

Elizabeth Brown

ELIZABETH BROWN: In the city of Birmingham because we'll get anyone who wants to transfer from Birmingham into these schools, if their parents have residency here. So they, this land was like a dumpsite, I think, years ago. Under, all this was underdeveloped and a lot of it was owned by, from what I understand, the city. The city gave, sold us this property fairly cheap, from what I understand, because they wanted John Carroll to be in the city. So when they go out and campaign for industry, they can say there's a private school in this, within the city limits of Birmingham. So—[tape turned off and on again]

KIM HILL: Good morning. This is Kim Hill. I'm at John Carroll High School with Miss Elizabeth Brown, and we are talking about school desegregation and the civil rights movement after the 1960s. Thank you for meeting with me this morning.

EB: You're welcome.

KH: We're going to start by talking about your growing up years and how you became a teacher and how you came to Birmingham.

EB: Well, I grew up in Kentucky, and I think being in Kentucky I was a little more moderate regarding integration and desegregation than I would've been if I had been born down here. The other thing that I grew up in a Catholic school, going to a Catholic school, grade school and high school, and many of the sisters that were, that taught me were from Massachusetts even though it was a Kentucky order. So they would have had different ideas that they would maybe come across in the classroom. They didn't deliberately preach that segregation was wrong or anything, but they were very careful to give us a positive view of it. The church that I went to always had people of African American descent in it. Now sometimes they didn't go to our schools because I

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got the idea they were sort of rural people, and sometimes they had a difficulty with transportation, and at the time it was really also against the law. Probably against the law of the churches too but we never knew about it and accepted it. They always had a couple of pews in the back said something like colored only, and the priest would regularly have to tell the white people to stop sitting there because in all Catholic churches the last two or three pews were the most favorite ones. They would have to sit outside their pews. But I guess I was always aware of those kinds of things. So it wasn't that big of a deal to me. It's sort of odd. My father seemed by today's standards to be very bigoted but his two best friends were, one was a kid that he grew up with and would come back and see him regularly, and the thing I most remember about him is big, black man. Daddy was about five-six, five, not much bigger than that. I was taller than he when I grew up, and this man it seemed to me like six-two or six-three and really big like he could be a professional tackle in my eyes. I'd hear Daddy say there's old Theoto, and he would come and visit with him any time he came back to Kentucky. So we could see the affection between them, and I also began to realize when I was an adult that Daddy would make all these racist statements to get a rise out of us as kids. Like one time he said, "Yeah, Theoto thinks he's as good as any white person." My older sister said, "Well, isn't he?" He talked for a few minutes and he said, "Actually he's better than most white people." But we began realizing he was saying all these statements that were just to make us upset because he was a big tease in that way. But so, he really didn't like integration. To me it was sort of funny in some ways because in Kentucky we lived on the Ohio River, and the Ohio River was totally integrated. The people standing on the bank fishing and off the dam. I don't remember how that worked, but they could fish

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there. They were totally integrated, and then they would separate and go their own ways. But when I came down here, it was very different atmosphere. But at John Carroll again I don't know why, but most of the faculty was not that prejudiced. I'm sure some of them were but even before integration. And so you would never hear someone use a racial slur or anything like that. Some of us were just absolutely very much on what we would consider the raving liberal side of what they would consider that. So I think I mentioned earlier that one of my friends came back to school a couple of years after she had left, and one of the teachers it was right before the integration. She was amazed in the faculty room how we were making fun of George Wallace and all his campaign, throwing the gauntlet down. We would exaggerate his "Segregation Now. Segregation Forever." All those phrases that he would just say we were making fun of and laughing about, and she told us later she said, "I was glad to come to Carroll because you, you don't realize it, but you all are raving idiots, not idiots, but raving liberals. You just don't know how liberal you all are." I said, "Really. You mean the other schools don't do that." She said, "No. They're just all against it and all that." But—

KH: Do you think people thought you were idiots too?

EB: Probably. I don't think they really did. No one cared about us except the Catholics probably were, I didn't hear too many sermons about it but I did hear a couple in the church that he sort of edged on it about people not treating other people [right]. Everybody knew who he was talking about, not treating other people like they should and so on. Many of the priests down here were Irish. They weren't getting enough native vocations and about half of the diocese, diocese and priests were Irish. So they had a whole different aspect and mind frame than perhaps some of the people did. Well, when

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integration was coming, the first year that the public schools integrated we had already met our maximum population. For some reason, I can't remember exactly why, but a thousand was the maximum that the school could hold, and if you had 1001, the accrediting societies would make you add more restrooms and more water fountains and more this and more that. So we were right at 998, and the next year, the public schools had a really difficult time integrating at that time. Kids were walking out and striking and all this foolishness going on. The next year we did integrate with four students, and I'm sure they were chosen to be a success. I think they interviewed them and sort of prepared them for whatever and made sure they were the kind of student that would be a success at Carroll to make sure that there wasn't any reason for any of the white kids to complain or their parents to complain. There were two boys and two girls.

KH: Was that in terms of academic success?

EB: I think probably academic and refined and social and whatever. I'm not sure of the categories. I do remember, sort of remember someone saying they told them that they could go to any function, of course as a student, but they asked if they went to a dance not to try to dance with the white kids. I don't know whether they went or not because I went out of my way to keep from positions of having to be responsible for dances and so on like this. Student council was always giving events, and I sort of made sure I was never moderator of any of these events because I hated those kind of back to school things. You'd be responsible for kids' conduct, and at that time you had to watch, make sure the girls were modestly dressed, and the nuns always had a bunch of "lay," what do you call it, the thin material, not file but netting. They would drape the, if they—

KH: Really.

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EB: Yeah.

KH: They'd put it over their shoulders.

EB: Yeah. You know. I didn't want to be any part of that. I've got enough to do preparing my lessons and as a new teacher, but anyway, like I say, whether they went or not. I'm not quite sure. But I did have one of the students in my class, a girl, by the name of Madelyn Humphrey, and she was a very good student. There was no way you could have anything against her, and the kids were, there wasn't any problem with them seating or anything. I [taught] just like I do even today. I set my kids alphabetically so I could learn their names. So there wasn't any problem with that. The only remark I ever remember her saying was [one] that brought sympathy to the rest of the kids. They were talking about some movie that was real popular, and yeah, it'll be six months before it gets into the theatres in the South. They always send it last to us. She said if you think that's bad she said you ought to see how it is with the black theatres. I think at that time there was a colored theatre or whatever. She said, "In my theatres, if it's six months for you, it's going to be a year for me," and the kids, they sort of --. It silenced them, and it sort of, that is bad. But then she was a junior, and another student, a boy, was a junior. The sophomore students -- the girl was a very outgoing, energetic young lady, and she got . . . At that time the student council had representatives in each homeroom, and the homeroom elected the representative. She was elected from the very first as a homeroom representative. So we were quite happy to see she was so outgoing and friendly, and the kids thought enough of her to do that. Obviously there only was one other student in the school in her class that could vote, and I'm not sure he was even in her homeroom. So then after that, the next year one of the traditionally black high schools closed, and it was

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a very small population. They were probably just hanging on. So we got, I don't know how many students. At the time I wasn't teaching many seniors or juniors, but we got four or five or six or seven or something like that. We still have one school that is not a diocesan school. I don't know if that means a lot to you. It is under the control of the diocese. It's a private Catholic school in Ensley, Alabama. Ensley is now actually part of Birmingham. So [it was] blue collar originally because that's where the steel mills were. They employed about twelve or thirteen thousand. There was a whole complex there at a time when the African American doctors could not go into a white hospital to practice surgery. So they didn't, so when their patients needed surgery, they had to turn them over to a white doctor. So they started in the 1940s. They established a hospital, Holy Family Hospital, and they did have surgery there. I don't know how complicated surgery was in the 1940s. And they had a high school and a grade school. When I was a little girl in Kentucky, the nuns that staffed the grade school were the nuns that staffed my school. We could collect money for clothes for them, and I remember coming home and telling Daddy, "Some of these kids have to walk to school barefoot without any shoes. We're going to collect money to buy them shoes," and he laughed. He said, "It's not cold enough in Alabama to ever wear shoes. They're not going to walk in the snow." When I got down here, I thought of that, and it really is cold enough to wear shoes here. But when I finally got here, I thought "gee, is this Ensley?" and sure enough I met some of the nuns that really were from the same order.

KH: So they were in such need that you even heard about it in Kentucky.

