

TAPE 1, SIDE A

WILLIAM B. A. CULP, JR.  
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PAMELA GRUNDY: I will start by saying this is Pamela Grundy, and I am here interviewing William Culp about West Charlotte High School. We're in Charlotte, North Carolina, and it is the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, 1999. I thought actually we might start by talking about your student teaching experiences at Second Ward. You said that's where you started out. Is that right?

WILLIAM CULP: Yes, I did my student teaching at Second Ward High School, and at the time that I started my student teaching there the belief was, of course, that Second Ward was going to continue to be in existence. It was very interesting because for most of the students there I was the first white person that they'd ever really had any direct contact with, so it was quite enlightening to begin to realize many of the cultural differences that existed between me as a Southern white male and these African-American students, male and female, who for the most part had come up in an entirely different culture even though they had grown up in the South as I had.

PG: Were you from Charlotte?

WC: I was born in Kannapolis, North Carolina, just down the road a ways, but my father is a Methodist minister and, therefore, we had traveled all over North Carolina. I had grown up in lots of small towns in North Carolina, places like Cramerton and Sylva and Mount Airy, and had lived in Charlotte at least twice during that time. So you'd have to say I'm a North Carolina product, but it's hard to pin down exactly where the greatest influence came from.

PG: Okay. How did you come to be a teaching at Second Ward High School?

WC: Well, I was very involved in the 60s in the civil rights movement. I went to college from 1961 to 1965. I started out in Greensboro, North Carolina, during the sit-in demonstrations and became involved in those. I had grown up in a Methodist minister's home and had received a lot of influence. Of course the race question and the civil rights issues were very important topics in my home during the 50s and early 60s, so I had become sensitized to questions of equality and racial harmony. So getting involved in the civil rights movement really sort of opened my eyes a great deal to what I perceived to be not only differences between the races, but also the substantial gap that existed between the black experience in the South and the white experience, and I think made me more sensitive and concerned about finding a way to bridge some of that gap. I then went to college and graduated and was in the army for almost three years, and went through the Vietnam experience, so when I came back and decided that teaching was what I wanted to do I think it only natural that I perceived that one of the things that I would feel was important was finding a way to bridge some of that gap that existed between the white experience and the black experience, particularly in this part of the country.

PG: Had your experience in the army been integrated at all?

WC: Oh, yes. No question about the U. S. army being integrated, and I'd had the opportunity to serve particularly with a number of enlisted men who out ranked me who were African American and really had an opportunity to interact with them in a situation where they were more in control than I was. That was rather interesting and a real learning experience for me. Certainly among the troops, I was an enlisted man, and I had an opportunity to get to know a lot of not only African-Americans but Hispanics and

others from different cultures. Certainly an enlightening experience and probably an experience that I feel all young people probably ought to have the opportunity to go through, although I wouldn't wish Vietnam on anybody.

PG: And so when you decided to go into teaching, was it was it with this specific thought that this was one way that you could bridge this gap?

WC: Yes. I came back from the army with a college degree in history and political science. I did not have a teacher's degree. I went out to the University of North Carolina at Charlotte for a year to get my teacher's certificate, and specifically wrote a paper on Second Ward and did some studies there as a part of my class work, and specifically was interested in pursuing teaching in a predominantly black school, not realizing, of course, that I was sort of going to be in the middle of the integration movement here in Charlotte. I really anticipated teaching in a predominantly black school and that's what I really volunteered for, I guess you could say, and made clear that that was my interest.

PG: So when you got a job you told the people who were hiring you that you wished to be at one of the black schools?

WC: Yes, it was made pretty clear that at that particular point in time that in Charlotte-Mecklenburg they were attempting integration at the staff level. I think anticipating probably that eventually there would be integration at the student level, but there were attempts and certainly questions. People were asked if they would be interested in this opportunity. It was still, I think, pretty much a matter of choice at that point in time. Later, of course, African-American teachers and white teachers were assigned on the basis of need as opposed to the basis of race really. But at this particular

time they were looking for pioneers, I guess you could say, that were willing to go into predominantly black schools and teach in order to integrate at the staff level, at the faculty level.

PG: Well, as you got this assignment at the Second Ward you obviously spent some time there. What was your frame of mind as you approached starting to teach?

