Arthur Ashe played tennis here as a kid. So did Althea Gibson. We used to see her play. Had a cousin who was a tennis pro, Ernie Ingram. But these were things that you did because of where you lived and who you were. We used to sigh with absolute anxiety that we'd have to dress up to go to the Lyceum program, to the cultural programs at North Carolina Central. I laugh because I subjected my children to the same thing when we moved back here. And my daughters didn't mind. They sort of enjoyed getting dressed. I can remember we had to put on evening dresses for Philter Skyler's piano concerts every year because our mother sorority sponsored it. And I used to say, oh my Lord, is this ever a drag. My daughters didn't seem to mind it but my son hated it with a passion. Do I have to go? Yes, you must go. You have no choice. But the thing that was so interesting--. As Rick got older how much he talked about and was pleased he'd had that experience. But those were the kinds and often times we got to get autographs from the stars who came to perform. There were no hotel opportunities for them so a couple of the artists stayed in our neighborhood. Across the street from me was the, well he was called the movie king, Mr. F. K. Watkins, owned one of the two black theaters in town.

GP: The Regal?

CT: No, the Regal was the Logans.' They were also family friends. But the servicemen's organization was also in Mr. Watkins' house also diagonally across. And that's the other place where sometimes the stars who came to town would stay. So we were exposed to cultural events on campus and in the church and community that I thought everybody had that experience growing up until I was a college student at Bennett and learned, no, everybody didn't have that experience. But it was special.

GP: What were other people, black people who didn't live in Hayti, what was that like for them? Do you have any recollection?

CT: I think the times for the most part were good and this sounds awful and I'm not sure whether I want this--. My family had a real estate office and I loved to hang out in that office. I just like people. I used to play sick to keep from going to nursery school just to hang out in the office, okay?

GP: Okay.

CT: Mrs. Scarborough who ran the nursery school would stop by to pick me up and at that time we lived upstairs over the office and I could see her coming and I would put my finger down my throat to gag and to be too sick to go, which let me get downstairs in the office. And people who came in and out of there, people who were not professionally trained or educated, they worked in the factories, they worked in the laundry, seemed content, seemed successful. I can remember feeling why can't we--. I had one girlfriend whose name was the same as mine. Her daddy worked in the factory, her mama in the laundry, and they rented from us. She had a new dress every weekend for Sunday school. I couldn't understand why I couldn't have a new dress every weekend because I knew we had more money than she had. But it was the

values. Okay, you got new clothes for birthday, Easter, Christmas, and dah, dah, dah, if you needed it. But just, it was a different value system and again it was a long time before I understood that. Most people, you know, wasn't into cars and all that kind of stuff and then I can also remember that a lot of people, again who rented from us or who did not have "big time jobs," drove really fancy cars. We always had a Chevrolet. I did not want to get my drivers license on a dumb Chevrolet. I wanted my mother to get a Cadillac. And her thing was, that Chevrolet is paid for. People with those Cadillacs--she used to call them on Strivers Row. So people were successful regardless of what their background was I think because jobs were plentiful, either in their own businesses or either manufacturing and textiles and tobacco. So people lived well.

GP: How did your family get into the real estate business?

CT: My daddy had a sense of vision. He finished Central. He was also I guess a very good friend of Mr. R. L. McDougal who was president of Mechanics and Farmers Bank and they did a lot of ventures together. Daddy had a piccolo franchise, jukebox franchise from Durham to Winston-Salem. And as I said, that was way ahead of his time. He died young unfortunately but we have often said or even some of the people who were successful in business after Daddy died who ultimately became millionaires, said had it not been for Daddy's untimely death it probably been us with all that money and not them, okay? But, you know, things work out. But we were very blessed. We really were.

GP: Yeah, it sounds like it.

CT: My mother was a schoolteacher who did not want, I had two older sisters and Daddy made Mother stop teaching with the birth of the second child. So she was at home. And then when he became ill she started going into the office and ultimately backed her way into real estate because she was a social studies and history teacher out in the county schools see. She was from Granville County from Oxford, North Carolina and she and a whole bunch of her peers from Oxford all married men in Durham who were successful. But we were very fortunate.

