

TRANSCRIPT
START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

PAUL KILLOUGH
MARCH 19, 2001

PAUL KILLOUGH: You push it that way. See [pause] that's just the way [pause] if there's some dead time when I'm not talking or you want to say something when it's not going. You can go ahead and talk if you want to.

JOYCE UY: The interviewee's name is Paul Killough. My name is Joyce Uy. The date is March 19, 2001. The location is Davis Library, Fourth Floor. The topic I will be discussing is, "The Teachers and Students of Culbreth Junior High School." Where were you born?

PK: I was born in Newport, Vermont, in northern New England.

JU: Where does your family originate from?

PK: My father came from Philadelphia. His father was an immigrant carpenter from Ireland. My father was born in Philadelphia. My mother came from upstate New York, close to the Vermont border. Her father was a dairy farmer. The family had lived in that area probably for a century.

JU: Where did you receive your formal schooling before entering college?

PK: Well, my father was a minister. So, we moved around some. I did elementary and junior high school in upstate New York in a little town called Galway, north of the capital of New York Albany. And then when I was fourteen years old, we moved to western Pennsylvania, and I finished high school in the town of Linesville. It's a little town in a rural area right next to the Ohio border.

JU: How would you evaluate your pre-college school experience?

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PK: Well, they were typical American public schools. The elementary and junior high was pretty good, I guess. My mother had been a teacher, and so she made sure they did right and made sure that I was learning. In high school [pause] the school in Lionsville wasn't very good academically, although I had a very good math teacher and a very good English teacher. I didn't ever have to work very hard in high school. And so, I had to work very hard when I got to college.

JU: How did you make a decision to become a teacher in a Chapel Hill junior high school, even if only for a year?

PK: Well, that's the story. When I got out of college, I went into the Peace Corps. It was just something to do. It [pause] was a way to see the world. It was an interesting experience. It was open to me. Peace Corps assigned me to a job and that was teaching. I hadn't picked anything. So they said, "Well, how would you like to go to Nigeria and be a teacher?" And I said, "OK." And they gave us (Peace Corps teachers) three months of very intensive training and teaching and in language and other things like that. And so, I taught biology, general science, and various other subjects in Africa for three years. So, when I got out of Peace Corps, I was a seasoned teacher--well, at least for three years. One thing was [pause] that was the Vietnam era. My brother figured out that I could avoid going to Vietnam during the service if I remained a teacher in this country. Peace Corps didn't count. They'd draft me from Peace Corps. So, I was looking for teaching jobs. And since I had been a teacher, that fit. So, I got a job out in Utah for a year in a boarding school. But that job only lasted for a year. I was sort of substituting for another

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biology teacher. And so, I was looking for another job. Peace Corps had something called a "green sheet" for return volunteers with prospects for jobs. And the Teachers Incorporated was listed on this green sheet as a place that was having return Peace Corps volunteers, and they had a project in New York City. And that's quite a story. They had a big project with foundation money in lower Manhattan, in New York City. And I went for an interview there. And I thought I was going to be teaching in New York. In fact, they gave me an interview with a junior high school principal. And he only had one question. He said, "Can you start right now? I have a class down the hall to teach." Well, I couldn't because I was committed to the Utah school for the rest of the year. But then in June, I went back to New York and I thought I was going to be in a training program there and be teaching in the lower east side of Manhattan in the Two Bridges district. But they said, "Well, how would you like to go to Chapel Hill, North Carolina?" And I said, "Well, I looked it up on the map. It looks all right to me." The next day I was down here. I'm not sure I answered your question. But that's part of the story.

JU: And you had no qualms about going to Chapel Hill to teach without ever visiting Chapel Hill?

PK: No, no. Well, I taught in this country before. And I didn't have any particular place in this country to call home. And Chapel Hill sounded like an interesting place, and it sounded like an interesting group of people. Many of the people in Teachers Incorporated were former Peace Corps volunteers any way. Harris Wofford was one of the original organizers of the Peace Corps, I think. And I think he might have been Peace Corps director once. And he was involved in this. And then, Roger Landrum. He may

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have been the president of Teachers Inc. And he was in the first group of Peace Corps volunteers in Africa, I think. And he was a prolific writer and wrote a lot of things about that. They were the people that were instrumental in that. And if they had a project in Chapel Hill, I said, you know, "Why not?"

JU: What special challenge did teaching certain disadvantaged youths present to you?