EB: Yeah, it was the order, the same religious order that staffed the grade school. So they were taking care of their own mission, and so little Holy Name in grade school in

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Henderson, Kentucky was trying to help this school here in Alabama. And then they had a high school, a different order of nuns staffed the high school.

KH: We called that high school.

EB: Holy Name—

KH: I don't think we reached anybody there.

EB: It might be closed down. It probably only has about 125, something like that. They, even though it's sort of odd. Even though it's a Catholic high school under the same order the Salesian fathers, they don't have many Catholics there. Someone said maybe five or six, and some of them say maybe as many as twenty. We get most of the Catholic students that are African American. But they are, they're having a real difficulty surviving. They're talking about making it some kind of school that they pair up--. They started in the North, and they're tied to an industry or a business, and the kids work in the business, and it's supposed to be really good academics, and the kids have to take academic subjects, not a trade school kind of a thing. I hope that it does succeed. They're investigating it to see if there is support among the parents and the business to do so. A few years ago it was maybe just two, last year it was about ready to close, and the kids went out and campaigned and got some money. The diocese does support it. From what I understand they give it a couple hundred thousand dollars to help them, but it is not really a diocesan school under our total control of the teachers and so on. But so I hope it does succeed because there is a need in that section for that. Some of the graduates were really upset at the idea that that school would close. I don't, and it's so small. They wouldn't have to be open during the summer I believe.

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KH: Let's clarify a bit on dates because as we were talking out in the hall there is at least one black students who graduated from here in '65.

EB: There were two. The first two, the both boy and the girl, Madelyn Humphrey and Robert Smith. There were more than two the next year because in the meantime Immaculata closed, and we got some of their students. At least one of them was William Bell. I don't know if there were more than, I didn't teach many seniors then. So I wasn't really involved with the senior class. So they were, both of those kids that originally came and at least one other graduated, and I'm not much for remembering years and dates. I sort of remember about that area.

KH: That's okay. Even if we get just around the time it's interesting because that was still four years before the public schools in Birmingham really started desegregating.

EB: Well, they did. They would have token persons at that time. I think their, the token part was probably one year before we [integrated]; I think we did it the next year. Some of us were upset we didn't do it at the same time or why we didn't do it before them. We were told that it, we would be subject to lawsuits, and this church is pretty poor down here compared to many places where there are more Catholics. The entire continent of Africa is more Catholic than Birmingham. I think it's about two percent and Africa is about six percent. But still, we couldn't do it before, and then supposedly that year we were already at max and so we did it one year later.

I know they never voiced it out loud, but I've heard a little criticism that we took in four blacks, and some of the white kids didn't get in. They thought that was, I don't know why they thought they should be -- all these kids were Catholic. Why they thought they should have the first positions just because they were white. I know at the time they

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had such a premium of so many kids that wanted to get in they deliberately didn't select the lowest ability kids to keep out. They selected ones that were, I would say, in the college preparatory class. We've always tried to keep, make sure the school isn't going to be just for the elite in intelligence. So some of the parents whose kids weren't accepted or whatever you call it, were upset that there were four spaces given to people who weren't white, which I think is ridiculous like I say that they would be denied. Just because they're white they're supposed to be more acceptable than the others.

KH: Were these parents the ones that seemed to be most likely to sue the school?

EB: No. Probably wouldn't have the money or whatever. This was just one, actually it was just sort of one person that I heard, but I felt like he was voicing a lot of others' opinions, and I just sort of dismissed it as ignorant. Our population [of African American students] right now -- the school would get upset if it went less than twenty percent, and right now it's somewhere between twenty and twenty-five percent African American. I think it's a struggle in many instances for them to come up with the money and to afford tuition. We do have financial aid, but our financial aid doesn't stretch as much as we would like for it to. If you come from any of the feeder schools, our feeder schools, you're eligible for financial aid. You don't have to be Catholic. At one time it was reserved for Catholic, and then they decided to help the grade schools out; they would make it [available] to anyone who was in a Catholic grade school. Then if you come from another school that isn't one of the public schools, after you're here one year, you're also eligible for financial aid. I don't know how much you get or whatever. That's a separate committee for that. Their proof is their income tax returns from what I understand. So that they really do need it.

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KH: Do you think the tuition here is relatively high?

EB: It's high when you go free to a public school. Our competition, I would say, is double, I think, from what I understand from the other schools. I think Altamont is probably about more than ten thousand. Ours is somewhere in the vicinity of five thousand. It might even be six. I'm not sure. Indian Springs is probably fifteen or twenty thousand. Indian Springs is a great school. It's a very small school. They have boarding facilities there, dorms and everything. I'm not sure about Briarwood whether theirs is; I suspect it's somewhat higher, but I don't know how much higher. They pay their coaches a lot more than we do. I know that. Coaches here make a tremendous amount of money in some of the schools. Every teacher would love to have even half the salary of their coaches. But anyway, it is high and that is a real concern. They're really trying to get the foundation built up so they can give more aid to kids and keep the tuition down and to give the teachers a bigger salary. We lose a lot of good teachers because of -- Of course I have a lot of years' experience. But my salary is between fifteen and twenty thousand dollars a year lower than the public school salary, and when I retire, I'll get three hundred dollars a month. They [public school teachers] get quite a bit more. My insurance is sixty-five dollars a month. Theirs is -- they got upset when they raised it to seven dollars -- the public school teachers, some of the friends that I have. We're talking about their friends, and they can't afford to pay seven dollars a month. I thought, "Yeah. Come to Carroll and you'll see or a lot of businesses and things." So anyway that's that part of it. Where are we as far as the interview? You want me to go back to, I think I regressed a little.

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KH: No. Really, I was, I just wanted to get some particulars about the school because I think it would be helpful to know just about the policies and the students in general. Like you said the school doesn't recruit. So do the students generally come because they know about the school or—

EB: They would be upset about when we recruit athletes. When we go out and recruit, we recruit from our own schools and talk to them about it and what they can get here and what perhaps other schools cannot provide and all the different activities we have. We don't go to any public schools and recruit. We do have an open house, and some people from the public sector do come and look at the facilities and so on. But as far as the state athletic associations, they don't want us to recruit athletes. If they inquire, we tell them if you really want to be here, you have to sit out a year, and then from what I understand if they're a prospective football player their parents are thrilled they're going to sit out a year [spoken sarcastically]. Usually they're freshman and they can, they can practice with the team, but they can't play. For the other sports sometimes they go to another school because they're immediately eligible in other places. It probably affects us more than it does any of the other private schools because several of the private schools have grade schools connected with them. So their eighth grade just moves into their freshman year. But we have about fifteen or twenty feeder schools, and they come from all over the city and transportation is a real problem. Either they have to be dropped off until they can drive, and some parents don't like their kids driving at age sixteen too for all of that. But I think from the very beginning the integration was very peaceful. From what I understand in some of the schools they had four football players escorting each kid to class, two in front and two behind. The coach told them they'd better not

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have any incident of anyone interfering with them, but I suspect the football players probably didn't like that, but they were told to do it and they did do it.

KH: I've never heard that story.

EB: Um hmm. That was at West End. I had a friend that taught at West End, and that's why I knew that. This has nothing to do with integration, but it's so typical of how the South was in those days. When Kennedy was killed, this, they had a huge celebration at West End. They were in their classes whooping and hollering led by the teachers because one of the teachers that was my friend was Catholic, and she was horrified at it. Then I had another friend later on in life who graduated from one of the -- I guess Ramsey at the time was considered a premier white school. It wasn't a magnet school, but it drew from an area where there were a lot of wealthy people on the southside. They were whooping and hollering and everything [about the Kennedy assassination]. I think Carroll and probably the black schools were the only ones that were mourning. He said later when he went home and saw the TV coverage, he was mortified at the way they celebrated. He and his friends also, another friend who was in another school, another area. I'm not exactly sure, but they were all celebrating.

KH: Was this President John Kennedy [as opposed to Robert Kennedy]?

EB: President Kennedy in Dallas.

KH: Wow.

EB: They thought it was wonderful. So that was the attitude. So I don't know if it was because of the integration part or he was a northerner or he was a Catholic or what. I just knew that this was—

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KH: I did talk with a doctor who integrated Ramsey High back in '63. He said he remembers students telling him the day Kennedy was killed, yeah, you're next. You're next.