WC: Well, the interesting part was, of course, that I was assigned to go to Second Ward, and then during the summer of 1969 they closed Second Ward.

PG: So you hadn't actually taught there?

WC: I had taught there as a student teacher, but I had not taught there as a faculty member. So when Second Ward was closed that left West Charlotte as the predominant black high school in Charlotte, and my new assignment was to West Charlotte, and I really didn't know anything about West Charlotte. What I came to learn as I began teaching there was that West Charlotte was in many ways the elite black high school, Second Ward being sort of the lower middle income black high school. So interestingly enough West Charlotte was the one that survived. Second Ward was the one that was closed. Second Ward was also in an older building, West Charlotte in a little bit newer building, and I think that probably had a lot to do with which one survived as well. I have to be honest with you that I was a little frightened. I was a little uncertain about how I would be received as a teacher. I didn't really have any doubts about the treatment that I would receive from the administration or the faculty, because I had interacted enough during my student teaching experience. I was a little bit concerned about what would be the reaction of students, and that was sort of the way I approached it, but I was pleasantly surprised that my race didn't seem to make a whole lot of difference to

students. Student who would respect the teacher would respect the teacher whether he or she were white or black. Those that were trouble makers were trouble makers and it had little to do with race. I really, I think, found a great deal of acceptance and a certain amount of grudging respect for someone who would volunteer. It was clear I was one of only about three or four white faculty members that year, that being the last year before integration took place. There were a number of black teachers who had gone to white schools on sort of the same basis. I found a lot of acceptance among everyone, students as well as faculty. Really, after a month or so, I became very comfortable with my situation and really began very quickly to get beyond race. In that particular situation where all the students were black and most all the faculty was black as well, very quickly began to feel that race was not an issue, at least not for the folks that were at West Charlotte.

PG: Was there sort of a moment or incident that you remember, a time when you realized this was the case?

WC: Well, as I look back on it I guess the incident that really sort of galvanized my feeling of acceptance was one of the problems that any high school has even today, is folks who are not students and not faculty who come onto the campus from the neighborhood. I hadn't been there but a couple of months when a non-student of student age was loitering in the halls, and I went out to confront him about what he was doing in the halls, and he pulled a knife on me. One of the students looking out the door saw it and buzzed the office and within a matter of minutes a number of administration members one in particular, Pop Miller, rushed down the hallway and grabbed the guy and the incident was defused very quickly. What I came to realize out of that situation was

that everyone was particularly concerned that I not view this as an attack on me because I was white, but instead to realize that this had happened to black teachers as well. I had number of black teachers come up to me and relate similar experiences. My students were very concerned that I not feel frightened or threatened by the environment. It was an experience that made me feel good about where I was because very quickly everyone sort of rallied to me in that kind of situation. I'd have to say that I very quickly got over any fear of differences or fear of the environment that I would have had going in.

PG: Do you have some other memories?

WC: Oh, yeah. Probably the biggest thing I remember is the lack of resources. This was the premier black high school, West Charlotte, and the school that the black community was particularly proud of and felt like it was their elite school, and yet I very quickly began to realize the lack of resources that was available. The most famous story that I tell about that that sort of illustrates it was that there were seven faculty members in the social sciences department teaching history, world history, U. S. history, and so forth, civics. We had one projector to share among those seven teachers, and it stayed broken most of the time. That particular year a number of schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, one in particular, Independence High School, had received a good bit of federal money as "model schools." I learned from a black teacher at Independence who had been at West Charlotte that there were extra projectors at Independence that had been bought with federal money. So we did a little midnight requisition where we went out to Independence and "freed" a couple of projectors and brought them over to West Charlotte and started using them among the seven teachers. After a couple of weeks it came to the attention of the principal that this had happened, and I got called in on the



carpet, so to speak, for having expropriated property of Independence High School and brought it to West Charlotte. My comment was, of course, that it was in a closet at Independence and wasn't being used and that we needed them at West Charlotte. I tell that story for a number of reasons. One is that it illustrates the resource issue that black schools were clearly deficient in the resources for teaching and for learning. But more than that I use it to illustrate the dilemma that black administrators had. This principal was in effect having to call me in on the carpet because I had expropriated some projectors from another school, and that was his job. Yet, at the same time, he realized that I was simply trying to create a learning environment that would be good for the students. I think that was the dilemma that black administrators felt during the segregated times. On the one hand they realized that they didn't have the tools they needed, but on the other hand they were afraid to rock the boat. It was that stress, I think, that was probably very difficult for them to deal with.

