

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A
BATTLE, ALICE

FEBRUARY 22, 2001

AB: She was a Mason. Catherine Carter's maiden name is Mason. So her sister was something Mason and I can't remember her first name. She was one of the younger ones because I had taught John and Catherine at Lincoln.

BG: Was there () uprising?

AB: There was a second because I can remember Mr. McDougle standing up on the lower level and you could look down on the stairs to the first level of the high school entry and this father had come in and he was saying, "I am tired of coming over here for this nonsense. We are going to put an end to this." I don't know who it was but that had to be the second one.

BG: Were they in the same week?

AB: I don't remember.

BG: The newspaper report, and the thing that was in everyone's mind, but from the newspaper reviews it looked like there were two in the same week. Did they lock the doors both times?

AB: Yes.

BG: Chained the doors so that nobody could get out. When that happened did you have an intercom system and did the principal suggest keeping the students in the classroom?

AB: Yes.

BG: ()?

AB: It seemed like it was in the morning and no later than lunchtime.

BG: So it may have been a couple of hours.

AB: I think so.

BG: Did you see changes in the--?

AB: It seemed like every time something would happen then we would start meeting to put a Band-Aid on that and then some of the other issues would not be--. I don't remember that it was in the same week. It seemed like it was a little time after the first, but I could be wrong.

BG: I could be too. I think it was like a Monday and Wednesday. I will go back and look through the newspaper reports and see what they say.

So they kept putting on Band Aids. Did they ever do a major operation and correct the situation to make the patient well again?

AB: I don't think they ever made it well, but made it better. They were more satisfied that the mascot became the tiger.

BG: Did they find the trophies?

AB: I think they put what they had on display, but a lot of them had been destroyed.

BG: They were trashed?

AB: I think so. From my understanding, they had been trashed. A lot of the trophies that were salvaged are what Mr. Peerman was able to find. My ex-husband, Jackie, was an outstanding basketball player and he had won a lot of awards. He does not have any trophies.

BG: The trophies were important.

AB: Very. And probably the band trophies from the band clinics. They would grade you and give you awards.

BG: Why do you think the trophies were so important? I'm not saying that they shouldn't be, I mean, I hear this over and over again. It's a major issue.

AB: It was evidence of achievement, accomplishment, excelling in an atmosphere where people think that I'm not a significant person but these trophies would prove that I am. That's about it.

BG: One of the things that I hear repeatedly from people I've interviewed is that at Lincoln High School there were values that were taught in the classroom and if necessary, at assemblies to teach values. Is that a perception?

AB: Yes.

BG: Now what happened to teaching values when you went to Chapel Hill High School?

AB: You know I think that social graces and things like that the white students got it at home and so it was not important to repeat it at school because it was done at home, not remembering maybe that the black students did not have that advantage. What I did was that I would stand at my door in the morning, and I always spoke to my students, and I expected a greeting back from the students. Just common courtesy kinds of things, and in the classroom I would tell them I was going to respect them and I expected them to respect me, and to respect each other that when someone else was talking that you listen until they are finished and then you have an opportunity to talk. Just in a subtle way but there was no outright teaching. It was just doing what was right.

BG: You mentioned something that the white students got at home and the black students didn't. I wonder if you could be more specific about that. Is that what you were just talking about when you said don't interrupt when someone else is talking?

AB: I'm thinking about--. Kind of being exposed to society, you know, going out to plays, big productions, and that kind of thing. Some of them, I don't think, were exposed to that kind of thing. Using your napkin, or even the whole family sitting down together and some of the black students were not exposed to that. Some of them my not have known where their next meal was going to come from so they were more concerned about eating than using a napkin or using the right fork or that kind of thing. So I think more of the white students had that advantage. It may have--. I don't know what I'm trying to say but--.

BG: I think you've been pretty clear.

AB: Do you understand what I'm saying?

BG: Absolutely. So you're also talking about a different economic level here.

AB: Yes.

BG: You're talking about poor, poor people and University professors to the large extent.

AB: I found out that not only were the blacks discriminated against, but the students from Carrboro, which historically were the "crackers" at the time, and we call them "red necks" now. The students at the old

Chapel Hill High School discriminated against them, professors children, and the elite () people being associated with Carrboro.

BG: What happened to the band the students mention all the time, the marching band from Lincoln High School when you got to Chapel Hill High?

AB: I don't remember that there was a band at the Chapel Hill High School. There may have been. Some of the teachers at Chapel Hill High went to junior high school--.

BG: They were Lincoln teachers.

AB: Right. Betty King, but I think they were split up. Ernest Edwards, I think, went to Phillips.

BG: What was Mr. () first name?

AB: Leon.

BG: Does he still live in Durham?

AB: Yes.

BG: Tell me about Mr. Peerman and what his role was his first year at Chapel Hill High after integration.

AB: I think he taught physical education, and he may have been an assistant football coach.

BG: He wasn't the head coach?

AB: I don't think so. I think Coach () was the head coach.

BG: Did he become head coach?