EB: Really. Well, that's where my friend graduated [from]. I had two friends who were sort of contemporaries of mine. I'm not sure where the other one went to school. It wasn't at Ramsey. They were also celebrating, but West End went totally wild from what I understand. No more classes that day. We had an old teacher, golly, she was—she retired from the public school system, and they say she ran any school she was in. The principal, she had more power than any principal. Then she went to work in a Catholic grade school as a librarian, and then they were getting better and better, and they felt like they needed a real librarian. So she lived right near the old school. In fact all she had to do was cross one street to get to it. She asked if she could work there, or work for us. I don't know what they paid her, almost nothing. She thought it was wonderful she could eat in the cafeteria free. She was quite wealthy. I think some of the parents who she taught at Phillips said that she had the same clothes that she wore at Phillips. She doesn't believe in spending a lot of money. But one of the students and one of the teachers had a writing class and had to talk about someone so she interviewed her at Phillips. What she did at Phillips -- she said all these people at West End when they were integrating, they were out whooping and hollering, their cars and riding on the top of the cars and all that sort of stuff, just utter chaos. No schooling, no classes were going on. They came to Phillips to get their kids to come out and join them, and the principal was so nervous he came to this lady, can't think of her name right now, and they said, what can I do? I don't know what to do. Our kids are about ready to walk out of school, and

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she says "get me the student council president and all the football players." So they all met and she said, "Are we going to let the West End people tell us what to do?" She said so, they went out and got the kids that had left Phillips to come back in, march back in, and the newspapers wanted to interview her and the principal protected her. All the newspapers said is this little old gray-haired lady and a bunch of big boys got the kids to come back into the school at the same time. So she sort of saved Phillips' reputation by appealing to the rivalry between the two big public schools. So that was sort of the situation at Phillips. I don't know if they integrated, but West End was the typical hot spot, the one that took it the worst. I don't know how long they were out running around in cars and so on. It was just like I said no schooling going on at that time. But I don't know how long that lasted.

KH: How did the students change here after desegregation?

EB: I didn't see that much difference. We had, I don't know if the students that came here were exceptional, but they right away accepted. As I said on the phone [to the interviewer] I'm sure that individually they might have had some incidences that were unpleasant, but they never brought it to us. If they had, they [the teachers] would've dealt very severely with it. Many of the teachers were actually already pro-integration. So they were thrilled. They thought we were criticizing the school when they didn't integrate one year before when the public schools had. I guess if we did have any bigoted teachers, and I suspect we probably did, they kept very quiet about it. They, I think probably would've gone overboard not to show any problems. Like maybe if the student almost made an A that student would get an A or something like that to go to the other extreme of even grading or their conduct or whatever they said they would probably tread

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very carefully. Not with those first four or five students, but very shortly after that we got some very good athletes. I think that helps when you're cheering for a team and you see one of your best people on the field or on the court is an African American. You're going to relax a little bit towards that. We had a student called Tom Gossam, very quickly he was a very good athlete, and he's known around here fairly well because he's in some of the plays, some of the TV shows and stuff like that. I think he has some kind of an entertainment company, theatre company, or film company. He was laughing. He came back and talked to the PTA. He was laughing at the fact that how he was sort of mischievous with this other kid. There was a white kid. They were regularly on the bench next to the principal's office being seen for what their mischievous thing was. He laughed about his seat on the bench. He was so accepted, and he got to Auburn where he got a football scholarship. He never said this publicly but privately he said how mean the players were to him even though he was playing for Auburn. By the time he was a junior he was a real star, and he played professional football, and they stopped being mean to him then. But he said, he talked about how he was accepted at [John] Carroll, and all of a sudden, he was expecting the same thing at Auburn since they recruited him and he got a football scholarship and how different it was. He said, oh, this is a different scene. He is, he, I think to his day he has a lot of affection for John Carroll. Every so often he comes back, and his nephew, [and] his two sisters also came here, and they were good in volleyball. They were good volleyball players. The son of one of the sisters came back and he played basketball, and he played for Alabama. He graduated, but he was sort of like the sixth man on the team. One of our players, one of the persons when he was very good in the tournament and so on, they said something about him being stolen from the

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public schools. I thought "stolen?" His uncle went there. His sister, his mother went there. His aunt went there. His older sister came to Carroll. In all, he was never in the public school system. We still get a lot of remarks. Like one time I remember we won the 6-A championship. One of the men as one of the teachers was leaving said, "How much do you pay those guys out on that court to play basketball for you?" I was telling the coach that, and he just shook his head. He said, "You know every one of those players has two parents that lived together and they both worked." Like one was a policeman and the mother was a teacher. "They were all," he said, "they can easily afford this school. We don't have to pay anyone." That would be a very dangerous thing for anyone, any school to do I think to do that. So I think once they started becoming more integrated into the school and the activities, they became cheerleaders and dance team people and all the sports that we didn't hear that much against it. Like I say I mentioned this earlier, we always had a girls' vice president and a boys' vice president to make sure that the girls -- at one time we'd have only one girl on the student council, secretary. That was always a girl's position. If the treasurer went to the boy, then we would have only one girl, and the principal didn't like that. So he decided to expand it to four offices. Girls' vice president, so we'd always have at least two. The secretary and the girls' vice president. So the first year, one of the years that Dwight Brown was the boys' vice president. At that time to be elected you would have to have tremendous white support because there was probably maybe only sixty-five or seventy in the school. Maybe we would have 800 or 900 at that time. He was, and then the next year Herman Taylor, who is cardiologist and now belongs at University of Mississippi. He is the chair, I guess you'd call it. They created a chair of I think public medicine or something like

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that, public health, and he was the first chair. He invited a bunch of people, and he invited his high school teacher that was a big influence in his life. She wasn't going. She felt like she couldn't go because to get to Jackson, Mississippi. She didn't want to drive. To get to Jackson, Mississippi she would have to fly into Dallas and come back, and it was like eight-hour or nine-hour trip, and she would have to take off three days. I said, "oh heck, I'll drive you. Take a personal day and I'll drive you." So he didn't think she was coming, and it was so fun to see his face when he realized that he turned, he turned back, and then he realized it was Miss Flannigan. He said, "Miss Flannigan!" he was so glad to see her. But he talked about her influence in his life. So by the time he was there, we regularly had student council. To me that's the premier position in the school, not the head football player or the head cheerleader. It's the student council that gives the real leadership. Student councils almost have all been integrated. I think last year's, who was it? I think one of the top ones, the president and girls' and boys' vice president were the big positions. One of them was black, and next year we'll have one also. One of my students who is [black], he will be head of it too.

KH: It sounds like the alums keep in touch with the school a lot.

EB: Yes. We try to keep them, it was really difficult when we built this new school because then we wanted them to realize that as I told the kids, if you go into a new house, the family doesn't change. The same people change. It really griped me when we were in this old building, and it was sort of dark and it wasn't air-conditioned. It was really warm when we began school. When we got to this building, John Carroll's a really good school and we brought the same teachers, the same curriculum, the same everything. The only change was it was a nice building like this and air-conditioned.

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The football field wasn't three miles from the school. We had an auditorium instead of a gym with a stage on it. But some of them that we were disconnected. So in the summer we have all kinds of reunions here. They give them the school free. I'm sure they pay the janitors and the maintenance people and whatever food. Obviously they are going to pay that. But the facilities are free to keep them connected to the school. And we have a newspaper that I'll have to get one for you that regularly comes out, alumni. Actually we have a sister who is, she won't admit it, but I think she's ninety and most of her teaching career has been at Carroll. She always keep up with the graduates, the births and the deaths, and she'll come to me and say, because you know I've been here a long time, do you remember such and such? I said, sister no. I don't recall that. "Well, he graduated in 1940." Sister, I wasn't here at the time. "Oh, yeah. Golly."

KH: She's been here the whole time.