GP: It sounds like it was a wonderful time.

CT: Look, it really was.

GP: It sounds like it. It sounds fabulous.

CT: And even with the separateness we knew we didn't, well, vacation here. Mother had a sister who lived in Philadelphia. My dad's sister had not yet moved to New York. But when we wanted to go places we would just go out of town to go. He took Mother to the 1939 World's Fair, same year he died unfortunately. I was born in '35. But, you know, people were doing things and living well.

GP: Sounds like they were doing big things too and living really well.

CT: Well, as I said, the whole atmosphere of Durham. Mr. Pearson, for whom W. G. Pearson School is named, lived two doors up from us where we first lived and then when all of that was torn down and the Pearsons ran a drugstore, the other brother. They lived next door to us at 1213. So again we were in and out of people's homes who were about something, who were absolutely about something.

GP: Okay, well, I think I have a sense.

CT: You know where I'm coming from.

GP: I do. I have a sense of Durham. I want to get back to—

CT: Hillside?

GP: Yeah, and kind of education during the time period. Besides the messages that you got from the teachers at Hillside, what was the general kind of feeling of what a good education for blacks was?

CT: Well, everybody took black history. I mean there was no choice. That was a tenth grade requirement at Hillside at least. Mrs. Speiger taught it for years. Her husband was I guess the first black chairman of the city school board, Dr. Theodore Speiger, who taught geography at Central. Your mom would know who he was. So we all had black history.

The other thing that was very interesting I thought were the trades people, the vocations. Young men, women too for that matter, there was a tailoring class. Ben Ruffin who you know of, a recent graduate, a little younger than I, Ben took tailoring at Hillside. Made most of his clothes and other peoples. He worked with Mr. Boykins in one of his, a black owned tailor shop on Fayetteville Street in Durham. But he took tailoring under Mr. Sissinette. I think that was his name, at Hillside. But there was tailoring. There was brick masonry. There were auto mechanics, carpentry. My father-in-law and his students built all those houses on the lower end of Lawson Street behind where Hillside is. So even if you were not planning to go to college, you had opportunities to develop skill and expertise and trades that people could go on and live comfortably and make a good living. The fellah who is national alumni president for Hillside, Bill Turner, was in the brick masonry class at Hillside. He went on to finish school but came back to teach brick masonry at Hillside.

GP: Oh, did he?

CT: Yeah.

GP: Okay.

CT: But those classes were way ahead of most schools.

GP: Oh, I agree.

CT: In wasn't until integration that they eliminated a lot of that.

GP: Well, the running joke in my family--. Because my mother is a very good seamstress, and I didn't take sewing or home ec in high school and I thought well, I'll learn sewing, no problem. And she looked at my work and said, "What is this?" I said, "It's a skirt, see."

CT: That's something else we had to do.

GP: Right, you had to learn those things.

CT: You took home ec.

GP: You had to learn those things.

CT: My home ec teacher, both of the home ec teachers at Hillside were both good friends of my mama's and were bridge club members with her. And one of them made me take something apart I know ten times. (Laughter) I was about to get my worst grade and afterwards finally Mama helped me. It was a Sunday dress with a little velour jacket. Mama finally helped me do that jacket because I couldn't get it right to satisfy that teacher to save my life. But you're right, basic skills were taught.

GP: Basic skills that my generation does not have. I cannot sew to this day. I will call my mama and say I need this, this, and this.

CT: Well, I had to pay and sent my daughters to--. Singer used to have a sewing class for kids. Well, my daughters are a little older than you are but I sent Susan and Gayle to take that class at Singer because I thought, they need to know how to sew. And, in fact, when Susan was coming home from Hampton sometimes she had new stuff. I said where did you get this. I made it. I knew how much money we were sending her. She was sewing for other people. And these were skills that we were taught and you didn't have a choice about it. It was a requirement.

GP: Well, now see I think that's something special that schools like Hillside did for students that doesn't happen anymore and I think other schools didn't do. Do you think that there are other things that Hillside did that were really special and unique for students?