PK: [Laughter] There were plenty of challenges. Of course, first of all, in Chapel Hill, not all the students were disadvantaged. Chapel Hill schools weren't as good then, I don't think, as they are now. As you know, Chapel Hill schools are rated the best public schools in the state. I don't think they were rated that way in 1969-70. I'm not entirely sure why. The University was big then too. It hasn't grown that much. Probably half of my students were the children of university professors, people connected with the University, doctors--people like that. But a minority of the students, just about all of them black, were disadvantaged. And their parents probably worked in the University too but in food service, or custodial jobs, or something like that. So there was a sort of bimodal distribution of power of students in the school. And that made it hard because you had really two groups of students and they were all in one classroom, and you had to deal with 'em. You know, the students who were university kids, whose parents were professors--they were academically very good, many of them, and way ahead of some of the things I was supposed to be teaching. And some of the poor kids were way behind, had trouble reading. And some of them had trouble just getting enough to eat. That was one of the things I noticed in contrast to my Peace Corps experience. You think of

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Africans as being poor and hungry. But I never had any hungry kids in Africa. Of course, a secondary school in Africa was sort of by nature, elite. The poor kids didn't go to secondary school in Africa where I was. So I had kids that were by African standards, were rich. By American standards, they were very poor. But in Chapel Hill here, I had kids who came to school hungry. And sometimes they stole the rich kids' lunches, you know, and stuff like that. And that was a problem too. There were plenty of challenges in teaching. And I'm not sure we dealt with it all that successfully. It's hard to know.

JU: Did Teachers Inc. train you in handling difficult situations in the classroom?

PK: Well, they gave us some training. I don't think they really gave us too much help in handling difficult classroom situations. And I wasn't terribly good in that anyway. Uh [pause] I hadn't had to worry about that in Africa. In Africa the students had to pay to go to school and so they were determined to follow the rules. And in Utah, I was in a boarding school where if a kid screwed up--why he was out of the--they just got rid of him. But here it was harder to deal with the difficult kids, a lot harder. And the Teachers Incorporated--we had a lot of new and innovative ideas, we thought, about how to deal with difficult kids. I'm not sure our ideas worked much better than some of the old ways. It's hard to know about that. It's always hard in teaching because you very seldom get to see the results of what you were doing, you know. Some jobs you do something and there's your result, you know. You cook dinner and there's the dinner. But in teaching, you teach and teach. And well, you might be dead and gone before you would know what the results of your teaching were. And they're so different; they're different in various cases. I lost track of most of my students. But I've run into a few of them since. Some of

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them turned out well and some of them, pretty badly. So well, I don't know if I [pause]. Do you have any more questions about that? That's a tough question, you know--how I dealt with the difficult students. And that was [pause] I suppose I didn't do too well all the time. Sometimes I did. One thing I did a couple of times, I think, was that I took some of my kids camping--the kids I had been having some difficulty with, you know. Trying to get to know them better, and we got along pretty well in a camping trip. I took them up to the mountains. I had a land rover. I got a picture of it here. There's my land rover. That's the back of my house where I lived. That's just on Mallette Street, about three blocks from here. But I loaded about six of those kids in my land rover and took them up to the mountains once or twice. And they had never done anything like that. And I also had been camping with kids who were well off. The well-off kids always had trouble because they were finicky eaters. Those poor kids [pause] I just bought along some chuck meat and some potatoes and I guess some carrots and some onions. And oh, hey [pause]. They didn't have any problem with the menu that I prepared. And they helped me cook it. And we got along fine that way because they had food to eat. And that was just a really big difference between the kids on one side and the kids on the other who just didn't (). A lot of them didn't know when their next meal was coming from all the time at home. And I suspect it's still the same way with some kids around here. I'm not sure.

JU: Was that the only way you can remember that you demonstrated to your black and white pupils that you were a genuinely sincere educator?

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PK: Well, you know, yah. I tried to be sincere and genuine. But a lot of the black kids had been kind of turned off by education. They didn't want to hear anything more about education, you know. You could be a sincere educator, but that was a world they didn't want to get into, you know. They had too much frustration and trouble with it up to that time. And so it didn't really matter if I was a sincere and genuine educator or not. At least, it didn't seem to. Some of the other teachers, I think, were a little more successful than I was. And some of them weren't-didn't do too well either. [Laughter] We had our difficulties.

JU: Describe a particularly memorable encounter you had, if any, with civil rights activists who were teachers of Teachers Incorporated?