EB: Well, a couple of times the order would send her to another school, and she'd work her way back to Carroll, and she loves the school and when she could no longer teach she became sort of alumni director. So she's on the phone all day with people that are calling in when they were married and when their husbands die or when they're ill, any honors and that magazine is called, I think it's called *Carroll Life*. It goes out to all the graduates who want it. The mailings make sure that's out and everything's in it and all the dates are right and all the things are spelled. She's in charge of any of the reunions, and a lot of times the ten-year reunion people don't quite know what they should do. They want a reunion, so she'll tell them you've got to do this and you should do that and don't forget to do this and get, sort of walks them through. But then for the twenty they pretty much know. So every time they always invite the faculty. I try to go

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when it's here. I don't want to go to some other place whatever. But I try to drop in on it. But they have a chapel, and they have a mass here, and they have a dinner after the mass. Some of them come to mass. It's always on a Saturday. So that counts for Catholics for a Sunday. Kill two birds with one stone. Then they try to get one of the priests that served here that's still in the area to say the mass and say a few words and have a meal after. I go to the mass, but I'm never sure if I'm invited to the meal or if I'm supposed to pay. So I decline the meal. If someone offers to give me a glass of wine, I might do that. But so I talk to them and whatever. But they get upset when I don't come. I say, it's just your reunion—you come every five or ten years, but I've got to [work here everyday.] They probably have eight or ten in the summer that I could go to. I can't be rushing up here all the time. But I do try to come to them. So they tie that to the school also when they can. So they and a lot of our alumni send their kids here. They want the same experience for their kids. [intercom and interruption] But anyway, they try to do that. One time we had a teacher's parent walk through. They just call to schedule their kids, and I was doing all my stuff trying to get --. Because we have to hand out course expectations and all this sort of stuff. So I was trying to find it. It was a different subject from my Spanish. I teach Social Studies and Spanish, and when I finally looked up, I saw this person whose kids I taught, I mean who was the parent of about five or six of my ex-students in the class. They had just all come here that year. I said, "Holy smokes. Look at all these people." I said I feel like I should start my subject. Then they all laughed. Then in the middle of my speech someone was talking. I said, "Fleming, you still are talking. You are just the same way. You just can't get over it can you?" They

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all laughed at that because it was the same deal, the same kids, the talkative ones, the ones that didn't pay attention. They're still—

KH: Still not paying attention.

EB: Yeah. I would, when I was a new teacher, someone was talking about this kid that they corrected for talking and made him stay after school and they're not going to talk anymore. They swore they weren't going to talk. This old nun said, "Honey," she said, "this is the daughter of so and so. She couldn't keep her mouth shut. It's in the genes. She's going to keep on talking." I thought, that is awful talking about—already made up your idea, their mind about this kid. Then the longer I teach I realize that's true. This new teacher she won't do that or he won't do that anymore. I thought, well, yeah sure. I didn't say it. Just like the father, she says—

KH: Because now you've seen—

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

EB: This, I probably shouldn't put this on tape, but I will. This guy, the names. This one woman came to talk about her son who's getting a D in Spanish. She just could not understand. [She asked,] "What can I do to help him?," and at that time, your parents, there's very little parents can do as far as helping them in Spanish. I looked at her, and I realized that she married, at the time this kid was in school, the class idiot. I wanted to say, "Lady there is nothing you can do."

KH: Oh no.

EB: Fifteen or twenty years ago you married the wrong person. He inherited his father's genes. He wasn't really stupid as far as the kid was, but he was sort of like, he always deliberately tried to be, pretend he was dumber than what he was. He was sort of the class clown. He wasn't really an idiot in the intellectual sense. He would pick a flower from some public garden and say "here's a flower. I brought you a flower. You want the flower?" Some little tulip or something like that. Just to get a laugh or whatever. But what I was thinking, I said, I just don't know. You've done everything you could and I've done everything I can. I thought, but I didn't say that to her obviously. But she—

KH: Yeah. I don't know how she would've taken that.

EB: No, she wouldn't—no, I would never say anything like that to a kid. But you see the characteristics that the kids and their parents, and sometimes it explains why this kid is so conscientious or so quiet or so shy or so talkative or a born leader just like his parent is. Sometimes it's totally the opposite of course because they're not totally their parents, one parent's genes. And I really thought, I was dreading the day when I

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would get the kids of my former students. But when it finally happened, I really didn't mind it at all because I felt a freedom to talk to those parents that I do not feel with the other kids. I feel like I can say -- you have to be very careful when you're a teacher. You can't outright say anything. You have to say "maybe you ought to, maybe his friends aren't the, maybe he's spending too much time with his friends, and actually he's spending too much time with the wrong friends," but you can't ever say that. You have to sort of couch, give them a few hints. But I always felt more free with the parents of former, the parents that are former students. He's running with the wrong crowd. They should, you should try to steer him away, or he's definitely not doing this or he's doing such and such. I can let my guard down because they know me and I know them and their family, and so that part is good. I feel more free with them, but you've really got to be careful. We had a conference once where the teacher said, I think he's just lazy because sometimes he does really well on tests when he studies and sometimes he doesn't because he hasn't done his homework. He hasn't studied. The parent got very upset. "He's not lazy. Sometimes he chooses not to do his homework. But he's not lazy." Well, we said, oh, okay. He chooses not to do his homework. We can say that.

KH: So you just have to figure out why he chooses that.

EB: Yeah. He doesn't want to. But I feel, I like the idea that I've taught their parents now. I feel sometimes it's hard if they're children of the girls with the name change, but on some of these days where the parents come into the school, you get to, they'll introduce you. Hi, I'm so and so. I was so and so. Then you say, oh yeah. I can see that.

KH: Do you feel like students here are sheltered from bad influences?

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EB: Oh there are bad influences in every school. I don't care how Christian they say they are. Maybe I think at Carroll if you're a little bit different, you're a little bit protected from that whether you're a nerd. You know some kids almost seem sort of autistic. They were really not autistic, but they seem that way. They don't have a connection with them. We can control that by making sure that they aren't made fun of or aren't razzed or anything like that. If we know that happens, they will be dealt with from the administration or from the teacher. We have, I guess, the freedom to send the kid out on some errand and say, "You're doing such and such. This is going to stop right now and don't you ever say this or do this or whatever." We can appeal to their Christian principles and so on. I mean, when I was in grade school, if anyone picked on anyone else the nun would send them on the errand and pre-arrange it with another teacher and tell us that if we didn't stop it, we were all going to hell very soon and this had better never happen again. "You're not being a good Catholic and a good Christian" or whatever, and I think the kid will probably notice from then on the whole atmosphere changed. We don't say that to them, but we can appeal to them, fuss at them perhaps more than maybe they could in another school. I'm sure they possibly do that in any private school. So we do have kids that are different in some way. We have two that are little people, midgets. They are both very well liked. Their personality also, but some that I think the parents send them there because they feel like they're going to be a little bit more protected than they would in another school. So I do think there is that possibility.

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KH: On the phone you said, for the Catholic students, you could appeal to their faith and tell them they're being bad but for the non-Catholics students you have to try different tactics.

EB: Um hmm. This happened maybe two years ago. Two kids were talking during mass, and they were talking right after communion, and we believe you're receiving the body and blood of Christ. So the one kid I had in class. The other one I didn't. [intercom] And so I kept her after mass, and the first thing I said was "are you Catholic?" She said, yes. I said, "Do you realize and you went to communion?" She said, "yes." "Do you realize this is the most intimate thing you will ever do in your life?" I said, "The second most intimate thing will be when you marry," which sure I said that. "You will be able to have sexual relations with your husband." I said this was the most intimate. "If you have nothing to say to Jesus, then pray for me. You have no problem with any of your classes, any of your family, any of your friends, I do have, and will you pray for me during the communion?" Now if she had been not a Catholic, I would've said this is the most sacred part of the mass for us. When I go to your church, I respect your church, and I do exactly what I'm supposed to do and what the rest of the people are doing, and I want you to respect my church. So that would be, that would be the difference. I would let the Catholic kids really have it big time, and the others I would talk to about respect in a way that they would understand. I think we do have kids that aren't Christian in the school. We have a Hindu teacher for example, and we do have other kids that have no religion or irregularly we have a Jewish kid in the school. I don't know individually what they are or who they are or whatever when you're in class. I'm thrilled when I learn all their names frankly. But when I would approach them in the

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discipline, I would approach them differently if it's applicable. Like if someone is talking, that doesn't matter. But if it's something else more serious and more of a moral nature, I might reproach a Catholic differently than one that wasn't Catholic.

KH: Let's talk some about your teaching, and were there any ways that you think your lessons changed after desegregation?

EB: My lessons changed. I think my class, let's see. This past, most of the time I have a mixture of students in my advanced placement class. This year I had all white, and in a way I was glad and in a way I wasn't glad. It doesn't, we don't choose our students. I tell the students you don't choose us and we don't choose you. But I probably let the white students have it a little bit harder than if it were mixed maybe.

KH: What subject is this?