PG: Were you surprised with the lack of resources at West Charlotte?

WC: Yes. I'll have to say I had been prepared for it a bit by being at Second Ward and realizing what I saw there. I think what surprised me was not so much the lack of resources at West Charlotte, but the lack of resources in comparison with some of the other schools in the system as I began to learn what was going on at other schools like Independence. The interesting thing was that the students, and for the most part the faculty, really never dwelt on that. They never talked about that. It didn't seem to be an issue that was of great concern to them. I was sort of like we do the best we can with what we have. I, of course, had come from a more privileged situation as a white student in predominantly white schools where there had been adequate resources. For me it was

a bit more shocking, and I also was a bit more impatient with it I think. I remember Pop Miller and I having a number of conversations in which he was trying to encourage me to be patient and to learn a little more tolerance for the system. I, of course, being young and full of vigor wanted to attack the system head on, and he was trying to explain to me that you collect a lot more and make a lot more progress if you did it more quietly. It was interesting to me and certainly not so much a surprise, but a frustration I would say. I think it was a frustration felt by other faculty members, but many of the black faculty members had simply learned to deal with it better than I had.

PG: So you were at West Charlotte you said essentially for a semester?

WC: Yeah, I was at West Charlotte for a semester. Having been a political science graduate I had the opportunity to go into the director of elections position. My wife had just had our first child. She had been pregnant and had to stop teaching. We were living on one teacher's salary. In 1969 teacher's salaries were not nearly as good as they are today, not saying they're very good even here today. I was working two jobs, like many teachers, teaching and then working in a department store nights and weekends. Here I had a chance to get a job with better benefits and paid better, so I took it and became director of elections. I've said many times that if I could have made the same money teaching I would certainly have stayed in teaching. I think that's a dilemma that we face: how do we reward teachers enough to get them to stay in teaching when there's so many opportunities to make better money at other jobs? It just raises my respect for teachers who stick with it. My wife did twenty-two years in education, and she was able to do that partly because my salary was better, and we were able to make more money by my doing other things besides teaching.



PG: You really left teaching just as things were beginning to be really transformed in Charlotte. These changes were taking place. Did you participate at all in the process of desegregation over the earlier years?

WC: Well, not a great deal, really. I had a young family, and I was very involved with my job. Because of that I didn't participate a great deal in the early days of integration. However, I really did later because all of my children went through the open school process which, of course, meant that they ended up at West Charlotte Senior High School which had an open school component as a part of the school. I was active in PTA's at Piedmont and Irwin and West Charlotte, all of which were former black schools. I did, you might say, a little later have pretty direct contact with integration and the school system. But during those early years I was pretty much involved with other things and not directly involved with school integration situation.

PG: Did you stay in touch with your colleagues at West Charlotte at all during that time?

WC: Oh, I did. Yes. In particular because a number of them were interested in politics and, of course, I was heavily involved in politics. Pop Miller and I stayed in contact, and I still see and hear from Pop Miller occasionally now. There were a number of other faculty members and staff members there who I stayed in contact with. West Charlotte for me will always be my high school. I still go to football games occasionally and see folks that I haven't seen in a long time. Since my children went there and since I taught there, I really do feel a special relationship with West Charlotte, and I hope I always will.

PG: It seems that in those early years of integration there were points where people were concerned about whether West Charlotte was going to stay open. Do you remember any of those?

WC: I think there was concern, and it was primarily because they were struggling with how could they maintain enough white population at West Charlotte to make it attractive to families to keep sending their kids there. That was, I think, one of the reasons the open school component became so important because it was one of the big drawing cards for white families, although there were a number of neighborhoods, Eastover and Cotswold and some other neighborhoods who had direct assignments to West Charlotte and went there. And, yes, I was aware of that, but again not directly involved in it particularly.

[PHONE RINGING IN THE BACKGROUND.]

WC: Do you want to stop for a second? I don't need to get it, but let me.

[TAPE IS TURNED OFF AND THEN BACK ON.]

PG: One of the things that you've been talking about has been this open school idea. What was the attraction of the open school concept? Why did you choose to send your children through that track?