PK: Well, I'm not sure we would characterize ourselves as civil rights activists. The Teachers Incorporated [pause] We started here in 1969 in the fall and the schools had been integrated for several years already. I'm not sure how many years. It was something like five or six years, seven years. So we didn't look on ourselves as civil rights activists, I don't think. We looked on ourselves as people who were trying to help kids learn, trying to get as many kids as we could to learn as much as we could get them to learn and better themselves--Make better citizens, you know, things like that. The schools were completely integrated in Chapel Hill in those days. From what I hear, Chapel Hill is still quite an integrated school system, unlike Durham. I had about, [pause] oh, thirty percent black kids and the rest of them white, in my classes. They had been very strict about that.

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There were stories about the earlier days, before integration. Oh, there had been a coach in the black high school that a lot of the blacks sort of felt badly about because when they integrated, he sort of lost out. The black high school had been very successful in athletics at the state level. The white high school had not. And the blacks thought that the black coach should be the coach for everybody because his record was better, I think. And he was a well-respected man in the black community. But that wasn't what the whites decided. They decided to give him a lesser role of some sort. I don't remember his name. I don't remember exactly what happened. But I think he soon quit teaching and didn't live much longer. And they felt badly about that.

JU: How racially enlightened were Culbreth Junior High School teachers, parents, and students during your tenure as a teacher there?

PK: Well of course we had, like in most public schools, we had people on every side. I'm sure there were a few kids whose parents were out and out racists. Not very many; the university, most of the people in the university community were not Klansmen or cross burners or anything like that. They were mostly in favor of integration. So [pause] but there were all sorts of different things going on. Integration was not the only thing going on. There were other serious problems in the school. Another thing's going on. This was right at the height of the Vietnam era. And there was a lot of student protest on campus. There was a campus moratorium. Students were not going to class for a while, I think. See, the government wanted to send students to Vietnam, and that got their attention. [Laughter] But uh [pause] that was a very big thing in 1969 and 70--was the Vietnam protests. And a lot of people you might call conservative saw this (sending

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students to Vietnam) as part and parcel of the world sort of collapsing around them. Here were all of the young students who should be good soldiers and going off to defend their country, rebelling against that. And of course, I was on the other side. I was determined I wasn't going to go to Vietnam. I served with the U.S. government in the Peace Corps in Africa. And I thought I knew quite a lot about how the U.S. government functioned overseas. And I didn't want to be part of a soldier. I didn't want to go over there as a soldier. Most Peace Corps volunteers felt that way. We can understand how the government could get into that trouble over there. But we wanted no part of it. The other thing that was going on then was the drug problem. I'd never seen drugs in high school, except alcohol. Or in college, except alcohol. And there wasn't much of that. In Africa, I remember, marijuana was a bit of a problem in parts of Africa where I was. The Africans used it some, and a few of the Peace Corps volunteers got into using it. But when I came back here, drugs were a serious problem in the Chapel Hill area--a little bit in the junior high but more in the senior high school. Of course, we had Teachers Incorporated people in the senior high school too. There was at least one and maybe two senior high school students that year who killed themselves from a drug overdose. And a lot of people were worried that we as Teachers Incorporated [pause] we were sort of liberal, you see. And they were worried that we were draft dodgers and distributing drugs. And so, they were dead set against us. Some of the people [pause] I think there was a dentist named Poe who wrote letters to the editor of the newspaper in the time about how bad we were. Uh [pause] and so, you had that on top of the integration thing that had happened before. The

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integration was more or less settled. It wasn't [pause] when I say settled, the schools were integrated. It didn't mean the races were the same by any means. But at least the integration issue that had been so big in the early 60s had been more or less settled. We would have one school system and everyone would go to it. We had a broad group in our Teachers Inc. There was about fifteen of us who came out of town, and there were fifteen more who were already teachers in the schools, some black and some white. I think all the ones that came out of town were white. But there were several black teachers in our group, in our training program that we had, who had been here, who were local people. There was one lady in particular--black lady--that I thought very highly of. Her name was Betty King. I haven't talked to her in many years, but I think I have her phone number here, someone that might know her and might know how to get in touch with her. And I'll leave that with you. It's right here. You call someone named Kenny Mann, Sr. at that number, and they should know who Betty King was. And if you want to find out more about Teachers Incorporated, she's a lovely lady. I'm told her health isn't very good, but I have the highest regard for her. She probably is a better [pause] well she was a career teacher, you see. I only taught here for one year, and she taught here for over twenty years. And she'd seen it all. And she was a fine teacher and a wonderful, sweet lady. And I don't know anybody who has had much bad to say about her. And I think she's still around. She used to sing in the choir in the AME Church on Rosemary Street, and she took me to church there two or three times. OK, did I cover that?