EB: This would be government. I would be more likely to be a little bit more frank when some of the things I think are going on in government than I would with if it was a mixed group, I feel like. When I got to economics I was so glad our governor said that our tax system in Alabama was immoral. You don't generally hear a Republican official saying that about taxes. I was quite glad to hear that because if they have Republican tendencies, I feel like I'm on the right side letting them. So I really, it's hard to, it's hard for me to at times to teach social justice and integration and segregation and things of that nature, but when I can work it in, I will try to work it in. I try to work it in in such a way that makes them realize [if] some of them aren't convinced of it morally they will be convinced of it economically because I pointed out to them that the South was in a stalemate when they were ignoring the contributions of all these talented African American people. They couldn't get the jobs that they deserved. They couldn't get the

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money they deserved. They couldn't get the political positions that they deserved, and when they started integrating and integrated more, that's when more prosperity came to this state. In economics I point out what we call the opportunity cost. And if you're on the curve, that means you're employing all your resources in labor, capital and management, entrepreneurship to its fullest extent. I always point out now on the graph where would you put segregation or where would you put prejudice, and it's either going to be pointed out in the classroom or it's going to be a test item where they have to figure it out themselves. It's going to be not on the line but inside the line, which means the economy is not reaching its potential when it does that. So there are a variety of times in economics and government I can point out to them how segregation kept the South behind for many, many years. Also I point out really stupid statements that our politicians have made during the years. I sort of remember those and probably do them in such a way that they make fun of them too. But there's a fair amount of kids here whose parents came from the North that are Catholic and are used to Catholic schools and the cost of Catholic schools. As far as discipline in the class, having a mixed group, in Spanish I forget. I don't think of boys, girls, different variety of students in the class. I'll think sometimes do you have any people of African American descent or black students, and I'll say no. Oh yeah. I have, yeah, I have three or is it four? I can't remember because I just don't think of those labels after a while. I probably notice it in the first day or something or even boys and girls. Like one time I had thirty students, this was way back when they'd put thirty students in a class, and every day they came in like gangbusters, and I had to get angry at them every day, and I got so tired of being angry at them. One day they were all sweet little angelic kids taking a test, and they were all quiet

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and I was just watching them and looking at them, and I thought, there's not any girls in this class. There were six girls and there were twenty-some boys, and they all—it was an eighth period class and they all came from seventh period boys PE, hot and sweaty with all their stuff, rushing to get dressed and coming to my class and no wonder they were that way. But I never counted the fact that there were so few boys and girls. Then another time I was watching, test time is a great time to observe and watch and see what they're doing and how they, whether they frown or smile or whatever. I really sort of enjoy watching them and thinking about them individually, and another time I realized that there were only four boys in this class in that particular class. Another time it was a Spanish 4 class, and I looked at them. There were about twelve. There were eight black kids in the class, six or seven or eight and I didn't realize there were that many. Gee whiz, this is almost, it's about half-and-half. I just never thought about that when I'm thinking about getting always pressing. They always get upset with me because in Spanish, two minutes left. We can do a pronunciation drill. "Ms. Brown, we want to get our books ready." I said, no. Let's try this pronunciation drill. Just stuff like that, even two minutes I don't want to waste.

KH: What is it about Spanish class that makes you more likely to—

EB: If you don't cover something, you're always aware that if you don't cover it and I always think if I lose five minutes a day, that's twenty-five minutes in a week and in a month, in four weeks I've lost two days and I'm two days behind. Whereas in a government or social studies class, you can always talk a little faster the next day and get the lecture in that you can't do in the Spanish. They've got to have a certain amount of writing practice. They've got to have a certain amount of reading practice, got to

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pronounce, and I'm a big one on pronunciation that maybe some teachers aren't. If they say they can't get it. "We can't get that." I said, "There are retarded people in Spain that are speaking this language." "Are you calling us retarded?" "No. I'm just saying if they can get it, you can get it. Come on now. You can do this. It's not that hard to." When they say it wrong I like go ballistic. After they've had enough time, the H is silent in Spanish, and I said you said "ahor" and I [wrote] "A-J-O-R-A." Is that the word you're saying? No, I said, you're going to put. One day I said we're going to practice H, and so I went to all parts of the room and I just sort of opened my mouth and nothing came out. They said, I know they thought I was a total idiot, but it got the point across. I said, all right. Now I did it. Now you all do it. Of course they just sat there and looked at me. I said, that's right. You've got it. The H doesn't have a sound. You've got it. So they regularly they tease me. Let's practice the H again Miss Brown, the "atchay."

KH: It sounds like Spanish class is so high energy you just don't have time to think about some of these—

EB: I am totally, I am totally exhausted with Spanish, especially Spanish I. You have to be so interactive with them and last year, I've been part-time for two years. Last year they called me and said you're full time. I said "No. I don't want to be full-time. What do I have?" They said four Spanish I classes. So by eighth period I have to remind myself that just because I'm tired doesn't mean I have to give them less. I can't give them less. So I just push myself and I go home totally exhausted. By the time I eat supper, I am whipped for the day. It's nice because I only have two lesson plans, and the previous year I had four. I just only had, well, since I had four classes, none of them were repeated, but it was, it is an exhausting class to teach. Now next year I supposedly

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am going to be full-time again. I begged them not. I said, "I'll take three classes or two, whatever, just part-time at this stage of my life." I'm glad to have the money, but I'd much rather be less exhausted. But for a Spanish you have to give and give and give and it's very tiring. So next year I'll have two second year. I don't know how that's going to go.

KH: Do you mind if I pause it for a minute?

EB: Sure, go ahead. [tape turned on and off again] Okay, when I first came down here, I began to -- up in Kentucky in high school, since it was a Catholic school, it was mostly Irish and German background and a lot of people who didn't know whether it was Irish or German in their background. But when I came down here, I got a lot of it [integration] in college. Our college was integrated even though it was against the state law because they registered them as foreign students, but they were -- the nuns wanted the college to be integrated. So it was people from Haiti and the Caribbean islands and so on. A lot of Chinese and a lot of Hispanic kids so I was used to that in college. But then when I came to here, I began to realize there were a lot of people of Lebanese [descent]-- they called themselves Syrian at the time but later on they changed it to Lebanese descent. There are two big churches here; one of them is sort of Greek Catholics and one of them was sort of Lebanese Catholic on south side. Then there were a lot of English, background English, Irish persons, and then there was a tremendous amount of Italians that were attracted here with the steel mills. Then John Carroll had some other that were like Slav, Slovak kind of persons like Slovinski and those families that came from a small parish outside the city that's still going today. Then I heard the kids talk about the fact that they had [what] was considered sort of a weak president. He really wasn't, I think he

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liked the position but not the dedication that the president should have. They criticized him. Some of the people criticized him, and some of the students criticized him and said when they were campaigning for this position, their parents told them you don't have a chance because you're not an Italian because that was the biggest voting bloc at the time. So I began to realize that. I began to realize it was like the nation in a microcosm because if you didn't have an ethnic group behind you, like maybe the football team or if you were a girlfriend of a football player or whatever, you didn't have that block behind you or the band also had another block. They would vote for it. So you needed one of those big blocks of persons to be elected, and a lot, not all but a lot, of our student council presidents and officers at that time had Italian names. So they started talking about the -- we got a lot of black leaders. You would hear grumblings that they vote as a bloc. I would always tell them about when I came here. Now let me tell you because the thing is their parents, a lot of their parents came here, and they could go home and check with their parents. They accused that of the -- those of you that are Italian, that happened when you were here, and I point out to them. I said, those Italians couldn't have been elected by themselves. Even if everyone of Italian descent voted, they still had to get somebody else in there to vote for them. I said, if every single black in the entire school voted for this whoever it was, president or whatever, they'll have to get someone else because there's not enough to call it. So don't talk to me about blocs. I said if there's a football player, all you football players vote. If there's a band member, you would vote for him and so on. So I was able to, because of my background I was able to tell them that.

KH: Did they not know about the voting bloc?

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EB: They never thought about it. You mean today's students now or what?

KH: I guess the ones you were talking to.