CT: Well, the leadership opportunities were just, in every organization, they elected officers so that again you learned how to preside. You learned Robert's Rules of Order. You learned just a lot of things about how to take care of a business, if you will, through opportunities with school extracurricular activities. Students ran the concession stands for the games.

GP: They were student run?

CT: Oh yeah. I think the student council for basketball games--. We ran them. I wasn't familiar with what organizations were running them at football season because I was in the band and was playing with the band. But I know during basketball season we stocked the concession stands and we ran it and the proceeds went into the activities for the student council.

GP: You know that doesn't happen today.

CT: Oh, heavens no.

GP: Not at all. Okay, you graduated in 1953 and *Brown vs. Board* was in 1954. Do you have a recollection of your, do you have a memory of kind of when the ruling of *Brown vs. Board* came down?

CT: Well, you know, the interesting thing, in 1951 and I need to find that article, or I think I'm going to ask the Herald papers to find it for me. In 1951 when the plaintiffs were filing their brief that also the lady was defended in, or was determined in *Brown vs. Brown* in '54, the Durham paper, *The Durham Herald*, had done a feature comparing Hillside and Durham High. They had photographed Hillside from its most advantageous angles and Durham High, which had a swimming pool in the pool at that time, they covered it up when they got ready to integrate, okay? But beneath the gym in Durham High is a swimming pool.

GP: I had no idea.

CT: Oh yes, oh yes. Well, I think I must have been ninth grade, '51. I don't even remember what grade I was. Anyway, after they had run this newspaper spread on the two schools in the Sunday paper I wrote a letter to the editor at the encouragement and support of my family because I was the only one still in school. Everybody in town swore my family wrote it, my sisters wrote it, or somebody wrote it other than me. But I wrote it myself. They gave me that idea and they encouraged me because my sisters were away in college at the time. And I got more positive feedback from the black community as a result of that letter because I did say in the letter that, no, it's still separate and it's not equal. What you have done is simply show the best part of Hillside and the worst part of Durham High. You didn't show the best

part of Durham High but if you put our best with their best then you can see the differences. I remember our equipment in the labs was not the most recent equipment. Our textbooks were not the newest. Invariably they were the hand-me-downs from the other schools. The lab equipment was and that kind of thing. So we were very conscious of I think the differences, if you will, that existed. Now I'll let you know this. We did not let it bother us to the extent that it interfered with our level of competency.

GP: That's apparent.

CT: Right. But since I had graduating, I was already in college when the ruling came down, I think basically in town people were pleased about it. Because the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People and other folks locally had been a party to way down in the list of plaintiffs. So were people were excited about it. Little did we know the impact, okay, the negative impact.

GP: What do you think the negative impact was?

CT: Oh, I think, well, first of all, the demise of identifiably black schools. There were I guess level one or tier one top grade high schools across the state. Hillside was just one of them, okay? Dudley in Greensboro, it was several of them. They don't even exist anymore.

GP: Why do you think Hillside wasn't--. Actually there were only thirteen high schools that were traditionally black in North Carolina that remained after school desegregation. The rest of them were turned into junior highs or elementary schools or.

CT: Well, again, remember Durham has always had a politically active black community. Although somebody was joking the other day and said they were amazed that people in Durham wanted to still call it Hillside because it was named for John Sprunhill, who was a conservative rich white man. (Laughter) And they thought the first thing they would have wanted to change was the name but by then it had been Hillside so long and it had established its reputation as a school for black folks. But it was unique. But the other thing I think that happened that not only did the schools, the leadership changed. That in so many instances the seasoned senior principal who was black became the assistant to the brand new graduate who was white. But I think racism was alive and well amongst the decision makers at that time because the boards of education were certainly not integrated. And then I think in some instances there was what remained as a de facto segregation that people allowed, if you will, the black supervisors to continue to run things as long as you didn't mess with them and vice versa. So some good things were able to be sustained for a good period of time.

GP: Do you think anything was gained?