JU: Yes, uh [pause]

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PK: At least I touched on it. I don't know if I covered it. There's lots to be said about this.

JU: Why did you personally believe it was important to make this professional commitment to Culbreth Junior High School?

PK: Well, it wasn't a professional career commitment for me. Uh [pause] after a year I could tell I wasn't doing too well. And I went on to graduate school. I enrolled here in Carolina. So it wasn't a big professional commitment for me. And I was avoiding the draft, you see. So don't give me any big awards for being a hugely committed activist. I was doing the best I could, but I didn't stay in it. In those days, I had it in my mind--I wanted to go back to Africa to teach. I had a good time teaching in Africa, and I had it in the back of my mind that I would go back there and make a career of that. Of course, I never did. But after Teachers Incorporated, I got another teaching credential. I never had any formal education credit up that time. I had Peace Corps training, but it wasn't formal college credit. Well, after graduate school here, which I decided I just didn't want to do--immunology and microbiology--I enrolled over at State. And I did an undergraduate major as an industrial arts teacher and finished a masters over there so that I could be a shop teacher--shop, industrial technology. And I thought in my mind, was to go back to Africa and teach that because I thought that was badly needed over there, and I enjoyed it greatly. And that's what I did. Now I never went over. I'm not sure why. I had a girlfriend here, and I was getting more and more established. After living four years in Chapel Hill, I bought a house. As you get older, it's a lot harder to move [Laughter] and I had done a lot of moving up to then. But I'm not sure. You couldn't say I was entirely committed to being a teacher. Probably none of us were in that group, but we were young and we were

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trying it out. And there were several people that did become teachers. Here's some pictures. This is sitting in the backyard at Mallette Street where we all lived. This is Derek Williams, and he became a history teacher at Andover in Massachusetts, you know. He's about the top of the history teaching profession in secondary school. You can't get any farther than he's gotten, and he's a wonderfully good teacher, marvelously good. This guy was a graduate from Yale. His name was Bob Levin. And I don't know if he continued in teaching or not. He'd been a football player at Yale, and he taught P.E. and coached at the high school. This guy is John Beck. He continued on as a career as a teacher. He taught sixth grade here in Teachers Inc. for at least two years. And I believe he went on to become a principal of a school somewhere. We lost track of him, but Derek's just gotten up with him. And he would be able to tell you lots of things about Teachers Incorporated and he was a very good teacher. Let's see. This is all from the first year. I could name the others here. That was David Perry, and he taught for three years in sixth grade--three or four years. And he was very good, very dedicated. But then he went to school of public administration in Texas, and then moved back to Washington where he was from. And he worked for a congresswoman for a while. And now he works as a sort of a lobbyist up there for an outfit called "A League of Cities." I don't know exactly what he does. This guy is George Scarolla. He taught for two years, I think. But then he became a professional political organizer. He's worked on several senatorial campaigns. He lives out in Washington state. I've lost track of him, but I keep up with David Perry. And David keeps up with George. George had known Hillary Clinton before she was Hillary Clinton. So they had some interesting connections. And there were several others.

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Let's see. This was the only picture I have of someone who was local. That was Barbara Lawler. She was a teacher in an elementary school here. But she later became principal of Sool School. She's deceased now, I understand. But she was a principal out at Sool School next to the high school for, oh, at least fifteen years and I think very highly regarded. And she participated in our group as well. This is David (). He taught high school biology for two years, and then he went to NC State and got a degree in City Planning. He was working, I think he got a job with the city of Raleigh as a planner, and then got married, and then he moved away. He was ex-Peace Corps like me. He served in India. This was Lynn Thomas. She was from Chicago. And I think she only taught with us a year, and I don't remember much about her. But who else? I don't know who that lady was. Some one else might know.

JU: I did have a fifth grade elementary teacher named Lynn Thomas.

PK: Uh, really?

JU: Yes, but she...

PK: Was she from Chicago?

JU: I don't think so. I think she was only in her twenties in 1990.