EB: Well, they were the ones thinking about it and complaining, the white kids were complaining or just some little snide remark. "He got elected because he's black," that kind of stuff. They would probably never say it during a class because I don't want outside things to come in on the class unless it's pertinent to the time. Government will [address outside things] but not too often will Spanish. But they remark before class or after class, and if I see a teachable moment, I'm going to take a few minutes of class and let them know my thoughts on it. I don't mind sharing my thoughts when it comes to something like that. Then last year I heard some kids here they were in Spanish class, and right before class they were talking about all these Spanish, Mexican, or Hispanic people. One of the suburbs evidently has a square -- and they don't like it at all -- where there's a house operated by the diocese where they can come and get help. Like it's a regular house. But they've made it into a center because they always gathered in this square. Evidently if you need someone to help you pour concrete, you go up and negotiate with someone and take them off and bring them back at the end of the day and give them the cash. This house they devoted to the diocese and people there, their Hispanic ministry gives them doctors, makes sure they get to their doctor's places. Any kind of difficulty with whatever, they help straighten out anything, and evidently the city is trying to find a way to move them out of that area without, in my estimation, looking prejudiced. I don't know if that's all true. You know, but -- all these Hispanics. So the kids were talking about they won't learn English and -- . In linguistics the first generation doesn't know English. The second generation knows poor English, and the

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third generation knows perfectly good English or as good as they can get. Obviously they're not English scholars, but they're obviously quite fluent in it. You can't keep a kid in this society from learning English. They're going to learn English in school. As soon as you turn on the TV set, they want to know what that is. They're going to learn English. But they expected these people . . . I said, "You have Spanish fifty minutes a day. You do it for two or three years." It takes them until about the end of the third year to start really thinking in Spanish, and the fourth year the class is totally conducted in Spanish. "Before you can even speak the simplest of Spanish, and you want these people to learn English." Well, they just want it dadadadada. They were going on a rage and all this kind of stuff. What did one of them say? I wanted to get on with the subject. But it really bothered me what they said. I went home and thought about it and thought about it, and the next day I told the class. I said, I cut it short, but I want to address this issue because it really bothered me what you were saying. The things you were saying were exactly some of the things they said about African American students when they were first coming to school and in our society. These kids would just to the "nth" degree deny that they were prejudiced. I said, unless you were from Great Britain or from Ireland when you're relatives came to this country, they did not know English. I said, and they spoke, they probably spoke their language. Your great grandfather, your grandfather spoke their language, and they just learned, just a few words in English and your parents learned better English because they went to school. I said you can look—and I guess this was a dig at their English—I said look at some of the things that you say. I said, that's because you've learned from parents that didn't learn the English very well and you're still saying it. "Me and him is going downtown. Do you see plural subject and a singular

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verb, and you're using objective case, and the reason why some of you can't learn Spanish is because you're translating literally from your bad English." I was letting them have it. Getting in a little dig in. I said I don't want to hear any more of it. I said the people will learn English when they live here long enough and before that you can't expect them to just turn it on. They are talking about survival. They haven't got time to take but just the bare minimum in English. They're coming for the same reason you're coming for, that your parents came for, and that was -- I tried to relate it to the things that I've seen in the past of all the different. Maybe that's why we went through integration I think a lot easier than some of the public schools because there were so many [groups]. A lot of the Italians had little stores in the city. The little stores were in black neighborhoods, and they had a sympathy for them so that some of the people that were the nicest in my class before integration were Italian descent. I think because maybe they remembered what a hard time of prejudice their grandfathers went through. And the Lebanese too. They had the same difficulties and they were succeeding, and they didn't seem to mind that other people wanted to succeed in it. I think with all the different, I think in many ways -- I don't know-- we're the most integrated school in the city, even before we were totally integrated with the black students because we had every income. We had kids that were so wealthy they could've bought us out. They wore uniforms. You don't know what kind of wealth they have. Then some that were [poor]; everything was furnished down to their pencils and their books in those days. So we had all classes, and like I say, a big segment of the Lebanese and the Italians and the other predominantly white groups. They, maybe they were sort of used to getting along. The other thing, many of these community schools, they go from their grade school together to their

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junior high to their high school. Whereas we attract from about a three county area, and there's a lot of inner city schools that, grade schools that come here. They come from all different parishes. So they might come from a school that maybe they know only five or six freshmen, and they might not be in their class. So they have to learn all the other about the other kids and make friends outside their usual group. They complain that dating's awful hard because one comes from one county and one [from another], they're trying to date someone that's forty miles from them and to go on a date the guy has to drive eighty miles in order to get her and take her home. So probably by the time they're a senior they like all that time together. I'm not sure it's for the right reasons. But anyway, there's no dating in their neighborhood in some instances. So as far as the interracial dating, we have had kids, I don't know, maybe after five or six or seven years that were going together to dances. I think it was more of a friendship than actual interracial dating. There is so many, today here in the South you see so many interracial couples. I don't mean every fifth couple, but you see so much of it. Your head doesn't even turn. You might or may not even notice it. The other thing which is I guess has a good side as well as a bad side, there are so few kids available for adoption. You have an awful lot, not a lot, but enough interracial adoption, again that's not that unusual. I don't know of any graduates that a black married a white. But I know that we have parents that sort of I don't know. I wouldn't call it even a surprise. It's definitely not a shock where a black parent comes to see you for a conference, and you say, oh you're so and so's mother. Okay. But there's enough of that that you're not even surprised anymore. It's just when a parent comes I try to look at their face and see if I know them from another generation something like that and match them up, but sometimes there's no matching

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up. We've had some kids that are, one family we had the boy was white. The girl was black and the second girl was oriental. They adopted all three of them. So now there's enough of that that you're not, you do see a lot of that. I think I mentioned the freshman I think, because maybe their atmosphere in the Catholic grade schools was so restricted or what or they're not used to changing classes. Some of the grade schools are so small they don't have lockers and stuff like that. They're in the same classroom, and the teacher might come in and change but they don't. It seems like they have a competition of how many they can hug because now they can hug, and they, it's indiscriminate. Boys hugging boys. Girls hugging girls. There's no difference between the races. They're always hugging each other. By the time they're seniors they're making fun of the freshmen that do that, and they clutter the halls because they've all got to have these group hugs and so on. You can't get around them and the typical Catholic response is a phone book between you. The distance of a phone book between you. They look at me like I'm crazy because that's a whole new generation. Ah, ah, the distance of a phone book between you and if it gets too long I'll threaten them with what do you call it--. P.D. something—there's three initials—

KH: PDA.

EB: PDA. I always say PSI or something like that. They'll look at me like I'm weird and I really am. They all, and sometimes I really tease them when there's not at all that, but I don't mind quick hugs but nothing more than that. I couldn't care less whether it's boys or girls or whatever because they're doing it to--. I just want them to clear the halls so I can go back to my classroom because we have hall duty after every class to hurry them along, and they're sliding in the classroom as the bell rings and so on. There

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doesn't seem to be any difference in any of that. Now whether, I do know that at dances and proms there's interracial dating, but whether it's really serious and amount to anything. It's sort of hard after they leave school to keep up with them who they marry and whatever. But it's pretty common down here now. It might not be in small towns, but in a city like this, it's pretty common. What else did you want me to—

KH: Now it's just general questions about your opinions of desegregation.

EB: Oh well—

KH: We can start with do you think it has significant effect on this school?

EB: You know, I wish we could ask the students that. It hasn't, I don't think the curriculum has changed as far as that's concerned. I think it would be hard to say that desegregation was a bad thing. It's either a good thing or a neutral thing, situation. I like the idea that the kids can know someone that is different from themselves. I think it prepares them for the reality in the outside world. I think some of these all white schools and maybe even the all black schools are, they're going to be thrown into--. If they're successful and higher jobs or even if they're not in the lower echelon, manual labor jobs, they're going to have to get along with person. I think that is as much part of education as the book learning where they can sympathize and know the kids on a different level and their ideas and their talking, and that's one of the reasons why I like Carroll. Some of them that are in the inner city, they don't have enough of a mix, and some of them, some of our suburban schools I don't think have enough of a mix of students. This is small enough where you can really get to know each other. You're not just a, when you're in these schools of almost 3000, there's no way. They probably know fewer people than they do here at this smaller school on the whole because they might have

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them in one class, and then they'll never see them again whereas here they're going to see them year after year in their classes. I think sometimes maybe our talk changes. The way we say things perhaps. I'm not sure, but maybe we say things in a way that we're not going to offend whoever's in the class perhaps or let them think that we're--. It's hard for me to think how I, I probably am a little bit more gentle with the integrated class. Where if it's all white, I will sometimes really let them have it in such a way that I am probably less. So if they say anything that seems like it's a little--. Sometimes kids are say bigoted statements and they don't realize the significance of it. Just sort of tinged with it. When I heard this about the Mexican population, I could just feel my back getting straighter and straighter because I could hear echoes from the past for other groups. I think I don't know if they listen to me. They're at least they're respectful enough about it when I told them in a very serious manner. You know why I didn't say anything about how disappointed I was because of the, I go back a long way and I can tell you what I heard in the past. So maybe that made a some kind of a significance to them.