CT: That's a hard question. That's a hard question. I think more was--. Okay, no, I started to say, post secondary education opened up more schools to black youngsters with integration. But I'm not even sure that was such a good thing because again the nurturing, supportive atmosphere that I think is so important at the undergraduate level was not there in predominately white institutions. But there were in my awareness from my own children's experiences, positively influenced non-African American administrators and teachers, but they were few and far between. So I think certainly more was lost than gained as a result of integration or desegregation,

because I don't think integration has yet to occur. My kids grew up going to either private schools or integrated schools and had lots of friends of other, of white friends. But interestingly enough, as they got to be teenagers and got ready to go to Hillside--and some of the white kids did go to Hillside--the relationships changed as they reached dating age. It was really quite interesting.

GP: So your children went to Hillside too?

CT: Yeah, oh yeah. We almost moved. When we got ready to build this house they were going to high school and we really, really, really, really had a better deal on a house we could have bought on the other side of town that would have meant they could not have gone to Hillside and they had a hissy fit. They had a hissy fit. We were looking at Old Farms, that's where it was. That was the neighborhood that we could have gotten more house for less money. Or not more house but it would have been a practical move, okay, dollars and cents wise. And they said, and not go to Hillside! Their dad went to Hillside and I went to Hillside. And I said oh, no. In fact, some of the same folks that taught us were still teaching at Hillside when they went. I don't know if you've heard people talk about Prof Alston.

GP: I have.

CT: Okay, we called him Prof when I was there, P-R-O-F. My kids came home called him Prop Alston because he was so old he had to be propped up. [Laughter]. And I got () them one day and said it's not Prop Alston, it's Prof Alston. And they said but you don't understand. And there were others who were in there but he was the most articulate of them because he liked to, as we used to say, play the

dozen and say to the kids, I know who your mama was and who your daddy was. But Prof Alston was still there. And that sense of connectedness meant a lot to them.

GP: Are there any other main people at Hillside I should know about, because I keep hearing Mr. G's Swing School, Prof Alston, and I was hearing it two different ways, Prof Alston and Prop Alston.

CT: It's a generational thing.

GP: Okay, so I'm glad you are explaining that.

CT: My generation called him Prof. My children's generation called him Prop.

GP: Okay. Are there other people or events at Hillside besides the band, Mr. G's Swing School? I know the football team was outstanding.

CT: Yeah, they won lots of awards, field and track.

GP: Were they good?

CT: They were good. Even before Durham Striders and all of that, some of the guys who are leaders in that effort ran track at Hillside under Mr. Easterling, who's since dead, and then oh, I can't call the other man's name who was coach, but a smooth talker. He was a minister as well. Had a radio program, smooth talking voice. But everybody adored him. What was his name? I can't remember his name right now. But everything about Hillside back in the era when I was there earned recognition on top of (). And, of course, you've seen probably some of Ernie Barnes' work with the band and Ernie, of course, was a Hillside graduate, played football and started his art work even then.

GP: Oh, wow. What do you think people of my generation or future generations should learn about the legacy of Hillside?

CT: The absolute sense, the embracing, if you will, how the older generation, the leadership of the educational system embraced the young people. They cared about them and they made it known to the youngsters as well as to the youngsters' parents that they were important to them.

GP: How did they do that specifically?

CT: Well, a long time ago they used to have to make home visits, okay? That was one of the other main things that was lost with desegregation. A teacher got her list a week before school opened. She had her roster. She knew who her students were and she visited them. So the teachers eyeballed the parents and the students and vice versa. When integration occurred, you know, the white teachers did not want to go into black communities, so they cut that out. And particularly for kids whose parents had not had a positive educational experience, they are conveying this negative attitude towards school. And if they don't live in the same community anymore, they don't go to the same church anymore, how do you form a relationship? And when everybody shows up at school at the same time for orientation it's impossible. Only the very assertive ones make that connection.