AB: Yes, after a year or two. But then Mr. Strickland became head coach. Ms. Clemmons would know all of this stuff.

BG: Is she still around?

AB: She lives in Durham and I haven't seen her very much. Whenever the students invite her back for reunions, parties, and things she won't come. When the Martin Luther King Committee honored the principals in the school year before last, 2000, she didn't come. Someone said that she said that when she retired from Chapel Hill High School she retired from Chapel Hill. She could get the students to do anything she wanted them to do. I don't know how she did this.

BG: During the late 60s, in the spring of '68 is when Martin Luther King was assassinated and then '69 there must have been uprisings still going on in the South. What role did these events have on how the students used what was going on in school?

AB: The students were always angry. I know I was just really sad. I had been over to a meeting at the central office and--. Was Martin Luther killed in '68?

BG: I thought it was in '68.

AB: But something had happened and I came back to school and I remember that I was just so sad and I may had been crying because () had just gone to first grade and my baby is in school with people that hate her. I was just so sad but the focus was on her just going to school. I can't put it into words, but I can feel it.

BG: Did she come home?

AB: No.

BG: Did she share that same feeling with you?

AB: No, she didn't even know it had happened. She didn't know a thing about it.

BG: She didn't feel--?

AB: No.

BG: It was a mother's worry.

AB: Yes, right.

BG: Certainly that hate sounded like it was just there at the high school and the anger.

Did you perceive all the students were angry? Were the black students just angry?

AB: Primarily the black boys and some black girls. I can remember some of the students were even angry with black teachers.

BG: Why?

AB: I never understood why. I think they felt like everyone was going to discriminate against them.

BG: Even the black teachers?

AB: Yes.

BG: Did they see a change in your teaching style?

AB: I don't whether they did or not but I'm sure there was a change because I wanted them to be certain that I was not going to discriminate against anybody no matter what the color. I tried to make certain to call on everybody and that I was going to even it up. I wasn't going to let somebody dominate the classroom. Everyone was going to have equal opportunity to perform. I think maybe I did it at Lincoln but I was more obvious, you know, aware of making it equal.

BG: Are there other memories of either Lincoln or Chapel Hill High that stand out in your mind that I haven't asked you about?

AB: Some of the white students would be so friendly to your at school and sometimes you would see them in town and they would pretend that they didn't see you.

BG: You were invisible.

AB: Yes. But I can remember--this is in later years--students would come to my classroom at lunchtime and there was a little Vietnamese girl, there was a black girl, and a white girl and I think a white boy and they would go and have their lunch and then they would come up to my room and talk and discuss television shows and things like that. The thing that most affected me when I retired was having to leave my students. It was a happy time at the school.

BG: What year did you resign?

AB: In '91.

BG: Did you feel there was significant progress had been made in high school by the time you retired?

AB: You know there was a middle part at the beginning. Everybody was trying so hard and like I said, all these meetings and after the riots meetings and trying to do what was right for everybody and then I could see it just slipping away and nobody was trying anymore.

BG: The walls were still there.

AB: Yes. Redeveloped. I think they had been broken down but they redeveloped.

BG: Do you think there was any separation to understand the different cultures, the blacks understanding the whites and the whites understanding the blacks?

AB: ().

BG: There doesn't sound like there were any models for that by the teachers.

AB: No. I can remember one time we had--. It had something to do with an integration issue and there was a workshop during the summer. I know Ms. Clemmons was there and I was there and some more black teachers in Chapel Hill. There may have been one or two white teachers but most of the teachers were from Hillsborough or Pittsboro or somewhere like that. It was a few years after the riot and everybody had met and solved all their problems. Then something happened and they decided they needed the workshop. It was an expensive workshop that was being paid for by the system or the county or something. There were very few Chapel Hill people there.

BG: Anything else you want to share with me?

AB: I just remember my students so fondly and often see students and they said that I made them do what was right. They talk about my demanding that they present papers to me on nice clean paper a certain way with a heading and written in ink if it was something they did at home--they could take notes in pencil in the classroom--and that I didn't let them chew chewing gum and I didn't let them wear hats and that I made them pay attention in class and that kind of thing. They come back and say it was for their good and I appreciate that.

One thing that was very disappointing to me was to see black students and many of them I had in my classroom who were outgoing and would participate in various organizations like being on the yearbook staff because they would have to go into the students home where the meetings were held in the white students homes, but my point is that some of those students were ridiculed by their black counterparts for trying to be white and acting like they were white because they were excelling. That was a great disappointment and I hear that this often happens. It happened here in Chapel Hill and it happens throughout the country. We need to do something about that. I don't know what, but we need to probably make those students who are doing the ridiculing feel important so that they won't think somebody else is trying to be better than they are. I don't know what the answer is and maybe somebody does have the answer.

BG: Do you think it is the association with whites or that they are excelling or a combination of that that makes the other blacks students want to ostracize them?

AB: I think that they don't feel important and to see someone that is--.

END OF INTERVIEW