KH: If we use that case as an example, how do you think you would've handled it differently if some of those kids had been black or Hispanic?

EB: The ones that said it or—

KH: Yeah, the ones who said it.

EB: Hispanic against their own group.

KH: It's possible.

EB: I would, if it had been like an Hispanic kid, I would say how could you possibly make fun of anyone or say something against someone that's your own heritage. That's, I would relate it to that. Sometimes the black students here have made fun of

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other blacks. It's the idea if I make it, anybody can make it. I try to, that's not necessarily true. You have, there are certain circumstances that are, it's just like someone two people who are very good in acting and one becomes a star because they just happens to be in the right place at the right time. The other person doesn't. He's teaching drama in some high school at much less money. So I would not allow, occasionally I've had students make fun of what they would consider lazy blacks or low income whatever and say it's their own fault and so on. I will, very seldomly is it in a classroom situation. It's after school situations that they sometimes, not ever year, but sometimes you get a group that hangs out in your classroom for about five or ten minutes as a meeting room, and you'll hear a lot more than you'll ever heard in class. I remember a few years back the, there was a group of about six or eight blacks. There were some whites in with them but mostly and for some, they had their lockers there after school, and they came back after school and told me about whatever, things. Most of the time it wasn't significant, but they didn't like any of the black boys. They didn't know who to go--. Six of them decided to go to the prom together. They weren't interested in dates. They were going with these girls, and they rented a motel room afterwards because they were going to gossip about everybody that was there. They admitted they were going to have a lot of fun gossiping, making fun of the other people who went to the prom, which I thought was great because I don't think proms are all that great anyway. But anyway, I said well, why don't you take, why don't you go with some of the boys. I mentioned the black boys at the school. Oh no. He can't do such and such. Oh no, he can't--. Have you ever seen his car and dadadadada. All this stuff like that. Just they seemed nice to me, but they had

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something against every single one of them. I brought up about five or six of them.

Then—

KH: Was it all about them not having nice enough cars?

EB: Well, or something like that. That kind of thing, he doesn't speak well. He's crude. He's sort of like too rough around the edges. That kind of stuff. I began to realize later in this particular-- I was mentioning some that I just knew. I hadn't had them in class especially, but they were athletes and stuff at the time. I began to realize later that I think these girls, these particular girls were of a different class of blacks than the boys. I think the boys were of the blue-collar type parents, and the girls were of a professional families. I began to realize that even within the African American community there were, I should have known it ahead. Obviously I should've known it because of my background is a lot in sociology. I thought I'd be a social worker, and I lacked a two-credit class of becoming a social worker, and I thought I'd teach for a while and get that and become, and decided I liked teaching. But I didn't realize that there's some prejudice of blacks against blacks, and it was that group that did not bridge it. Now I suspect that these boys that were of this class, I suspect that they went into college and got a career. I think these girls would look at them differently, which frequently high school kids that won't even look at each other, they find out that they're not the kids aren't cool enough that they want. Later on in college they tend to realize how stupid that is and-- But I suspect some of these boys probably were a little rough around the edges because they came from blue collar families. I, I don't know too much about it but I began to recall some of these girls had been in my Spanish IV class that was about half-and-half. I thought that's the way, the English that they use and they talk about their

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parents, they are professional, kids of professionals, and these other boys I suspect they do use poor English and they do whatever. They're probably not of that. But I, I thought well, college is going to cure that pretty soon. They were seniors at the time, and they'll, but it was just sort of a bit of an eye opener to me. One of our teachers here that was, this is, last year was the first year she hadn't taught here. She's gone into the business world. At the time she was obviously of a very high class as far as her English is concerned, and she was very fastidious about her dress and everything. There were a couple that I had in fourth year Spanish, and one of them I had in AP government. The only boy she considered was--in her high school, a black boy she considered dating. She herself was black--was what I would call a son of a professional person. The others, she wouldn't have anything to do with at that time. She was crazy about this kid. I don't think he ever knew that the extent it was, how crazy she was about him. It would've been a beautiful match if I could have just gotten them together.

KH: So class was automatically just the highest factor for her.

EB: I don't know. I guess I don't know. Because I, when she finally did marry, it really was probably the best person that she could have--

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

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KH: From observation of seeing how much suburbanization has happened in Birmingham, there are so many people who are living in communities. Either they've moved out or they're still in the city and yet the city is mostly black now. So generally everybody is living at least residentially segregated lives. So what do you think the whole desegregation process means to them knowing that most of their lives are still segregated?

EB: We still have segregated churches, and we still have segregated neighborhoods. Most of the whites that are have money are on south side Birmingham. At one time that was going really down fast and then it was a renewal of getting these hundred year old houses. Well, Birmingham is a relatively young city compared to what I'm used to in Kentucky. But a house that I at one time could've bought for like 17,500, it had like four or five bedrooms. I probably just as well I didn't know it was for sale because I could have never kept it up. One of these big barns. But now it's probably worth three or four hundred thousand or more. But I think, as the blacks become more influential, they're going, they're moving out into these other areas. At one time you wouldn't find any person of African American descent in Vestavia, which is probably at one time was the up and coming white area and they, there's now regularly we have families--. When I phone, use the phone or black families I realize it's Vestavia. Mountain Brook at one time would not allow anyone in there that was Catholic or Italian and certainly not blacks. It was one of and now it has a few wealthy--. That's the old wealth of Birmingham. Homewood where I live, I was, it always, when they integrated, they integrated something called Hollywood and Edgewood and there was another wood

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somewhere, and they all argued about what name they should take. So they finally ended on Homewood. At the time they formed this city, they took in a black section of Homewood called Rosedale and so, Homewood, the city of Homewood has always been integrated from its earliest days in that sense, but that neighborhood is traditionally black. But now I'm beginning to see kids walking to school. Homewood is great because it actually has sidewalk. Kids can walk to school, and they can walk home and they--. So I'm beginning to see some black kids that are not in my immediate neighborhood but obviously close enough around the corner or somewhere. Across the street I see black kids playing with, there's a family of them that has two kids, and they moved from a very wealthy district to Homewood because they wanted to have a middle class background. So I see those kids playing together, and the problem with Homewood though, this little house that I bought for \$17,500 is now taxed at \$220,000, and I haven't anything to it except keep it up. I did add a room and a second bath. Very few starter families can afford that kind of housing when you're starting out. I don't like that because I don't want it to be, I tell my neighbors across the street who are psychiatrists, I said I hope they never find out my salary or the neighbors will petition to get me out of here. Teaching in a school like that.

Rosedale, the thing I don't like about Rosedale, and I sort of course belong the association that serves as a watch dog for these council is the community of Rosedale has been divided by two highways. One of them going through Homewood and across the 280 also. So as a result they're fractured into three or four areas, and they don't have as much of a community. Now it's all integrated. They used to have their own swimming pool, and now they don't. They just integrated. They still have a community center that,

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but all the activities at the two centers are integrated. But it has gone down, and it's not just because, it's not totally planned that way. It's just a very wealthy man owned a lot of property, a black man owned, and he was in his eighties. He owns about nineteen houses, and he didn't fix them up. He let the relatives live in them. Well, now the houses are owned by people who don't live in the state. This is high commercial property because these streets have, as I said, blocked it off and they want, they're not fixing the houses up. The people who still live in Rosedale want the neighborhood not to go commercial, but when you get, half a million dollars for this property and it's just a house on it. So they're encroaching a little bit into the community, and this association is trying to save it by making a historical thing and keeping all these big companies out that want to buy out this property and be on this, it's an entrance to a highway rather than a highway. So right now it's a fight because they, it probably is older than the Edgewood and these other cities, but we feel like that we should make these homeowners, we're trying to keep them from selling their property to the commercial. I'm not actively involved. I just get the newspaper and keep up with it. And trying to keep them from being able to sell it and go commercial, and maybe they will now be interested in fixing up these houses. I couldn't understand why the people who wanted to move out the inner city why they didn't move into Rosedale because they'll get into a nice community school, and then I began to realize they can't buy into it because all these family members living elsewhere won't sell the property. I think they were waiting for it to go commercial before they sell it.

KH: And maybe the property value is too high.