If I were in charge, that would be one of the first things I would do and Kay will probably tell you. We've supervised residents in psychiatry from Duke at Lincoln through the years, and usually I get two or three residents each year. And the first thing I would do, I would not allow them to look at a real patient. I'd make them go on a home visit with one of our pair professionals so they could see the communities

they were coming from. I mean if you're over there in the ivory tower you don't know anything about public housing. I never will forget one young man said to me, this patient was paranoid, and I said well, why do you say that. Says well she says she's crawling around at night ducking gun shots and dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. And I said well, Sir, where does she live. He had to pull her records and see. I said that's not paranoia, that's real. At that address there are probably bullets whizzing around in her neighborhood. So again, to have some sense of who you're serving and where they're coming from I think makes a big difference in any profession's ability to relate to them.

GP: Any other lessons we should learn from the legacy of Hillside?

CT: How we're going to get parents to recommit themselves, but again, I think the outreach has to come from the school administrators and what have you. But the other thing, I can remember parents being at the school, not to chastise teachers or students, but being there to assist. And these people weren't being asked to give money, but just some time. But I think somewhere or another along the way it got lost to the point that people thought if you go to the schools to do things you're supposed to be able to bring money.

GP: You're right.

CT: And people who couldn't bring money stayed away. I can remember when my kids left private school and went to public school, fortunately my job situation was always such that I could kind of take my lunch hour when I wanted to go, and I would go in and out of schools and was just amazed at just how few black parents would show up for programs for anything, and to me it was unheard of. If I

had two words to say at a program at school, my mama was sitting there in the audience and I could look out and see that's my mama and you know you're supposed to do good. And I did the same thing for my children. Whether they had something to say or not, if they were just up on the stage, you'd just go to say hey, I'm rooting for you. And that's one of the legacies, if you will, from long ago that we don't have anymore and it's not encouraged now. There was a big to do not too long ago with a parent who showed up at one of the schools and didn't stop at the office to get her—

GP: That's right, her visitor's pass.

CT: Her visitor's pass.

GP: Why do you think that is?

CT: Well, I guess people are angry now, weapons and stuff, I don't know.

But it was all a negative for us rather than a positive.

GP: Right, right.

CT: And that's scary.

GP: It is scary. I've asked everything I want to ask but I'm afraid that there was more that I could have gotten that I didn't know to ask. So I'm going to ask this question. Is there anything more I should know about Hillside to make sure that the story is told accurately, from your perspective at least?

CT: I think the other thing that maybe we didn't touch on is that kids were there because they wanted to be there. There was a truant officer but I think by the times kids got to Hillside they didn't miss school. They were there because there was something there for everybody. As I said earlier, there was a sense of acceptance, a sense of belonging. I can remember very quietly in some instances where there were

hardships in families, teachers and maybe parents as well assisted. I can remember one fellow who was a class ahead of me who came from a big family, bright fellow, bright fellow. He must have had simply one pair of trousers and one decent sweater to his name. Was always immaculate. And I can remember he was on the safety patrol with me and on student council with me. I can remember hearing some of the teachers, because I was nosy, I wasn't supposed to hear it but I was hearing it. I remember hearing some of the teachers, both of whom happened to be my mother's friends, getting things together for him because he traveled with us. He did things and rather than have him feel out of place and not dressed as nicely as everybody. And it wasn't any big to-do about it. Nobody was poking fun at him because he was always immaculate and smart as he could be. I think he ended up with a full scholarship to Morehouse. I've lost track of him now. But I think that sense of support to people was the other thing that was there that we've lost.

GP: And so your message to schools now, things they could do better to help educate black kids, would be what?

CT: Let them know you care about them. Keep your arms around them. I've gotten involved recently with New Horizons, the school for kids that have been put out, and I've been so impressed with how motivated those kids are over there at New Horizons. Marlana Dumford, they call her Coach, has done a tremendous job. I've gone over and spoken to them and done a number of things. And again I think if you can chip through the armor that kids naturally put on themselves, and that's a part of developmental milestone, is to distance yourself from authority or whatever, especially if you feel yourself not having what you think you ought to have. And if

we could push that aside and relate to the person instead of the exterior or the superficial, we could go a long way with improving education.

GP: Okay, thank you very much.

CT: Thank you very much. This was fun.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

TRANSCRIBED JUNE 2005 BY CATHY MANN