WC: Well, first of all, my wife and I both are trained educators, I guess you could say. My wife, of course, did twenty-two years with school systems so she's even more of a professional educator than I am. I think the biggest thing that we liked about the open school idea was that it seemed to be, we thought, child centered and it encouraged creativity and it encouraged students to really sort of go at their own speed and at their own pace. It tried as much as possible to offer them opportunities to pursue

what really interested them as opposed to some artificial curriculum that was created by somebody in the bureaucracy. The other thing was we had such a good experience with our first child in the open school program that it was natural to follow with our second child, and then when we had foster children they went through the open school as well. I think the experience with your first child certainly sort of sets the tone. The open school really was a magnet. It was the early magnet, and they really had the open and the traditional program before the magnets really became as widespread as they are now. We liked the creative piece as much as anything, and our experience being positive simply encouraged us to continue that with the other child.

PG: Was there any thought about sending your children to these black schools, the open schools had all been ( ). Would that have made a difference?

WC: I don't think that consciously entered our decision making, but we would not have been interested in sending them to schools that were segregated or predominately white in nature. We certainly liked the open school component because it did provide diversity and provided the opportunity for interaction not only with African-American children, but also interaction with children of other cultures, Hispanic and others, that make up the mosaic that we think should exist in society and that children should be exposed to. But I don't think that we really made a conscious decision because naturally your children start at elementary level and you sort of monitor their progress and decide whether they are proceeding on a course that you think is good for them. Really, the only school they went to that had a predominantly black population, more than fifty percent, was West Charlotte. The others, of course, were more along the seventy/thirty ratio that the school system as a whole had. But I'll have to say that there

was a little bit of me that certainly felt like the interaction with children who were African American was a critical part of their education, and to learn about the real world you really have to be involved in the real world. We've always tried to provide for our children, at least, the opportunity to know how other people live and how other people think so that they are not isolated and so that they are not protected, if you will, from different influences. In my family, at least, it's been a very successful process, and I try to encourage other families to look at as a process that they ought to put their children into so that their children can learn from it.

PG: When you speak of it as a process, could you describe to me the process?

WC: Well, what I mean by a process is that the interaction has both positive and negative connotations. You have to learn how to interact with people and that includes people who are different than you are, who don't have perhaps the same values or the same cultural standards or the same background or even the same language necessarily. You go through that by having this interaction. You begin to learn how to cope with differences and how to make those differences create strength rather than weakness. When I say process I'm really looking at the interaction, both the negative and positive aspects of it. It certainly hasn't all been positive. There certainly have been traumatic moments for my children just like any children in school, and yet they've learned from both the negative and positive, and I think it makes them stronger people.

PG: Can you think of any particular lessons that your children learned, either positive or negative? Do you have any specific memories?

WC: Well, I think, probably the biggest impact it had on my children is that they do not judge people on the basis of the color of their skin. As Martin Luther King said,

they judge them on the content of their character. So I've noticed that my children much easier make friends with people who are different, who look different than they are because they can see beyond skin color or beyond language being different. So I think that's probably the most significant influence that it's had at least on the children that I've had the biggest contact with. And it's been interesting how they've maintained friendships over the years with a pretty wide and diverse group of students, for example, from West Charlotte. Both of my children still maintain ties to a number of their high school friends and, in fact, have done a better job of that than I did, frankly. I think perhaps part of that is that I didn't have as unique an experience as they had in high school. My high school was pretty plain and boring really when you get right down to it. I think that that continued tie that they feel to West Charlotte and to their high school friends is an example of the importance that that time period in their life has played in their life and has made a real difference for them. I think the other thing that was important for both of my children was that they got the opportunity by going to West Charlotte of getting the feeling of what it was like to be a minority because whites really are a minority at West Charlotte. I think that was good for them to go through that experience. I don't think anybody would want to be a minority their whole life, but to have some experiences like that during your life I think is probably humbling and helps you better understand the difficulties that others have who had to struggle against discrimination or struggle against feeling alone or isolated or alienated. I think in both cases the ability to be comfortable being in a minority situation where you are the minority and also being comfortable, more than comfortable being attracted to people

who are different than you are. I think both of those are the strengths that came out of their high school experience.

PG: Is this something you would discuss as a family while they were in school, or is this something you know in retrospect?