EB: The potential, the property value is relatively high if they were to, but it's pretty reasonable as far as that particular area is concerned. The friend of mine that

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taught here that was black, I often thought, why doesn't she, wonder why she doesn't try to get into Rosedale because she would get into the school system, and it's very convenient. To me it's the best part of the city to live in because you can go to these outside areas and you could also go downtown if you want to. The downtown area, there's hope for that because white flight is now coming back in the way of condos and lofts and stuff like that. That shows some promise to reintegrate the city as far as the whites are concerned. Some of these huge buildings have been vacant for ten years. They're now selling them and turning them into condos, into lofts, and so that's a, that's also good, but I think as the blacks move up in money, they're going to go into the places. There doesn't seem to be the opposition as far as trying to keep them out at one time I'm sure it was.

I remember one of my students whose father was a doctor, he loved yard work. So he was out doing yard work and one of the persons stopped and asked him if he could do their yard work. They were, the persons were really embarrassed, and he said, it was their, it was his house. He was just doing yard work for his own. He was a doctor down at UAB in there. That was in a very high priced area that I could never think about living in frankly, near a golf course. You know how you put a golf course in that, how that—

KH: A gated community.

EB: Yeah, right. So I think and a lot of that left before integration have moved back into—. You often see a piece in the paper about a person that left during that time because he or she couldn't get ahead, and then the parents were getting old and they felt like they had to move back to help take care of them. They found a totally different atmosphere here now and quite happy about it. I don't know how much of that goes on.

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Maybe not a lot. Sometimes when you see things in the paper about that you know it's unusual to be in the paper. So you can't say a blanket situation where thousands are moving back or whatever. It might be because it's so unusual. But the big companies now feel free to send, to integrate into the city because, or go into the city, because now they can move their black employees in as well as their white. Don't have to worry about color and what they're going to be associated with.

For a while during, that's another thing I remind my students. You couldn't get any kind of Broadway show down here because it wasn't integrated. They weren't going to bring their people down here. One of the most stirring concerts I went to was Leontyne Price. She was the first black headliner person that came to the city. Of course there was a sell out. It had been integrated so before that, but there hadn't been any. She was so electrifying. When she sang -- I don't know I can't remember which song she sang. It was either the national anthem or "America the Beautiful." It went, of course with that voice. It would've, but to me it was a very, it was a highlight concert that, and it was for the people that came who loved opera and loved good, that kind of music and weren't, no one was coming because of this stupid segregation stuff. And no baseball teams and no sports events, nothing. You can get to, it wasn't anything. Our cultural life was very limited shall we say.

KH: At a standstill.

EB: Because of this stupid segregation rules and so on. I try to point that out to the kids by giving some of the -- I probably make it up, the headliners, some stupid name. Would you like to see a concert by such and such?

KH: Or the people at City Stages [community music festival] for instance.

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EB: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

KH: Many of them wouldn't be able to come.

EB: No, that's so far removed from these kids. They have no idea. The thing about separate water fountains and all that stuff is just so dumb. I remember there was a great columnist for the *Atlanta Constitution*, and it was a white person but he was saying the, we could integrate these schools very quickly by taking away desks. He said, now think about this. When the grocery lines were integrated. I went to the bank and those lines were integrated. It seems when white people sit down, that's when they don't want to integrate. If we would just take away the desks and the pews and the seats, we would have no problem with integration. He always did it in a way that would make fun of it. I would read that to the kids and talk about it.

KH: That's interesting.

EB: I wish I could remember his name because he was famous at the time for his humorous solution to southern problem, but that was the funniest thing. Take away the desks. No one minds standing in line. It's when you sit down is when the problems begin.

KH: Do you discuss this topic often with your friends who teach at other schools?

EB: No. Occasionally when it comes up like my friends that were in school at the time that Kennedy was killed. We would talk about that and so on. It's just sort of an ordinary, everyday thing. Integration and segregation are just history now, and kids don't even think about unless you bring it to them. They what's the TV series, *Eyes on the Prize*, they'll show that. It's too long to show the entire thing, but they'll show parts of it

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especially the ones with Birmingham. It's unbelievable to the kids when they see it. It just like happened on Mars or something. It's just so but even some of the, when I talk, a couple of years they put me in sociology, and when I taught, that I was a little bit, not a little bit, quite disturbed by some of the black kids didn't know their heroes. They sort of heard of Martin Luther King, but they weren't too sure about it. Coretta Scott and some of these people, and I was just horrified at it. But they already, it was like anyone over thirty can't be trusted. You know that era, and they just didn't know much about that, and they didn't seem to care and just prejudice in general. I was, the last minority group, now this group is not a minority. It's a majority, but it's still, it has all the characteristics of a minority. Now who could it be. They, finally someone came up with women, and this one girl who's a typical blonde response. I can say that since I'm a blonde. She said, but women aren't discriminated against. Everybody said, oh my gosh. But sometimes when I, when the white kids don't quite understand, this would happen in government more than in Spanish, don't quite understand what the problem of the black kids are, whatever. I can say I am white and I don't think I will ever be black. But I can tell you as a woman living in a man's world the barriers that I have seen and the barriers that I have faced and that women face and they don't even realize it and so on. Sometimes that will, they can sort of see my perspective and translate it to what the blacks feel so that even though you're asking why I went into teaching.

When I was, I knew I wanted to go to college. I had to work in Daddy's restaurant when I was a kid, and I'd see these forty and fifty year old waitresses, and all they knew was waitressing and the conversation and so on, their level of conversation and so on. I knew I was going to college some way. I was not going to be, if you didn't

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go to college, you could work in the bank as a teller or you could work as a waitress or a clerk in the grocery store. So I was going to college, and if you went to college, you could be a teacher. You could be a social worker. You could be a lab technician. My older sister was that. Some of those make very good money. The lab technicians make more than teachers. But you couldn't go into research. You couldn't go into medicine. The obstacles were so great in medicine, I just didn't want to even think about it. I wasn't sure I really liked hospitals anyway. There's just nursing, and all my friends, they went into nursing or teaching that went to college. So I sort of thought what would be what I like the most, and what I liked the most was sports. Again there were no sports for girls. The only thing we could play is tennis. They allowed us to play tennis, and I got to be very good in playing tennis. It was the only way I could express my competitive nature in sports. So I loved sports, and I thought well, I if love sports maybe I would like teaching it. So I majored in PE, never taught it. Not one day did I teach PE. By the time I graduated, I still kept my major in PE because I had so many credits in it by then, but I had gone onto other fields but—

KH: Maybe you would've ended up a tennis coach.

EB: Actually I coached tennis here about ten years because it was the only sport that the girls could have. I decided to take, I'd say well, we'll practice a few times, play one school and that's it. The PE teacher got on the phone and lined up ten schools for us to play. It was such a struggle in those days. I'd say to a girl, she's in basketball, have you ever seen a racquet. Have you ever seen a tennis racquet? You think you could hold one. I would teach them. I put girls on the court and they'd say, they'd say wait a minute, Miss Brown. I don't know how to keep score. Oh I didn't teach you to keep

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score. Oh shoot. Well, let me tell you real quick about, and we were going against kids who had a pro and some of the public schools had a pro since age four, and they were slaughtering us. I said, this is it. We're going to have this year and we're not going to have a team next year. I'm tired of you all losing. You haven't a chance in this sport. They said oh we still like it. We get out and meet with other kids. I said you don't mind being killed every day? "No. We still like it." I said oh my. Okay if you'll stick with me, I'll do it. Then I started reaching the point where the parents were interfering. They were so glad I gave them the opportunity, but then the parents were saying my daughter is better than this one and so on and you're not playing this one enough and so on. It's time for me to get out. I've got too much to do. I mean, my supplement was \$200 a year for taking all this stuff. I said, oh it's time to get out. So I turned it over to someone else but that, I don't remember how we got off on all this. But the prejudice, I could relate some of the prejudice and the, not overtly prejudice because then at least, I'd tell the boys. I'd say if you were prejudice against females, you are most likely going to marry a female. They said oh, because they're all homophobic guys. I said, there's a fifty-fifty chance that you're going to have a girl in your family. Sometimes the ones that are really macho I'd say please God. Give them five girls and no boys. I'm already praying for them to have all girls for meanness sake. Don't give them--. So they and I said, you'd better get over it and I'd relate that. If you're prejudice against the huge part of the population, you might as well grow out of this. You're going to have, always have to deal with a person on this either as your customers or your bosses or your coworkers, and so you just got to get over it if you are. So I'd try to relate that to being, growing up female in that respect. Okay, is that—I've probably taken a lot of your time.

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KH: That's great. Thank you for your time.

EB: I enjoy reminiscing frankly.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by L. Altizer, September 2, 2005