PK: This woman would be at least fifty-four now, I think. So that must be a different Lynn Thomas [pause]. That's me in the garden [Laughter]. We had a garden back there. I had a beard then. I think that was taken after I was a teacher. And there's Derek working on his car, getting all greasy [Laughter]. But that's the sort of pictures we have. The house now belongs to a professor that's well known on campus, or was--John Shelton Reed. He was a sociologist and he fixed the house all up after we moved out. But

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anyway. I'm afraid I lost track of what you were. Give me another question. Hopefully, it will be useful.

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JU: Would you describe the condition of Culbreth Junior High School as integrated?

PK: Yes [pause] pretty much so. At least, at least meeting the legal definition. The black kids and the white kids were all going to the same school and for the most part, going to the same classes. There was some tracking where the kids that did better in classes, the kids that were doing better in a subject were separated and tracked. And kids that weren't doing so well were put in a slower group. But there wasn't too much that. I was given three sections of seventh grade biology, and everybody was in the same class. And then, I was given two sections of something called "Landscaping." And that was about [pause] I think maybe a little more than fifty percent black in those sections. They were, oh, they were seventh or eighth and ninth graders. There's a sort of a long story about that. There had been a teacher before me who had a landscaping program. And somehow or other, he lost his job, and they wanted to continue the program. But they really didn't provide me with the tools and equipment. And I wasn't equipped to teach it. And I really didn't know much about, and we really didn't do much landscaping in that [pause] uh. And those classes were integrated too. But not perfectly, you know. But by and large as public schools go, Culbreth was integrated.

JU: What does the word "integrated" connote for you?

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PK: Well, it means teachers and students. Er, it means one school system for all groups of people, basically. And [pause] and everyone gets the same opportunity for education.

That's basically it.

JU: I have two more questions.

PK: OK.

JU: How did you see the protracted drama of integration developing in terms of its stable successes and seemingly insurmountable obstacles?

PK: Oh, that's a very difficult question. Uh [pause] you know, we were hopeful that integration would improve things. I think most people were. And I'm still hopeful. But it's a very difficult business as everybody familiar with it knows. People come from widely different backgrounds with widely differing interests and abilities. And it's very hard to get everybody into kind of the same mold. Uh, I shouldn't use that word. I'm not very good in talking about that. Uh, about all I can say is that it was a very difficult business. And we were working on it, and trying to educate our kids as well as we could.

JU: The last question I have for you is, "Examining the general picture of Culbreth Junior High School at the end of your tenure as a teacher there, did Teachers Inc. teachers who taught here commit few blunders and, on the whole, did their job well?"

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PK: I don't think so. I wouldn't give us very good grades, I don't think. Not at Culbreth anyway. Some of the teachers in the elementary school--Derek. Well, Derek was at Philips, and I think he did a much better job. And some of the elementary school teachers--David Perry. And then there were some more Teachers Incorporated people who came the next year. John Beck, I think, was quite good. I wouldn't give myself very high marks. I'm not sure I did anything much of great value. Uh, I think more than anything else, it was a learning experience for us. If it did a lot of good, I think what it was, we learned a lot. Uh and maybe we helped things along some. It's very difficult to measure that, you know. I think James Farrington thought I was a good teacher. I think, you know the highway patrol officer, he seemed to admire me. He said some very nice things about me. Now maybe he was just saying them to be nice. But he said some good things. And I had other students say they thought I was doing very well. I also had some people say I didn't do well. One of the other Teachers Incorporated teachers was named Hal Lankey. He was a very bright guy. Don't have a picture of him. He lived in our house, though. And the school didn't invite him back the next year. He had some radical ideas about teaching. And I think he might have taught the kids a lot of stuff. But as far as keeping order goes, he didn't do a very good job in that. I think a lot of people would agree. And I don't think he taught. Well, we did not keep track of him. I don't know if he taught anymore. But he didn't teach here. It's very, it's very hard for me to say whether we did a lot of good. Some of us did not. Some of us did--probably did some good. Whether I did much beside learn myself, I don't know. Uh [pause] there's another group now

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though that's trying the same thing and doing it all over again, and I think, maybe doing it more successfully. There's a group called Teach for America now that's very similar to the Teachers Incorporate from everything I've heard. And they're much bigger than Teachers Incorporated ever got. And it sounds very much like the same thing all over again. I don't know that they even know that we existed. But they're set up the same way.

JU: OK [pause] thank you very much Mr. Paul Killough. Um.

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END OF INTERVIEW