WC: Oh no. We discussed it quite a bit. Again, the open school for my family at least created children who knew how to talk and knew how to express themselves and who did it freely. So we had lots of dinner table discussions in our family, and lots of sharing of experiences. So I really heard a lot about what was going on with each of them as they went through school and the experiences that they had there. I think about it in retrospect now because they're all grown and adults and have moved out, but in reality as you were going through it, it was a process again of helping them cope with some of the things that were at times difficult and at times challenging, and not always pleasant, but which were good learning experiences and were things that would help them as they faced other challenges in life.

PG: Do you remember anything specific, something somebody said one night at dinner that you discussed?

WC: You ask me that question and nothing just comes right to mind that I can really remember to try to relate. I'm not getting anything.

PG: That's okay, or any particular issues that would come up.

WC: I remember in particular that one of the issues that came up at one point was when my daughter was at West Charlotte. It was the issue of student elections. They had tried to create sort of a convoluted process to insure that there would be racially mixed group of students in the student government. I remember that my daughter sort of



bridled against that. She felt like it ought to be just like democracy, and that if you had the votes to elect people you should be able to elect people. She really didn't feel very comfortable with this sort of convoluted process that they had created. Of course, the administration had done it in order to insure diversity. My daughter felt like if white students couldn't convince black students to vote for them then there was something wrong and that it ought to be democracy. I remember a number of discussions we had about that, and I was trying to stress to them that the process was created to insure some diversity in order to make everyone feel more comfortable. She was, in effect, arguing for a more pure democracy and creating a situation where people had to compete. If they couldn't compete, then they had to figure out how to compete better. I think that was a very interesting discussion, and certainly I never won that argument. On the other hand she learned to live with the accommodation of the process that had been created.

PG: And this was essentially a process to insure that white students got to be elected?

WC: That's exactly what it was. The black students were firmly in control with numbers, guaranteeing some diversity. I think about it in the argument that's gone on about the U.S. congress and the creation of racial districts to try to insure the election of some minorities to the congress of the United States. And yet the courts have struck that down and say, in effect, you can't do that to insure that people of certain races are elected. I can hear my daughter now saying, "See, they're saying it has to be pure democracy and people have to learn to overcome their prejudice in their voting," and so forth. It was just an interesting discussion that sort of brought out, I think, a greater understanding on the part of my children of what both black and white students were

dealing with in an integrated situation, particularly one in which white students found themselves in a minority which, of course, black students had found themselves in forever. I think it was a learning experience.

PG: Did you agree with the process?

WC: I defended the process. I don't know whether you could say I agreed with the process. I defended the process because I understood perhaps from a little different perspective of why there needed to be some artificial creation of positions for both black and white students in order to insure harmony. My daughter being younger, and like I had been at one time perhaps more idealistic, certainly saw it from a different angle. I think many of us find ourselves defending the status quo at times, not because we necessarily agree with it, but because we don't really have a better idea. We don't have a better plan to put into place. As I watch education and the struggles that go on with what to do in the present day about integration and how to try to maintain some diversity in the school population, it makes me realize more and more that there are needs at times to create artificial processes in order to insure that everyone feels included in the final program. While you may not always agree with the final product, I think we're all called upon to accommodate ourselves to some extent in order to look for the greater good for the society as a whole.

PG: Were there other measures that you recall the teachers and administration at West Charlotte making in order to make all the students feel that they belonged to the school?

WC: Well, the big thing that always struck me about West Charlotte in those days, and I really can talk primarily about the 70s and 80s because those are what I'm

more familiar with, was the fact that there was a great attempt on the part of the faculty and the administration to treat students the same, not to show any kind of favoritism regardless of whether it would be favoritism toward black students or white students but, in effect, to try to create an environment in which all students felt the same and felt that they were treated the same. I think that was the important element in the magic that West Charlotte created, was that cooperation. I think the other thing was the pride that the school felt. Not only has West Charlotte produced a lot of Morehead scholars, for example my daughter having been a Morehead scholar and went to Chapel Hill, but also they produced a lot of all state football players, and they've won state championships in basketball a good bit. They did great in the Odyssey of the Mind. West Charlotte is just a school with lots of awards, and lots of plaques, and lots of pride. It's had the pride not only since it's been an integrated school since 1970, but it had it before that. It's a school with a long history and organizations to help promote that positive feeling about the school. I think that white students who started going to West Charlotte in the 70s really began to plug into that feeling of pride that black parents and black students had had for many years about West Charlotte. I think the pride of the school and the good feelings about the school in the community and among both faculty and alumni and students and parents simply helps that school continue to do such an excellent job as it faces the new challenges that inevitably it will face. It's a school that's really proud of itself, and proud of its heritage, and proud of its history. I think there's no one that I know of that can say with any more pride anything than "I'm a member of the West Charlotte family."

PG: And you continue to be a member of that? You still go to games?

WC: Oh, yeah. I still go to games, and I've been a debate judge at West Charlotte in recent years, and I still feel tied to the school even though, obviously, I have no children there any more and will probably never have any children there, and probably won't have any grandchildren there since my children are scattered from one end of the country to the other. It's my high school. It's the school I feel close to, and it's the school I'll always identify with even though I didn't attend it.

PG: That's very ( ) when it can even draw in somebody like that.

WC: But then I have that unique experience of having taught there, and having had children attend there, and having been involved as a school committee chairman and school committee member, and a PTSA leader there, and had four children that went there, two of my own and two foster children, so I've really had lots of experience at West Charlotte over a long period of time. I hope West Charlotte will continue. I know it will be different. I know it will change. Nothing stays the same, but I just hope that there will always be a West Charlotte Senior High School.

PG: If I could ask you just a couple more questions.

WC: Sure.

PG: In the time when your children were there and when you were on the school committees, and working with the school, what were the big challenges you think the school faced, along with making all the students feel comfortable. What other kinds of challenges?

WC: Well, over crowding has always been a condition that I think West Charlotte has had to deal with, and it became even more of a condition after integration. The challenge of getting new buildings and renovated buildings was always something

that was on the minds of folks at West Charlotte, and I think probably will always be there. That's certainly something that never goes away, is that challenge of over crowding and the challenge of providing adequate space for instruction. Getting involvement from parents is difficult at any school. It's a particular challenge at a school like West Charlotte because most of the white parents who are involved there and whose students go there live really on the other side of town, so to speak. So getting them involved in and coming to meetings and feeling a part of the school is difficult. Many black families have the same difficulty in terms of either being single parent families or having situations where both parents work. This constant struggle to keep parents involved in the school and keep parents active in the school family was certainly something that we continued to struggle with there. The other problem that I remember in particular during my time was Charlotte is such a growing community, and Charlotte is always opening new high schools with new facilities, with new campuses, with new resources, and the best and brightest teachers tend to be drawn away from aging schools like a West Charlotte to go to the new school at Providence or the new school at Vance where they have the latest equipment and more space and new facilities. A constant struggle is to keep bright teachers and the best teachers in a school like West Charlotte as opposed to losing them to the new fancy schools that are always being built in a community that's growing like Charlotte is. That was a constant struggle and continues to be a struggle because there's something about the new school that attracts teachers and particularly teachers who have developed a reputation for being excellent. That was one of the problems when I was at West Charlotte and my children were there was watching some of your best faculty members slip away to other schools and be drawn away. So I'd

say those were some of the major problems. Probably the biggest problem at West Charlotte is trying to win a state championship in football. West Charlotte has a great tradition in football and is the scourge of the Charlotte community in terms of football. I mean, they beat everybody, and they beat them good on the local level, but they've had a great deal of problems winning state championships. They've gone to state championship games many years running. In fact, when I was on the school committee we went to the state championship football game, and we decided that we would print up some bumper stickers that said, "West Charlotte state champs," and we would sell the immediately after the state championship football game in Chapel Hill and raise money for the school committee. So I printed up the bumper stickers at my own expense, and I recruited a bunch of people so we could cover all the exits at Chapel Hill on the West Charlotte side of the field, and went to the state championship football game and Northern Durham blew our doors off. So we ended up with a bunch of bumper stickers we couldn't sell. Winning that state championship in football continues to be—they have won it one year—but they've been more times to the state championship football game than any school in the state, including schools that have won the state championship, but they haven't come away with the gold medal very often. I'd say that's probably the biggest problem. Winning that state championship in football.

PG: How much do you think it mattered at the time when your children were at the school to have good football teams?

WC: I think athletics teams offer real spirit for a school. Both of my children played sports. My two foster children did not play sports, or very well. But my two children did play sports and enjoyed sports. I think the main thing is that is draws the



school together. It gives the school a common focus. It gives everybody a chance to cheer for something together, black and white. I think that was probably the major interest in sports at West Charlotte, and everybody likes to win. Having a winning team, which West Charlotte consistently did in basketball and football, certainly makes school more enjoyable in the sense that it gives them something to help add to that pride that I was talking about. I think it probably was important at West Charlotte and continues to be. I think at times it's over emphasized at West Charlotte, unfortunately, and I think that's probably a common problem in any school that's had as much sports success as West Charlotte has. My feeling about it at least was that it added to the school spirit.

PG: I just have a couple of more questions that I ask most of the people I've been interviewing about this issue. At the beginning when you were first thinking about school integration, thinking about integrating schools yourself, thinking about your children, what did you think that desegregating or integrating the schools of Charlotte would do for Charlotte? What did you think it would accomplish?

WC: Well, I thought it would in particular create a community environment that I thought would be more positive. That it would create more of a feeling of unity in the community. That it would be an opportunity for people to reach across artificial barriers and be able to meet and interact with each other, and that it would create a stronger economic and political environment than we had had during segregation. And the other thing was, it was just the right thing to do. It was something that was moral. It was something that I felt strongly needed to happen in order for us to begin to move to the point in time when we can get beyond race, when race will be perhaps not an issue and perhaps not something that we have to concern ourselves with. So I think that my feeling

was that I wanted my children to grow up in a real world, a world that existed in reality as opposed to some sort of fantasy. My feeling has always been that kids, particularly in an urban community, who don't go to integrated schools simply miss out on a lot of what's real about the urban environment. They're not very well prepared to deal with the real world when they become adults. I felt like this was an opportunity for my children at least to have a better understanding of the world and of people and to therefore be more successful in life. I never really thought of it as a social experiment. I thought of it as something that's time was overdue, not just due. For my family it was something that was a commitment that we made, that we wanted to do something during our life to make the world a better place to live and to help learn to understand and to get along better. So integration in the schools was simply one part of that that was important.

PG: Do you think your expectations were fulfilled?

WC: I'd say my expectations were fulfilled within my family and for my children. I'd have to say that we have fallen short of my expectations as a society. We still have a lot of work to do to create a color blind society. We certainly are not there yet. I really feel that in Charlotte there is a great deal of racial harmony and a great deal of interaction among people of different races that would have been impossible had there been no school integration. So I think we've made progress, but like so many I think we've got a long way to go.

PG: How much of that job do you think that schools can do, ( ) the question people ask?

WC: Well, I think we ask entirely too much of our schools for sure, but it's a critical point in society because it is a place where all students have to go. They have to

go to school. I happen to be personally a little bit concerned about the move toward so much private education, not that private schools aren't good. I know they're good schools. But, again, I feel like in many cases they create an artificial environment for students that's not the real world and that it ill prepares them for dealing with the real world.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE A

BEGINNING OF TAPE ONE, SIDE B

WC: Vouchers. I'm in no way interested in encouraging people to leave the public schools, or to make it easy for them to leave the public schools, or to make it less expensive for them to leave the public schools, because I really think public education is a critical part of our society. If we don't encourage people to stay in public schools, we could end up with public schools being virtually black and private schools being virtually white, and I don't think that would be healthy for the society, and I don't think it's good for the children. There are those who disagree with me. I have to give them their due. As my daughter argues, it's a democracy, and we end up having to vote on some of these things, and settle things in that way. But I just feel like that at least for my family and for my children the opportunities afforded by integrated education have far outweighed the negatives. Have far outweighed any possibilities that they perhaps didn't achieve as much as they could have. I really think that education is more than just what you learn out of books. It's a lot about what you learn from other people. And in order to have a good education, you have to have experiences from lots of people who are different than you are. I think in our family at least my children got a much better education than I did. I went to a segregated school. I never interacted with black children in my childhood,

and I think my children have had a much better opportunity than I did. And that's what it's all about, is each generation has to make a few more steps toward an equal society, and eventually we'll get there. It's not going to happen overnight. It hasn't happened yet, but we're making progress.

PG: Is there anything about West Charlotte that I haven't asked about that's important? Do you want to say something about it?

WC: I've talked about the spirit, pride. No. I think you've probably covered it pretty well. I think you've got enough.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW